

For immediate release
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USIBWC COMPLETES RIO GRANDE LEVEE-RAISING PROJECT, SEDIMENT REMOVAL UNDERWAY

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has completed a project to raise a 7.4-mile segment of the Rio Grande flood control levee in El Paso, Texas. Work on the project began in May 2007. The levee improvements will provide additional protection from Rio Grande floods in a reach from the end of the concrete-lined Chamizal Channel (upstream of Ascarate Park) to just downstream from the Ysleta-Zaragoza Bridge.

“We made a commitment to El Paso to undertake improvements before the rainy season. I am pleased to announce that we have completed the work on schedule as promised,” said U.S. Commissioner Carlos Marin.

The USIBWC raised the levee by inches in some areas up to a maximum of three feet to comply with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements. FEMA requires that levees be able to contain the 100-year flood with three feet of freeboard (the distance between the water surface elevation and the top of the levee). FEMA is currently developing Flood Insurance Rate Maps for El Paso County to identify properties at risk of flooding. Where levees are inadequate, property owners may be required to purchase flood insurance. With the completion of the levee-raising project, property owners in adjacent areas are expected to be exempt from the flood insurance requirement.

The levee-raising was completed using USIBWC personnel at a cost to the federal government of \$959,000.

Work is also underway to remove sediment in the concrete-lined Chamizal Channel through central El Paso-Ciudad Juarez using \$650,000 in funds obtained for this purpose by Congressman Silvestre Reyes. The project, which is being carried out with the Mexican Section of the Commission, will remove sediment in a 1.2-mile reach. The work is expected to be completed by the end of August.

The U.S. Section continues to work on flood control levees and will begin construction next week to raise a small levee segment upstream from downtown El Paso. The USIBWC has also developed plans for levee work in other portions of El Paso County and Doña Ana County, New Mexico. This work will be accomplished subject to the availability of federal appropriations.

Although El Paso experienced localized flooding during storms in 2006, Rio Grande levees in the United States were not overtopped.

For the international reach of the river, the USIBWC is working with the Mexican Section of the Commission to draft an agreement to determine additional work necessary to restore the Rio Grande flood control project to its full conveyance capacity and which works can be carried out in the medium and long term. These activities are aimed at offering greater protection for those who live on both sides of the border in the area of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.

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