INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION
UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
UNITED STATES SECTION

July 12, 2018

Ms. L'Oreal Stepney
Deputy Director for the Office of Water
Texas Commission of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 13087
Austin, Texas 78711-3087

Dear Ms. Stepney:

We are in receipt of your email dated July 11, 2018, regarding the high salinity levels at the Anzalduas Dam's pool. There is no international agreement regulating the salinity concentration of Rio Grande waters or spelling out any international actions that should be taken should salinity concentrations exceed a certain level.

Nonetheless, we recognize that the high salinity in the Rio Grande is having a negative effect on Texas users. For this reason, we have undertaken the following actions:

1. We requested Mexico to resume round-the-clock operation of two pumps at Morillo Drain; and
2. We requested Mexico to release additional water from Falcon to dilute the salinity

We have made these requests at both the local level and at Headquarters. Acting Commissioner Nuñez personally reached out to Commissioner Salmon and Principal Engineer Elizalde of the Mexican Section of the IBWC (MxIBWC) to request support. The MxIBWC indicated it will operate the pumps to the extent they can without exceeding the Morillo Drain capacity.

Mexican demand from Falcon Dam is low (10 cms). The Mexicans have indicated that they are only making releases to meet municipal demand and, due to low Mexican storage at Falcon, they are not able to release additional waters to dilute salinity for the Texas farmers. They also point to indications (such as a reading of 2098 ppm at Los Ebanos) that the high salinity is due to runoff from recent rains in Texas and Mexico.

The U.S. Section will attempt to quantify the extent to which Morillo Drain operations may have contributed to the salinity problem. Should the U.S. make dilution releases, we would seek to negotiate with Mexico for a compensating water credit for that part of the salinity due to inadequate operation of Morillo Drain. Please note that we have been unsuccessful in the past in obtaining a credit from Mexico after the US made dilution releases from Falcon to assist Texas farmers.

We are also reiterating our requests for the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority to pay its debt of $180,148.77 for 2015, $139,575.21 for 2016 and $152,644.38 for 2017 that it owes the

International Boundary and Water Commission as its share of Morillo Drain operation and maintenance costs in accordance with longstanding agreements. The failure of Texas users in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to pay their share has exacerbated maintenance problems at the Morillo Drain.

In addition, we are working with federal, state, and local partners from the US and Mexico on the Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative, which is developing recommendations for improving water quality impairments in the Rio Grande, such as bacteria and salinity. The initiative has developed models of the river to run multiple scenarios to select the most effective and feasible options. Ultimately, the initiative seeks to develop a binational watershed protection plan to implement water quality improvement strategies in the region.

As you know, the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission does not have the authority to make dilution releases absent a request from the State of Texas or Mexico. Should the State of Texas choose to make dilution releases in response to its stakeholders' concerns, the International Boundary and Water Commission will ensure Falcon Dam operations are adjusted timely in response to the request.

If you have any other questions and/or concerns, please call contact me at either (915) 832-4118 or via email Daniel.Avila@ibwc.gov.

Sincerely,

Daniel Avila, P.E.
Principal Engineer
Operations Department