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Comments on Managing Acute Water Scarcity on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Institutional Issues Raised by the 1990s' Drought, Presented by Stephen Mumme

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Comments on “Managing Acute Water Scarcity on the U.S.– Mexico Border : Institutional Issues Raised by the 1990s’ Drought,” Presented by Stephen Mumme

Stephen Mumme’s article states that the main lesson to be gained from the drought of the 1990s is that the competing and growing demand for water in the region needs new tools to address the problems of water scarcity. As Mumme points out, water scarcity in the United States–Mexico border region, exacerbated by the drought of the 1990s, requires new technical approaches, as well as new institutional arrangements. Several potentially beneficial measures are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Initially, the problem of water scarcity should be addressed in the Border XXI’s water working group. Within the group, a “task force” should consider prevention, attention, and remedial actions for future droughts. The minutes and reports of the task force and the public meetings must be collected and examined by the International Boundary Water Council (IBWC), as well as the other agencies that address droughts, in order that they may consider the information as they devise strategies and programs to address droughts.

In addition, public participation is essential in order to involve all actors in prevention, attention, and remedial actions. Public participation should include the following parties: main water users (agriculture, industry, et cetera), local officials, research institutions, nongovernmental organizations related to environmental issues, and the general public. The IBWC should collect and analyze the information that results from public participation.

Drought issues should be considered within the context of the regional ecosystem. The problems and consequences of droughts extend well beyond linear considerations on water distribution. Necessarily, the remedial actions implemented to address droughts must reach beyond these constraints as well. The proposed ecosystem approach should consider all factors of the natural, social, and economic systems related to regional and sub-regional use of natural resources. This approach should stress water scarcity issues, but within the framework and connection of all natural, social, and economic factors related directly or indirectly to

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drought issues. Moreover, a comprehensive approach to interactive factors related to water disponibility issues should also be taken into consideration.

A binational geographic information system and database derived from this approach should be established in order to store, manage, and share information derived from drought situations. Relevant data that must be shared include water use and reuse modes; health effects of water scarcity; productive and economic consequences; and ecological consequences. The proposed task force, as well as local officials and non-governmental organizations, should promote the dissemination of information, public awareness, and education about drought issues.