

For immediate release  
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## AGREEMENT SIGNED FOR LOWER RIO GRANDE LEVEE WORK

The U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) and the Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 (HCDD1), with the assistance of U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar, have reached agreement on rehabilitation and reconstruction of Rio Grande flood control levees in Hidalgo County, Texas. Under the agreement, HCDD1 will cooperate with the USIBWC to construct Rio Grande levee improvements in the United States from Peñitas, Texas to the Banker Inlet south of Mission, Texas.

USIBWC studies have identified various reaches of Rio Grande levees in Hidalgo County that do not meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements for protection from the 100-year flood. In some areas, levees would be overtopped; in other reaches, levees lack sufficient freeboard (FEMA requires freeboard of three feet, the distance between the water surface elevation and the top of the levee that gives an extra margin of safety). USIBWC has developed a plan to raise and rehabilitate deficient levee segments, subject to the availability of federal appropriations.

To expedite work in Hidalgo County, local officials intend to use funds raised from a recent bond election for design, easement acquisition, and construction of levee improvements. At the same time, the USIBWC will use its own federal appropriations for additional levee work, about \$2 million to \$5 million annually. USIBWC has estimated the cost of Rio Grande levee improvements in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties at \$125 million.

“I am committed to working with local officials to fix the levees. This agreement makes it possible for us to work together to raise levees in critical areas,” said USIBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin.

Commenting on the spirit of cooperation between the entities, Congressman Cuellar said, “I commend the County of Hidalgo and the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission for working together to protect the people and properties of the Rio Grande Valley. This joint venture is indicative of the great working relationship that exists between Hidalgo County and the federal government. I am very happy at the priority that has been given to the protection of our citizens by government of all levels and look forward to continuing to support these critical efforts.”

Under the agreement, HCDD1 will work on a 12-mile levee segment, with the potential to work in other areas as well. HCDD1 will undertake levee improvements in accordance with USIBWC requirements. The USIBWC will continue to maintain the levees once the work is complete and assure continued protection.

The agreement complements ongoing USIBWC levee work. The agency is currently moving forward with plans to raise the levee for the next 3.3 miles from the Banker Inlet to the Hidalgo-Reynosa Bridge. Construction is expected to be completed by October 2008. As additional funding becomes available, the USIBWC will proceed with levee improvements in other downstream locations.

For more information:

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