

**MEETING MINUTES**

California-Mexico Border Relations Council  
April 8, 2025 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. PST  
(or until close of business)

Simultaneous interpretation was provided in Spanish and English.

The agenda for this meeting can be located on the BRC webpage: <https://calepa.ca.gov/border-affairs-program/california-mexico-border-relations-council/>

**1. Welcome – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California**

Chair Garcia welcomes everyone attending.

Public Comment: None.

**2. Call to Order, Roll Call, and Establishment of Quorum – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California**

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m. by Chair Yana Garcia. The meeting was held via Zoom and in-person at the College Center at Imperial Valley College, the California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

At 1:04 p.m. roll call was taken, and all Council Members<sup>1</sup> and/or their alternates were present for the duration of the meeting as follows:

<b>Council Agency</b>	<b>Council Member</b>
1. <b>CalEPA</b> : Present	BRC Chair and Secretary Yana Garcia California Environmental Protection Agency
2. <b>CalOES</b> : Present	Yvonne Dorantes, Deputy Director, Legislative & Governmental Affairs <u>Alternate</u> of Director Nancy Ward California Governor's Office of Emergency Services
3. <b>CalHHS</b> : Present	Secretary Kim Johnson California Health and Human Services Agency
4. <b>CNRA</b> : Present	Noaki Schwartz, Deputy Secretary for Equity and EJ <u>Alternate</u> of Secretary Wade Crowfoot California Natural Resources Agency

<sup>1</sup> Membership of the BRC is statutorily defined in Government Code section 99522  
Air Resources Board • Department of Pesticide Regulation • Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery • Department of Toxic Substances  
Control • Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment • State Water Resources Control Board • Regional Water Quality Control Boards

5. **CalSTA:** Present Giles Giovinazzi, Senior Advisor  
Alternate of Secretary Toks Omishakin  
California State Transportation Agency
6. **CDFA:** Present Secretary Karen Ross  
California Department of Food and Agriculture
7. **GO-Biz:** Present Diana Dominguez, Trade and Investment Representative  
for the Americas  
Alternate for Director Dee Dee Myers  
California Governor's Office of Business and Economic  
Development
8. **BCSH:** Absent
9. **U.S. EPA:** Deputy Regional Administrator Cheree Peterson  
Present Appointee for Martha Guzman Aceves, Regional  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9

A quorum of 7 of 8 members was established.

### **3. Meeting Logistics and Interpretation Services Announcement – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California**

Chair Garcia and Deputy Secretary for Intergovernmental Relations Sabine Talaugon at the California Environmental Protection Agency provides details on how to submit public comment and access interpretation in-person and on Zoom.

### **4. Discussion and Possible Action to Approve Draft Minutes for the Previous Meeting on November 7, 2024 – Chair Yana Garcia, Secretary for Environmental Protection for the State of California**

The Council reviewed the November 2024 Meeting Minutes.

Motion: CalHHS Secretary Kim Johnson moved as follows:

“Motion to approve the draft meeting minutes for the previous BRC meeting on November 7, 2024.”

Second: CDFA Secretary Karen Ross seconded the motion.

Public Comment: None.

Roll call vote:

<b>Council Member</b>	<b>Vote</b>
1. CalEPA: Secretary Garcia	Aye

2. CalOES: Deputy Director Dorantes (alternate)	Abstain
3. CalHHS: Secretary Johnson	Aye
4. CNRA: Deputy Secretary Schwartz (alternate)	Aye
5. CalSTA: Senior Advisor Giovinazzi (alternate)	Aye
6. CDFA: Secretary Ross	Aye
7. GO-Biz: Trade and Investment Representative Dominguez (alternate)	Aye
8. BCSH:	Absent

Motion passes with 6 votes in favor, 1 abstain, 1 absent.

## 5. Discussion on Cross-Agency Collaboration

### a. CalHHS

Secretary Kim Johnson: Secretary Johnson discusses expanding access to quality and affordable healthcare for all Californians through their support of the promotores community engagement model. CalHHS distributed ten \$250,000 subgrants that included Comité Civico del Valle in Imperial County. The Department of Healthcare Access and Information has been working with Ventura County on providing mental and behavioral healthcare trainings for members of rural communities.

Secretary Johnson discussed the Border Infection Disease Surveillance Program, the first of a five-year cycle to identify outbreaks in border communities.

### b. CDFA

Secretary Karen Ross: Secretary Ross emphasizes the importance of collaboration with our border partners in Mexico and Canada, especially right now. The two areas CDFA has day to day open communication and collaboration is through their animal health division surrounding the avian influenza and plant health division with mitigating the impacts on invasive pests at the border stations. Secretary Ross noted the importance of sharing learnings, research projects, and technologies, such as the sterile insect technology that serves as a low-risk way of combating invasive species when we have them.

Regarding trade relationships, every year delegations from both countries are sent to deepen understandings of mutually beneficial job creation and economic growth on both sides of the border. She ends with the note that California is making a considerable effort to provide education, training, and workforce development, and understands that technology and automation will be part of this. CDFA is working with their partners at GO-Biz as well as the Workforce Development and Labor Agency to support the people in addition to technologies, citing an example of a pilot certification programs in the Community College system.

### c. CalOES

Deputy Director Yvonne Dorantes: Deputy Director Dorantes opens with the note that emergency management is a collective effort. CalOES has been working closely with international, federal, state, and local partners to coordinate and support broader wildfire response and recovery efforts to protect public health and the environment. She specifically discussed the LA fires being a historic multi-agency effort that involved direct firefighting with support from 12 states, multiple tribal nations, and three international partners, including Mexico. She emphasized gratitude for the partners that have been supporting the rebuilding and resilience of Southern California through resources coordination and real-time information sharing.

Deputy Dorantes also highlighted Listos California (a CalOES emergency preparedness campaign), the State Threat Assessment Center (a hub where CalOES, California Highway Patrol, the California National Guard, and federal partners monitor and address cross-border threats like drug smuggling and human trafficking), the Maritime Security Program (a partnership with U.S. Coast Guard, California's Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Mexico's Secretaria de Marina Federal), and State Warning Center (tracking and sharing updates on cross-border pollution).

#### d. GO-Biz

Trade and Investment Representative for the Americas Diana Dominguez: Trade and Investment Representative Dominguez shared that GO-Biz is actively engaged with Mexico in pursuit of global business opportunities, especially for small businesses. She notes a recent delegation to Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico to support and advance sustainable manufacturing practices. GO-Biz also led a group of economic development organizations based mostly in the Inland Empire, San Diego Border Region to Mexico City and facilitated several networking opportunities, presentations, and discussions around investment and business expansion.

Trade and Investment Representative Dominguez noted future business delegations this year which will continue to foster more international collaboration, attract investment, and promote the work and leadership around California and Mexico's green and water technologies. She closed with a note that GO-Biz is in discussion with the State of Baja California and Baja Sur on the potential for renewing the Commission of the Californias MOU and she will provide updates on this at the next Border Relations Council Meeting.

#### e. CalSTA

Senior Advisor Giles Giovinazzi: Senior Advisor Giovinazzi highlights the partnership between CalSTA and Caltrans in the building of international infrastructure projects and planning integrated transportation networks on both sides of the California and Mexico border. He noted Caltrans support of the Lithium Valley effort to extract lithium from deposits in the area adjacent to the Salton Sea and how Caltrans is working with the California Energy Commission and GO-Biz in Imperial County to assess transportation needs and plan for a system that will support lithium production and transportation. Caltrans, the Imperial County Transportation Commission, and the City of Calexico began construction of the Calexico Intermodal Transportation Center, funded through Caltrans Active Transportation Program, will strengthen cross-border connectivity and provide a secure transportation experience for all who travel through Imperial County, completing the project in early 2026.

Caltrans is also working with the Imperial County Transportation Commission and federal partners to advance the Calexico East Land Port of Entry Joint Operations Systems Project which creates a plan for a new pilot system for commercial vehicles to book appointments for specific times to cross the

border on current conditions with potential to expand to passenger vehicles and could be replicated to other ports of entry.

Caltrans is working closely with CalEPA and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) on the Tijuana River Valley and Border Climate Adaptation and Environmental Justice Plan to reduce climate pollution and improve water and air quality, with Caltrans repurposing a \$3M climate adaptation grant to SANDAG to address Tijuana River Valley pollution.

Senior Advisor Giovinazzi ended with sharing key initiatives like the Caltrans and SANDAG launch of a cross-border Climate Change Resiliency Plan and a Binational Rail Strategy to be included in the Baja California-California Border Master Plan.

#### f. CNRA

Deputy Secretary for Equity and Environmental Justice Noaki Schwartz: Deputy Secretary Schwartz begins with providing an overview of the California Natural Resources Agency, its mission, and highlights a few of CNRA's department's collaborative work.

The California Energy Commission signed an MOU on clean energy cooperation with the State of Baja California in 2024 and the State of Sonora in 2025, both calling for the sharing of best practices on energy efficiency, zero emission vehicle infrastructure planning, renewables, and other clean energy efforts - development of workplans to implement both MOUs is underway.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife granted San Diego County funding for the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Brownfield Restoration project and the design, habitat restoration plan, and CEQA documents are complete.

The State Coastal Conservancy granted \$340,000 in 2017 and \$3.19M in 2023 to the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association to support planning related to the Tijuana Tidal River Tidal Restoration Program with final design and permitting to be completed towards the end of 2025. The Conservancy Board approved \$30M towards the implementation of Phase 1 which is scheduled to begin in 2026 and granted the Department of Parks and Recreation an additional \$250,000 in 2020 to support environmental compliance and the development of a use agreement for the restoration of the abandoned Nelson Sloan Quarry in the Tijuana River Valley. Planning is expected to complete in 2025 with the intent to implement a small pilot project shortly after.

Lastly, the Coastal Commission has been receiving regular progress reports on projects addressing the cross-border pollution process and informational briefings and presentations from relevant agencies, staff is coordinating as needed with the City and County, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, City of Imperial Beach, and more.

#### g. CalEPA

BRC Chair and Secretary for Environmental Protection Yana Garcia: Secretary Garcia began with the update that the MOU was signed with Baja California last November. The main objectives of the MOU include 1) identifying and reducing criteria pollutants, toxic air contaminants, greenhouse gas emissions, and vehicle emissions in the border region, 2) identifying and reducing waste including the burning of waste tires, and 3) encouraging the participation of public, private, and other sectors in improving air quality in the border region.

Providing updates on CalEPA's engagement in developing solutions to address the Tijuana River transboundary pollution and flows - the Agency is continuing its partnership with federal, state, and local entities to assess impacts to communities. The San Diego Water Quality Control Board and Air Pollution Control Districts are working on rolling out the Air Improvement and Relief Effort (AIRE), a residential air purifier program utilizing \$2.7M from the California Air Resources Board (CARB) Community Air Protection Program. In addition, the project to fund the full repair and expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant with colleagues at the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission has received full funding (\$600M) to complete the project and reiterated the Regional Board's commitment to close communication in project timelines and deliverables. The State Water Resources Control Board financed a \$4.7 trash boom which was deployed in the Tijuana River, is overseen by the nonprofit Rural Community Assistance Corporation, and blocked 50 tons of trash in the first rainstorm of the season from flowing to the Pacific.

Secretary Garcia provides an update on Prop 4, the \$10B climate bond that includes a provision for \$50M available to the State Water Board for cross-border water quality issues, including specifically those at the New River and Tijuana River. The Water Board is evaluating possible eligible water quality projects and expenditures for this funding and welcomes thoughts and comments on this in this forum and others.

Lastly, moving to the topic of hazardous waste and waste management. The Department of Toxic Substances Control continues collaboration with U.S. Customs and Border Protection Hazmat Unit to conduct weekly inbound hazardous waste transfer inspector inspections for commercial vehicles. CalRecycle formed an internal research group focused on collecting data on the flow of waste materials across the border and communities affected by those waste materials on both sides of the border. At the next Border Relations Council meeting, CalEPA hopes to provide an update on some initial findings of this workgroup and will continue to provide updates moving forward.

#### h. U.S. EPA

Deputy Regional Administrator Cheree Peterson: Deputy Administrator Peterson shared U.S. EPA's continued dedication to reducing transboundary water pollution.

#### i. Public Comment

John Hernandez: Checking all the boxes but not connecting the dots. Where are we going on a federal level? Hope that CalEPA does everything it can do and doesn't look away. It's gotten worse for a certain portion of the population; you can still see white caps of pollution coming across the New River and Calexico. The New River demands attention and requires an international component.

Secretary Garcia: Beyond reporting out what we've done, the investment, the collaboration, we need to maintain a focus on results. We need to be better at listening to community residents about how our programs and investments are or are not making a difference in their day-to-day lives.

Timothy Kelley: Tijuana River is bad, but the New River is worse. Want to bring your attention to a couple cross-border collaboration going on through different organizations, one of them was the Cali-Baja Binational Alliance, an organization made of Imperial County partners, San Diego and all of Baja California to Ensenada which built the collaboration and communication about challenges that were occurring. Since then, we've formed the Imperial Mexicali Binational Alliance and County Transportation, meeting on a bi-monthly basis and focus on transportation pertaining to border crossings, the environment, health, economic development, and education. Making people aware of

the importance of the border, and how an efficient border is good for our economy, supporting border improvements, security, technology, personnel, and infrastructure. Support the Caltrans pilot project, no reason to be in line idling for three hours when you could have an app that tells you its your time to get in the queue. I hope that during your visit you'll go to the east port of entry, and you'll be able to observe a facility that brings aggregate from Mexico and the U.S. across the border in a conveyor belt, we can do the same thing with containers. We won't be needing trucks to wait in line to cross the border and the belts don't create pollution. There are quite a few students from Imperial County that go daily to Mexicali, multiple students from Mexicali that cross the border to go to college here at IBC, SDSU, and our high schools. Having an efficient border is very important to us.

Gil Rebollar: Much of the national focus has been on what happens between the ports rather than at the ports of entry. This Council can showcase the binational collaboration for the environmental, economic, or social issues that really reshape this national narrative that continues to focus on fear mongering and scare tactics. Imperial Valley contributes so much through land ports, agriculture, resources, we need more through technology, through increasing efficiency of our ports through the Global Entry Program. Imperial Valley deserves that action and deserves that acknowledgement and respect of being here with us.

Luis Olmedo: Executive Director of Comité Civico del Valle reinforcing importance of the state's investments on infrastructure, housing, healthcare, the environment (New River, Salton Sea) – continue investing on infrastructure and the environment. We still suffer that water is not compliant with Clean Water Act, but the Water Board did invest \$7M within point of entry systems which is a great step for over 30 years of inaction. DTSC cleaned up the Brawley Chevron facility that was a former pesticide manufacturer that has become a benefit, contained, cleaned, and improved, but so much more could have been negotiated because of the harm to that community. Comité Civico del Valle is doing a weather resilience program putting Acs, water systems, air purifiers, but we should be able to breathe clean air. Either we invest upfront and protect our environment, protect our population and create good jobs, or we pay the medical bills.

Secretary Garcia: Secretary Garcia appreciated Luis's years of advocacy in this space and his work on the New River.

## **6. Discussion of New River Improvement Project**

### **a. CalEPA**

Secretary Garcia: Secretary Garcia introduced the New River to attendees who may not be familiar with the challenges associated with this water body. The State Water Resources Control Board has granted nearly \$48M in 2023 for the New River Improvement Project.

### **b. Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board**

Executive Officer Michael Placencia: The New River flows from Mexicali, Mexico into the city of Calexico in Imperial County North, eventually flowing into the Salton Sea. Final volume in the Salton Sea via the New River is 20% from Mexico, and the remaining 80% from treated wastewater treatment plants and agricultural sources in the U.S. The New River has been recognized as severely polluted since at least the 1940s and threatens public health and does not support a healthy ecosystem for wildlife and other biological resources.

Assembly Bill 1079 was signed into law in 2009 requiring the California Mexico Border Council to create a strategic plan to study, monitor, and remediate and enhance the New River's water quality to protect human health. CalEPA appointed a technical advisory committee, and the New River Improvement Project Strategic Plan was adopted in 2011. Three goals of the plan: improve public health, transform ecology, strengthen economy by enhancing community development opportunities. In 2016 the plan was updated to utilize wetlands to clean the water.

Recommended infrastructure components include a trash screen, diversion structure bypass conveyance system, and pump back system to divert disinfected effluence back to the New River. 3 permits obtained for discharge since 2020, construction began in 2023. Trash screens and diversion structure will capture virtually all solids once operational. Pipework installation is proceeding, effluent pump back station also being constructed. Setbacks so far include flooding, leaks, alignment of trash screen track, pump-back system pipe testing – all work was completed in March 2025. Projects are being evaluated in the other four regions.

c. California Department of Water Resources

Ash Cousin, Salton Sea Construction Office: Ash is secondary construction oversight from the department with the city. New River Improvement Project has three components: trash screen, diversion and encasement, construction of a pump-back system. Award was back in January 2023, but the schedule has been delayed, several setbacks as mentioned earlier. Current contract amount is \$43M. Photos of construction progress in presentation and 2024 storm damage. Construction aims to complete in May 2025.

d. City of Calexico

Mayor Diana Nuricumbo: Mayor Nuricumbo notes that she has only held this position for a little over three months and this has been a project that has taken about 15 years from start to finish. Getting close to the ribbon cutting, looking at the first week of May.

Liliana Falomir, Public Works Manager: showing slides related to the funding aspect of the project. City received \$46M from Department of Water Resources to do the construction but the cost exceeded that grant. The city had to tap into a grant they have for the Department of Parks and Recreation for the New River Parkway Project, Phase 1A and 2 (~1.4M). Calexico has an MOU with Imperial Irrigation and Imperial County that established each agency would contribute \$50K for materials and maintenance, but as costs continue to increase it will be more than that. This is a current challenge. Once they get final numbers from project designer, they'll be able to find funding opportunities for operation and maintenance.

e. Sonoran Institute

Francisco Zamora, Senior Director of Program and Enrique Villegas, Program Director, Colorado River Delta: Mexicali has been growing and encroaching over agricultural lands and infrastructure, estimated 100 miles of agricultural drains that flow through urban and suburban areas, very polluted with trash. Most of the channel is above ground, water goes through the drain from the wastewater treatment plan to New River at the border. Web of drains flows into the New River, 2 drains contribute 90% of flow.

Mexicali Fuye project's initiative is to improve water quality through nature-based solutions in the river, in the rains that flow through the river. Four-year phase happening right now mainly funded by



State Water Boards and a Mexican Philanthropic Institution. Two main objectives, the first is to develop a plan that gets stakeholders together to plan how we deal with the drains long term. The document will evolve, a mid and long-term planning effort. Expect to contract it August 2025. Second objective is three miles of improved nature-based solutions projects to improve water quality. Constructing green corridors with community participation, monitoring birds, fish, vegetation, hoping to see improvements in these indicators. 2 enhanced wetland areas will start construction in June 2025. Green corridors – full design is complete, only doing work on three specific areas due to budget. Want to replicate these actions in other areas of the drain systems – 3 pilot projects identified at different drains.

f. Public Comment

John Hernandez: Sonoran Institute is doing great work, but a little too little too late. Redirecting and mixing waters is not convincing him that what's in the water making its way into the communities isn't damaging to humans and wildlife. Started talking about this 27 years ago under NAFTA. Policy makers need to hold people accountable because people have died (cancer, airborne pollutants, toxins, etc.). Mechanisms in place aren't working. Reduction in flow...what does that do to diluting contaminants? A lot of residents have family on the MX side. Important to consider them when talking about community benefits. Where are the other agencies besides the ones here doing their part? Why do we need Sonora Institute? No one else is stepping up. Band aid approach means we continue to bleed.

Tim Kelley: efforts can pay off (golf course in Mexicali example of river clean up). Wetlands projects weren't designed to be parks, but so many people go. Currently there are 3, but there's room for ~50. Coachella Valley White Water River now has a bike trail running through it. No reason we can't do this. Biking and horse riding would turn the river from a nuisance to a benefit.

## 7. Future Meeting Dates and Agenda Items

Secretary Garcia reminds attendees that the Council is open to agenda items from members of the public. If there are items the public would like to see on the Council agenda, please reach out via email: [BorderAffairs@calepa.ca.gov](mailto:BorderAffairs@calepa.ca.gov)

Public Comment: None.

## 8. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Public Comment: None.

## 9. Adjournment

Chair Garcia adjourned the meeting at 3:08 p.m. PST.