



## **Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) Meeting**

**December 8, 2014  
1:00 – 3:00 p.m. EST**

**Call-In: 1-202-395-6392; Conference Code: 3042916**

### **FINAL MEETING SUMMARY**

#### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

*Ann-Marie Gantner, GNEB Designated Federal Officer (DFO), Office of Diversity, Advisory Committee Management and Outreach (ODACMO), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Jay Jensen, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ); Diane Austin, Chair, GNEB*

Ms. Ann-Marie Gantner, GNEB DFO, conducted the roll call and thanked the Board members and alternates for their participation. Mr. Jay Jensen, CEQ, welcomed the participants. He recognized the citizens of the border region for their attendance and noted the diversity of federal agencies represented at the meeting. Dr. Diane Austin, University of Arizona, GNEB Chair, also extended her welcome to participants attending the meeting in person and via teleconference.

#### **II. Overview of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board’s 16th Report on “Ecological Restoration in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region”**

*Diane Austin, Chair, GNEB*

On behalf of the GNEB, Dr. Austin thanked the CEQ for the opportunity to share the GNEB’s 16th Report, “Ecological Restoration in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region.” Dr. Austin provided an overview of the content of the Report. Topics covered in the Report include background about ecological restoration, information about current ecological restoration activities of the federal government, and a focus on ecological restoration in border watersheds.

Dr. Austin stated that the U.S.-Mexico border is 1,954 miles long, and the border region comprises seven ecological regions, including valued ecosystems, critical habitats and treasured landscapes. The border region includes mountains, deserts, natural waterways and urban settings. The border region’s ecology has been challenged by the introduction of invasive plant and animal species, energy development and mineral extraction, population growth and urbanization, subsidized agriculture, water infrastructure development, and international border commerce and security. These challenges have led to degraded conditions, such as monocultures of invasive species, overaccumulation of wood material (posing a wildfire risk), mine tailings and spoil

piles, drained wetlands, altered river flows, overabundant herbivores (because of a lack of predators), disconnected wildlife corridors, and the overlying degraded condition of a changing climate.

Humans need the ecosystems in the border region because of the services provided, which include food, fiber, pest control, recreation opportunities, physical protection from extreme events, regulation of clean water, stabilization of climate, and educational and inspirational opportunities.

The GNEB began its analysis by adopting the Society for Ecological Restoration's definition of ecological restoration, which is "the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed." Ecological restoration encompasses a range of activities, ranging from cessation of the activities causing degradation to re-establishment of pre-disturbance conditions (often not attainable or even desirable). In ecological restoration, human concerns and values play a central role in determining baseline conditions and designing the restoration process; the ultimate goal is sustainable solutions that meet human objectives.

Ecological restoration in the border region poses unique challenges. The length and width of the border region results in restoration activities that cross political borders, including the international border between the United States and Mexico. Other challenges include prioritizing and selecting among projects and addressing issues of scale and connectivity. The GNEB recognized the significant progress made through the efforts of federal agencies, noting that achieving more effective restoration requires interagency collaboration and translation of goals into on-the-ground actions.

Dr. Austin summarized the four recommendations of the GNEB to the federal government regarding ecological restoration in the border region.

- (1) As an initial measure, the GNEB recommends that the U.S. federal government collaborate with local, state, tribal and national entities in the United States and Mexico to avoid resource damages through proactive approaches.
- (2) The GNEB recommends that the U.S. federal government promote ecological restoration projects, including promoting existing federal initiatives, applying a systematic framework across agencies, and developing governance and funding mechanisms applicable to landscape-scale restoration needs.
- (3) The GNEB recommends that the U.S. federal government actively increase engagement with Mexican agencies, establishing a management framework on both sides of the border, and actively engaging collaborators at all levels of governance in urban and other transborder initiatives.
- (4) Finally, the GNEB recommends that the U.S. federal government evaluate, consider and plan for flow management of water sources, such as irrigation and wastewater for ecological restoration benefits, considering state water law and water rights frameworks.

Dr. Austin concluded her presentation of the Report by recognizing the need for a greater understanding of the ecosystems of the borderlands and the services they provide. A better

understanding also is needed of the cumulative impacts of such human activities as development, land use and alteration, and water use on ecosystems in the border region. Landscape-level, ecosystem-based solutions need to be incorporated into decision making. The GNEB recognized that multiple restoration scenarios are necessary for achieving environmental goals across large areas.

Dr. Austin thanked EPA for making the Report available online at the GNEB website.<sup>1</sup>

### **III. Accepting the Report and Initial Reactions to the Recommendations in the Good Neighbor Environmental Board's 16th Report**

*Jay Jensen, CEQ*

Mr. Jensen acknowledged receipt of the 16th Report on behalf of the President of the United States. Mr. Jensen thanked the GNEB members for their impressive work. In particular, he thanked Dr. Austin for her leadership, as well as ODACMO staff for facilitating the work of the GNEB. Mr. Jensen expressed regret that more of the GNEB members had not been able to attend to facilitate dialog between the CEQ and GNEB. He assured the participants that the CEQ and the White House are very attentive to the Board's recommendations. The former Chair of the CEQ, Ms. Nancy Sutley, was very appreciative of the Board's efforts. The new CEQ Chair, Mr. Michael Boots, although unable to attend the meeting, extended his personal thanks to the GNEB members for their time and dedication. He would be sending a formal letter of response regarding the GNEB's recommendations at a future date. The reply letter would include a detailed response from each of the relevant federal agencies.

Mr. Jensen noted that many of the GNEB's recommendations were aligned with current federal activities; other recommendations highlighted directions that the federal agencies need to pursue with greater effort. He recognized the salient, topical and timely nature of the GNEB's recommendations. The recommendations in the 16th Report are in accord with the topic of the next GNEB Report on climate change. He responded to the recommendations of the 16th Report: to avoid resource damage, establish a systematic framework and engage on a large scale, have a robust engagement strategy with Mexican agencies, and manage water flow.

- Regarding the GNEB's first recommendation on avoidance of resource damage, Mr. Jensen recognized that there is a mitigation hierarchy. The first step is to avoid damage if possible. The measures that the federal government has taken to avoid resource damage have included infrastructure development and executive action. Efforts have built on discussions with state and federal agencies.
- The landscape-scale approach has been a hallmark of the current administration's approach. The *Priority Agenda: Enhancing the Climate Resilience of America's Natural Resources* by the Council on Climate Readiness and Resilience (hereafter *Climate and*

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at <http://www2.epa.gov/faca/gneb>.

*Natural Resources Priority Agenda*)<sup>2</sup> contains sections on the process of prioritizing landscapes and planning to protect those landscapes, the results of which might be applicable to the border region.

- Increasing engagement with state and local stakeholders and between the United States and Mexico relates to the President's recent Executive Order on climate change, which established a task force of governors, tribal leaders and mayors to develop recommendations on climate change.
- The importance of water issues and flow management also is recognized by the Administration. This problem is being explored on a landscape scale within the *Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda*. Valuation of ecosystem services is being considered with particular emphasis on stormwater infrastructure, as well as broader, longer term planning by the Department of the Interior (DOI) on a basinwide scale.

Mr. Jensen stressed the need to identify actionable projects and programs. Establishing a relationship with a champion is vital to project success. Community and individuals' support is key.

The participants discussed the CEQ's preliminary response to the 16th Report. GNEB member Dr. Teresa Pohlman, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) noted that the mission of the DHS does not include ecological restoration, but—as for other agencies—the DHS' activities outlined in the Report reflect the balance between the need for ecological restoration and the need to carry out each agency's established mission. The need for DHS to play a role in ecological restoration in the border region is being addressed through training and establishing a tribal liaison. Resources have proven a challenge, as has planning a proactive response. Mr. Jonathan Andrew, DOI, noted that DOI has partnered with DHS in ecological restoration efforts in the border region and has made progress. Difficulties in establishing collaborations among agencies have presented a barrier. Emphasis needs to be placed on champions, facilitating collaborations, and on-the-ground planning. Mr. Tracy Perry, U.S. Forest Service, stated that good collaborations had been established between DHS and the U.S. Forest Service, and discussions need to continue. Mr. Samuel Coleman, Acting Regional Administrator of EPA Region 6, agreed with the need to protect and sustain water bodies, which is aligned with state objectives. The reuse of land and prevention of pollution both are in accord with EPA's objectives. He cited Border 2020 and the President's 2013 *Climate Action Plan* as examples of pollution prevention planning, which will continue to be an issue as U.S. energy production increases. Mr. Coleman noted that he has been nominated to join the GNEB in March 2015. Mr. Russell Frisbie of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) stated that the Report's recommendation on increasing U.S.-Mexican engagement is an endorsement of the Commission's activities, which have both a rural and urban focus. Commissioner Edward Drusina, IBWC (GNEB member), noted that the IBWC is working toward creating a framework

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<sup>2</sup> Available online at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing\\_climate\\_resilience\\_of\\_americas\\_natural\\_resources.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/enhancing_climate_resilience_of_americas_natural_resources.pdf).

of Mexican and U.S. entities working together to address environmental problems in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

Mr. Jensen asked about public response to the formation of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument. Mr. Andrew responded that DOI has not had any negative issues associated with the designation. Ms. Jennifer Hass of DHS also reported no concerns with the designation from border patrol agents. Commissioner Drusina responded that public response so far has been largely positive.

Ms. Denise Benjamin-Sirmons, Director of ODACMO, thanked Dr. Austin and the entire Board for their work in preparing the Report. Dr. Austin's leadership was invaluable for guiding the GNEB's spirited discussions to reach consensus on difficult issues. Ms. Benjamin-Sirmons also thanked the ODACMO staff, including Ms. Gantner and Mr. Mark Joyce, ODACMO Associate Director, for their assistance to the GNEB.

#### **IV. Discussion of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board's 17th Report to the President**

Mr. Jensen stated that mitigation, preparedness and adaptation were priorities for the administration. The topic of the GNEB's 17th Report will be "Climate Change Resilience in the Border Region." This topic aligns with the *Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda*.

The participants began the discussion of the topic of the 17th Report by noting synergies between the topics of the 16th and 17th Reports. Dr. Jeffrey Payne, GNEB alternate member representing Dr. Holly Bamford, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, emphasized the importance of connecting the ecological restoration expectations established in the 16th Report with climate adaptation in the 17th Report. Considering climate change will ensure that ecological restoration activities will succeed in the long term. Broad climate issues will be important. He recognized that climate is changing rapidly, requiring a long-term perspective. Environmental managers will need to consider climate change when determining how best to allocate limited resources. Dr. Greg Eckert, National Park Service (GNEB member), pointed out that, as with ecological restoration, the GNEB will need to develop an understanding of what the members mean by "resiliency." It will be crucial to identify the primary stakeholders for whom the resiliency activities are to be carried out. Mr. Stephen Niemeyer, GNEB alternate member representing Mr. Kevin Shaw, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, reminded the participants of the views of the states of Texas and Arizona on climate change and noted that GNEB decisions are made by consensus. Ms. Alice Ewen, Council on Environmental Quality, expressed appreciation for this reminder but reiterated that regardless of the terminology chosen, the President places great importance on the issue of climate resilience.

Ms. Ewen observed that federal agencies will be prioritizing resilience on a national level. The Board can leverage this focus on resilience to achieve higher prioritization of its recommended projects. There is a multi-agency commitment to develop a resilience index for natural resources and another for community resilience. Dr. Keith Pezzoli, University of California, San Diego (GNEB member), inquired about the priorities that will be used to identify landscapes, including

protected and urban areas. Ms. Ewen responded that the DOI likely will be the lead agency in developing criteria and will carry out its charge within a 6-month deadline.

The participants discussed leveraging existing scientific resources on climate change resiliency. Dr. Pezzoli emphasized the ability of scientific research and data to advance achievement of the GNEB's recommendations. Mr. Jensen agreed that science and data have the ability to drive policy, although policy reports also have the ability to drive research agendas. Dr. Austin recognized the value of researchers from academia, state agencies and nongovernmental agencies, as well as federal agencies, serving on the GNEB. The following scientific resources were discussed:

- **The Nature Conservancy.** Ms. Ewen cited recent resiliency work being performed by the Nature Conservancy on the East Coast of the United States, rating large landscapes for vulnerability and developing funding priorities for long-term preservation, which might be generalized to the border region.
- **Department of the Interior.** Mr. Andrew noted that the Phoenix, Arizona, office of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has performed extensive hydrologic work that would be important to understanding water issues pertaining to climate change resiliency. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management develops data to make decisions related to water management. Mr. Andrew also cited DOI work related to the preservation of endangered species, including fish, riparian species and herps. The Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs) might be a source of data developed for large-scale decision making on managing landscapes.
- **Department of Homeland Security.** Dr. Pohlman suggested using the data from the DHS' annual *Scorecard on Sustainability and Energy Performance*, which is departmentwide but might be extrapolated to the border region, to help establish a baseline for climate change. She also cited the annual federal agency *Strategic Sustainability Performance Plans* as possible data sources.
- **Council on Climate Preparedness and Resilience.** Dr. Pezzoli observed that the Council's *Climate and Natural Resources Priority Agenda* is a good source of information about land use.
- **Past GNEB Reports.** Dr. Austin stated that the first chapter—"Climate Impacts, Adaptation, and Mitigation"—of the 13th Report, would be a good source of information to review in preparation for developing the 17th Report.

Dr. Austin noted that what will be important when reviewing these and other sources will be to consider what data and issues are uniquely applicable to the border region.

Regarding champions for the GNEB's projects, Ms. Ewen stated that the November 2014 *State and Local Leaders Task Force Report on Climate Preparedness and Resilience*<sup>3</sup> provides

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<sup>3</sup> Available online at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task\\_force\\_report\\_0.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/task_force_report_0.pdf).

recommendations on climate and natural resources that the GNEB might want to consider, particularly as California Governor Jerry Brown was a contributor. Ms. Ewen suggested that Governor Brown might be willing to champion GNEB projects that align with recommendations in the task force report.

The federal focus on environmental justice also has bearing on the topic of the 17th Report. Dr. Pohlman stated that recently, she had attended environmental justice meetings with tribal leaders at which climate change was recognized as being important and was a frequent topic of discussion. The National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) also is very interested in the nexus between environmental justice and climate change.

Recovery from natural disasters is part of climate change resiliency. Under the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, the President was charged with establishing an expedited and unified environmental and historic preservation (EHP) process. Dr. Pohlman explained that CEQ, DHS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation are leading the development and implementation of a framework for coordinating federal agency EHP reviews for disaster recovery projects.

The participants discussed whether to include mitigation in its recommended activities or only recommendations that are reactions to climate change. Dr. Pezzoli commented that land use intervention both mitigates climate change and is adaptive (e.g., restoring the tree canopy in San Diego, California). Ms. Ewen agreed that the two functions, mitigation and adaptation, were difficult to separate in forestry. Dr. Pohlman suggested including reference to the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program and Green Globes<sup>®</sup>, a Green Building Initiative program, both of which can be used to grade system sustainability. DHS has developed Resilience STAR<sup>™</sup>, a program analogous to EPA's ENERGY STAR<sup>®</sup>. As an example of mitigation that also would be adaptive, Mr. Steven Kameny, GNEB alternate member representing Ms. Rachel Poynter, Department of State, noted that decreasing idling times at border crossings would reduce air pollution. This could be achieved by infrastructure changes (e.g., increasing capacity, offering alternative energy sources for refrigerated trucks). Mr. Joyce agreed that some recommendations, such as fostering green infrastructure, were analogous to avoiding the need for ecological restoration and would be good to include in the 17th Report. Dr. Austin noted, however, that a recommendation that might appear harmless on the surface, like fostering use of renewable energy, might have environmental justice consequences.

Ms. Ewen pointed out that a new \$1 billion grants program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program focuses on climate resilience. The Rockefeller Foundation is providing technical assistance tied to this funding, including performing vulnerability assessments.

Ms. Ewen again thanked the GNEB members for their time and effort in producing the 16th Report. She expressed her appreciation to Dr. Austin for her dedication and service.

## **V. Next Steps and Adjournment**

The participants discussed the timeline for the production of the 17th Report. Mr. Joyce pointed out the GNEB, including new and returning members, would meet for the first time in 2015 in early March, likely March 9. There was agreement that the timeline for the 16th Report, in which the GNEB drafted an Advice Letter highlighting key issues in its first year and prepared the Report in its second year, would be good to follow for the 17th Report. Mr. Frisbie stated that the IBWC is establishing citizen forums along the border, contact with which might benefit the GNEB in drafting the Report.

Ms. Gantner updated the participants on the membership process. Letters will be sent to federal and state agencies this week. State and federal members who would like to request to serve on the Board again will need to respond quickly. Eligible GNEB members from state and local governmental agencies should coordinate with their superiors if they wish to be nominated again to serve on the GNEB. Ms. Gantner asked for suggestions of candidates from business, nongovernmental organizations and academia, in particular.

Dr. Austin informed the GNEB members that she had attended the 20th Anniversary celebration of the North American Development Bank (NADB). The Board of the NADB/Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) had voted to merge the two institutions. The GNEB's letter was instrumental in helping the institutions to decide which key issues to highlight in their merger agreement.

Mr. Joyce thanked the CEQ for hosting the meeting. Dr. Austin thanked all of the people who participated in person and on the telephone, the representatives of the CEQ, and the members of the GNEB.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

### **Action Items**

- ✧ Eligible GNEB members from state and local governmental agencies should coordinate with their superiors if they wish to be nominated again to serve on the GNEB.
- ✧ GNEB members should send to Ms. Gantner suggestions of GNEB candidates, particularly those from business, nongovernmental organizations and academia.

## **Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) Meeting Participants**

### **Designated Federal Officer**

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***The White House—Council on  
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## Agenda

### **Good Neighbor Environmental Board and Southwest Border Interagency Working Group**

December 8, 2014; 1:00 – 3:00pm (EST)  
White House Council on Environmental Quality  
722 Jackson Place, NW  
First Floor Conference Room

DIAL-IN: (202) 395-6392; PASSCODE: 3042916

- I. Welcome and Introductions**
  - Alice Ewen, Council on Environmental Quality (5 minutes)
- II. Overview of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board’s 16th Report on “Ecological Restoration in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region”**
  - Diane Austin, Chair, Good Neighbor Environmental Board (10 minutes)
- III. Accepting the Report and Initial Reactions to the Recommendations in the Good Neighbor Environmental Board’s 16th Report**
  - Jay Jensen, Council on Environmental Quality (10 minutes)
  - Discussion—Southwest Border Interagency Working Group Representatives provide initial reactions to the recommendations in the Board’s 16th Report (35 minutes)
- IV. Discussion of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board’s 17th Report to the President**
  - Topic—Climate Change Resilience in the Border Region
  - Discussion—Southwest Border Interagency Working Group Representatives and Good Neighbor Environmental Board Members provide initial suggestions on scope and areas of emphasis for Board’s 17th Report to the President on “Climate Change Resilience in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region” (45 minutes)
- V. Next Steps and Adjournment—Council on Environmental Quality (10 minutes)**