

[Border 2012 Summary of Comments](#)

**Public Meeting on the US-Mexico Border 2012 Program
Tohono O'odham Nation & US Environmental Protection Agency
Tribal Chambers on main St., Sells, AZ**

October 15, 2002

6:00 p.m.

Minutes

I. Welcoming by Tribal and Environmental Protection Agency Representatives

Blessings in the O'odham language by Tribal Representative, Chairman Edward D. Manuel.

Presentations by Chairman Edward D. Manuel included: Vice Chairman, Council Members, Council Representatives, District Representatives, Representatives from Mexico, Border Coordinator, EPA Department Representatives Jim Fletcher, Thomas Flores, and Christine Vineyard and Laura Yoshii.

Chairman Edward D. Manuel welcomed attendees.

It was stated that the focus of these meetings is to make the issues more regional in order to represent the affected people more directly.

The Primary purpose is an opportunity to share issues and concerns and to try to make improvements.

II. Presentation of US-Mexico Border Plan

U.S. EPA Representative, Jim Fletcher presented a PowerPoint Presentation on the Border 2012 Program. He stated that Ms. Shirley Molina played an integral part in the formulation of the Border 2012 Plan framework

Mr. Fletcher informed the audience that the Border 2012 Program is an extension of the Border 21 program, which lasted five years. He spoke of the vast and diverse region that covers the Border area. It covers 6 Mexican States, 4 U.S. States, 26 Indian Tribes, Mexican Tribes and many issues.

Mr. Fletcher mentioned the Environmental Challenges faced by these border areas. These included: lack of water, litter from immigrants, off-road vehicle traffic and damage to the environment, all of which affect the public health in those areas.

Water Quality, Air Quality, Hazardous and Solid Wastes were among the key concerns that were touched upon by Mr. Fletcher. He stated that these were problems that needed to be worked on. 27 million dollars have been invested in Tribal Wastewater and potable water projects. There are projects for the 26 tribes residing along U.S.-Mex. Border.

On Water Quality:

It was stated that most tribes get water from wells and that there are shared aquifers between the Tribes in the U.S. and Mexico. Additionally, there is water available from the Colorado River Delta as well as the New and Alamo Rivers, and that the U.S. is trying to work as partners with Mexico on water pollution issues.

On Air Quality:

There is particular matter, dust, and tire pile and landfill fires that pollute the air quality in various communities. There is a San Luis/Yuma Air Quality and Toxicity Study. People are being trained in Emergency Response Tactics, Re-mediation Techniques, etc.

A New Approach to lessen these issues are included in the New Mission Statement which includes longer planning periods and a new organization.

Mr. Fletcher presented the Mission Statement: To protect public health and the environment in the U.S.- Mexico border region, consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

Three types of coordinating bodies were presented under the Border 2012 Program. These included Regional Work groups, Border-wide Work groups, Policy Forums and Local Task Forces.

EPA assures U.S Border Tribes will participate at various levels within the Program framework. Tribes will participate in State programs. Training will be provided by the U.S. to Mexico. Mr. Fletcher stated that Mexico doesn't recognize tribal governments the way the U.S. does, and that Mexico had asked that Tribal co-chairs not be assigned to the U.S. delegation because no counterpart entity existed in Mexico.

The Program 2012 Goals were presented. These included:

Goal #1 Reduce water pollution

Goal #2 Reduce air pollution

Goal #3 Reduce land contamination

Goal #4 Reduce exposure, particularly children's exposure, to pesticides

Goal #5 Reduce exposure to chemicals as a result of accidental chemical releases and/or acts of terrorism

Goal #1 Reduce water pollution was highlighted as the main issue of concern all along the border region.

On Public Meetings:

It was stated that there would be more frequent Good Neighbor Environmental Board meetings. There will be more opportunities to submit comments in both the U.S. and Mexico.

It was mentioned that the main Environmental Issues included: Clean water, clean air, safe use of pesticides, but that the issues up for discussion were not limited to these. All important issues should have the opportunity to be addressed.

Mr. David Garcia voiced his concern on the issue of tire dragging and breached fencing along the International Border and other areas that border his tribal district. The District that he represents needs to address issues of solid waste including clothes, bags and plastic containers left by undocumented aliens. His District has been dealing extensively, now more than before, with these issues. Mr. Garcia said that there should be a solid waste ordinance that obliges Border Patrol officials to ensure that undocumented aliens take all of their personal belongings along with them at the time of their capture. Another concern that Mr. Garcia referred to was that of trampling on Sacred Sites by Border Patrol agents and other individuals, as well as the fate of the Aquifer that is shared by both sides of the border. He stated that he was troubled about contamination of the Aquifer and the use of it. "We don't know what Mexico will be doing" he said.

Another issue that was raised by Mr. Garcia was that of future economic development along the border. Economic development would affect the air as well as other environmental arenas. He spoke about the importance of involving all of the stakeholders including EPA, Tribal Colonies, Districts, Tribal Councils and Nations as a whole. Decisions that are made on both U.S. and Mexico sides will have an effect. Mr. Garcia stated that the EPA needs to be educated in greater detail about the relevant issues at the local level then work towards obtaining community buy-in so that everyone agrees on improvement measures. Concerns about population and housing issues on both sides of the border were mentioned. He asked, "How will decisions be made, particularly in our Nation?" He stated that Mexico doesn't recognize tribes: "They don't want this whole issue of cultures", therefore, Indians in Mexico would not have a say.

Ms Shirley Molina Thanked Mr. Garcia for his very helpful comments

Mr. Denis Ramon voiced his concerns on monetary issues. He asked if both Mexico and the U.S. would share in the expense for some or all of the proposed projects.

Jim Fletcher said that most of the money on the U.S. side will come from the EPA Border Affairs Office and that investment funds shall be committed to meet border infrastructure needs. He added that U.S. tribes need to designate priority projects that need support such as potable water system improvement projects. He also said that there are grants for air and pesticide projects.

Mr. Denis Ramon: Who will address money for road construction in Mexico? There are respiratory problems caused from the dust. He asked, "Where will the money come from to address these problems?"

Jim Fletcher stated that U.S. should send copy of meetings to Mexico so that we can let people on the other side know.

Shirley Molina There are plans that are to be reviewed to certify a paving project in Agua Prieta, Sonora.

Ken asked would any of the funding for roads in Agua Prieta be in the form of grants?

Christine Vineyard stated that she was not sure because the meeting on this issue was just held last week. She said that she did not know at this point if the money would come in the form of loans or grants. She assured that she would let everyone know as soon as she found out.

Eileen Lopez asked if the money from grants and loans was just for structural purposes. She wanted to know if this money could be used for clean up as well.

Shirley Molina stated that they would do all they could to direct money for improvements.

Eileen Lopez also commented that many tribes have funds match programs and that her tribe doesn't have the funding to participate.

Shirley Molina indicated that it may be possible to reduce the required minimum amounts eligible for funds match programs or have them waived altogether. She also mentioned other possible funding sources.

Ty Canez stated that the roads are a real problem and that funding is difficult. He stated that priorities are given to urban areas and that rural areas get the short end. He recommended getting the AZ Department of Transportation involved.

Chairman Edward D. Manuel commented that the Federal Government doesn't want to take responsibility for the international fence. That perhaps the Tribes could resort to USDA or the new Office of Homeland Security for money to maintain fence line. He stated "We need a road on the International Boundary" There are 1500 people a day passing through leaving 8lbs of litter per person. "4 million pounds of litter are left in our Nation" He voiced his concerns about this litter ending up in the water holes that cattle drink from. He asked who will do clean up of all this. Another concern regarding fencing involved wildlife that gets through the border where there is no fence. There is concern of disease being brought in from Mexico. He asked how we are monitoring contamination on both sides? He also voiced his concerns on tire dragging by the border patrol and how erosion is a serious problem. He stated that the border patrol has been told of this and that lately they have stopped.

Shirley Molina asked if there were other questions.

Ron Curley talked about his concerns regarding fencing cut by drug runners along International Border. “I think it’s everybody’s job to deal with it” he stated. When fences are cut there is the possibility of calves getting into highways. Each side says “You fix it”. Mr. Curley also voiced concerns regarding Range Conservation and Range Management so that cattle can have enough feed on the ground. He mentioned that the drought has been very bad this year and that animals will break fence to get to grass. He stated that cattle should be allowed to graze year round.

Rafael Garcia, Representative from Mexico stated that there is a school in his community that needs to be paid attention to. The water level in his community is very low and contamination is present. He is wondering why there is enough money to provide technical assistance and no budget to save the children in the school and the general community. He asks for two things: Drinkable water and a sewage water system. He hopes that some of the funds can be allocated to his community.

Shirley Molina Thanked Mr Garcia for sharing his thoughts. She asked to focus attention on the most pressing issues in future meetings. She stated that EPA would work with U.S. and Mexico on border patrol, health and other issues. She stated that this was only the beginning of a long relationship where important issues like these will be addressed.

Shirley Molina spoke at length in the O’odham language

Chairman Edward D. Manue.

III. Break: 15 Minutes

IV. Discussion session-Tribal and EPA Representatives

During Discussion Session several members of the audience voiced their concerns.

Eileen Lopez asked for a copy of the Tribal Assurance Document.

Jim Fletcher assured her that he would get that for her.

Denis Ramon talked about individuals in Mexico not understanding concerns in the U.S. He suggested that there should be meetings held in Mexico in order to inform people in Mexico and to give them an opportunity to voice their own concerns.

Jim Fletcher apologized for not informing the audience that such meetings would be taking place in different locations in Mexico such as Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali.. Mr. Fletcher stated that as soon as the locations for these meetings are known they will be announced through publications and e-mails.

David Garcia stated that he disagrees on not having tribal governments represented when dealing with International Border issues. He asked, “whose decision was it not to have tribes represented as Co-chairs?” He stated that there is an injustice when touting

purported equal participation by all stakeholders but not allowing Tribal Governments to sit as Co-chairs of committees. Tribes will be participating, but not on an equal level with other government agencies. “As a member of this Nation I want to make that point.” He stated.

Jim Fletcher stated that “our” hands are tied. It is out of “our” control. Mexico has related that they don’t want tribal government representation on a par with both federal governments because they do not recognize Tribal governments in Mexico

Jim Fletcher stated that there is room to work together locally and to build a strong relationship in order to work effectively.

Denis Ramon asked if there was a framework on the agreement that has taken place or is the framework going to take place?

Jim Fletcher stated that there is a Tribal Assurance in order to make issues known and to hear specific concerns that will be made available for public comment.

Laura Yoshii stated that it’s important to be forthright.

Jim Fletcher responded that Mexico does not perceive tribes the same way U.S. does. Therefore there is no parallel entity to U.S. Tribal Governments in Mexico. He stated that Tribes’ concerns will be addressed and that members of tribes will be full stakeholders. There will be an inclusion of tribes in all the discussions both with U.S. States and within Regional Work groups. He stated that the intention of Task Forces would be to address more specific issues with the different border tribes. This new structure recognizes more involvement at the local level not just at Federal Government level.

V. Closing

There being no additional comments or questions the meeting was concluded at 8:00 p.m.