



U.S. – Mexico Water Management

As part of a landmark [treaty](#) signed in 1944, the U.S. and Mexico share the waters of cross-border rivers. The treaty, which addresses the utilization of waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande, continues to be a critical tool for both countries as rising demands and scarcity of water resources along this arid region persist. To address ongoing concerns related to binational water management, the Border Legislative Conference (BLC) hosted a legislative exchange session on November 20, 2020. Facilitated by California Senator Ben Allen, Chair of the Senate Environmental Quality Committee, and member of the Natural Resources & Water Committee and the Select Committee on California-Mexico Cooperation, the conversation included state legislators from both sides of the border.

Panelists for the session included:

- Jayne Harkins, P.E. U.S. Commissioner of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), United States and Mexico
- Salvador Lopez, Chief Environmental Officer at the North American Development Bank (NADB)
- Dr. Oscar Ibañez, Executive Director for the Board of Water and Sanitation of the state of Chihuahua

Through presentations and dialogue, several key topics were discussed, including:

- Due to its arid environment, the U.S. – Mexico border region is especially vulnerable to drought.



- In the United States, both surface and ground water are owned and managed by local, state, and private entities. In Mexico, water is owned and managed by the federal government, specifically the National Water Commission (CONAGUA), rather than state and local governments.
- The IBWC, which is comprised of United States and Mexico government officials, is responsible for the application of boundary and water treaties between the two countries, as well as settling any differences that may arise.
- Ensuring that the details of existing treaties remain binding, regular meetings are held for collective review by the IBWC. Meeting minutes are subject to formal approval and considered binding agreements intended for implementation once approved by the U.S. Department of State and Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The Convention of 1906, which provides equitable distribution of the waters of the Rio Grande, delivers water to Mexico, which is stored in Elephant Butte Dam, New Mexico.
- Through the 1944 Water Treaty, Mexico delivers water to the U.S. from the Rio Grande, known in Mexico as Rio Bravo. The Rio Conchos is the main river in the state of Chihuahua and the Rio Grande's largest tributary. For its part, the U.S. delivers water to Mexico from the Colorado River.



- October 24, 2020 was the deadline by which Mexico was to provide the U.S. with the owed water from the Rio Grande. Local farmers in Chihuahua, where the Rio Grande flows, voiced strong opposition to the water exchange.
- Established in 1994, NADB develops and finances environmental infrastructure along the U.S.-Mexico border to improve the well-being of the population.
- Between 1995 and 2015, significant expansion of drinking water distribution, as well as in wastewater collection and treatment, has been achieved in both countries. In the Mexican and U.S. border states, average water consumption has dropped in the last several years due largely to water conservation campaign efforts.
- As made apparent by the state of California, opportunities exist to diversify water supply, such as groundwater utilization, seawater desalination, and water recycling.
- Aging infrastructure, overreliance on limited water resources, severe vulnerability to drought, and other climate change impacts remain a challenge to water resources along the border.

Interested in additional sessions? Be sure to visit the [Legislative Exchange Series](#) page for upcoming virtual gatherings.