

# The New River and the Tijuana River

Practical linkages in forging policy and establishing solutions to common contamination problems.

# New River (actually just a drainage ditch)



The New River flows 20 miles in Mexico. 60 miles in the USA. About as long as the All-American Canal

# New River contributions to the Salton Sea

- The New River brings about 80,000 acre-feet of water annually from Mexicali.
- This is about 20% of the water in the New River at the outlet to the Salton Sea
- New River's Mexican input to the Salton Sea will become even more important if IID water is further reduced.
- The presence or absence of Mexican water will change the design features for habitat enhancement at the New River delta into the Salton Sea

# Mexicali needs New River water

- Mexico's allocation of Colorado River water has already been significantly cut and will likely be further cut.
- With water supplies reduced, Mexico has incentive to reuse effluent from wastewater treatment plants and lower the amount crossing the border at Calexico.
- Mexican authorities have stated that their goal is to reduce the flow of New River across the border into the United States to ZERO.

# Tijuana River Watershed (20% in USA)



# Tijuana is in a water crisis

- Tijuana relies on Colorado River water for around 90-95% of its water needs. The aqueduct is at capacity—and is in a state of disrepair.
- High growth rates in Tijuana/Rosarito/Ensenada along with its fragile water supply system will soon create a state of emergency in Tijuana regarding water.

# The Aqueduct from Mexicali to Tijuana is 40 years old

“[The congressman] added that a structural collapse is highly probable, and that if a massive failure were to occur, water would stop being supplied to the dams in Zona Costa, and the supply in the dams would **end in less than a month.**”

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# Mexicali-Tijuana aqueduct



# IBWC is heavily involved in the Tijuana River

- The IBWC treats 25 million gallons per day of Tijuana waste water at a plant near the border.
- That treated water currently gets pumped through a 3.5-mile-long pipe into the ocean off Imperial Beach.
- \$330 million was approved to double the size of the International Wastewater Treatment Plant near the Mexican border.
- After Tropical Storm Hilary, the amount needed has doubled.

# Like Mexicali, Tijuana needs to reuse its water

- Tijuana and surrounding areas are growing at a fast pace, mostly because of immigrants unable to cross the border into the U.S.
- Water needs continuing to grow, they will want to reuse treated water as a form of new supply.
- Tijuana has insufficient reliable resources to build treatment plants to the level of potable reuse.

# Imperial Valley needs to press for an update of Minute 264.

1. New River Minute 264 (August 26, 1980) established water quality standards for New River water at the international boundary not to exceed **30,000 colonies** of fecal coliform per 100 ml on average.
2. Tijuana River Minute 270 (April 30, 1985) set the standard not to exceed **1,000 colonies** of fecal coliform per 100 ml.
3. Minute 270 is in accord with Mexico's national standard for effluent for any treatment plant. Minute 264 should be updated to reflect the same standard as in Minute 270

# Imperial Valley can leverage water between Mexicali and Tijuana

- The simplest way for Tijuana to get new supply of water is for the US to pump water from the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant back to Tijuana.
- The simplest way for the Imperial Valley to get cleaned up New River water is for the Mexicali Zaragoza treatment plant to be upgraded to that it meets Mexican sanitary standards.
- **These two programs should be linked.**

# Downsides

- The IBWC is woefully underfunded.
- The IBWC can only be funded directly by Congress via the US Department of State. (or from the EPA under special conditions)
- IBWC is not eligible for any funds in the Inflation Reduction Act or the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill.
- The New River is among the lowest priorities of IBWC unfunded projects

# Reasons for optimism

- The United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) has provisions to pressure Mexico to fulfill previously-agreed upon stipulations, such as treatment standards.
- San Diego County Supervisors and Cities have petitioned for help from Governor Newsom and President Biden. The topic is in the news.
- The current IBWC Commissioner, Maria-Elena Giner, is eager to help.
- There may be funding opportunities in current budget.
- A border crossing fee has been proposed to pay for water infrastructure