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**The Ford Foundation-Sponsored Symposium Series on U.S.-  
Mexico Border Environmental Policy: A Brief Perspective,  
1991-2000**

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ROBERT G. VARADY\*

## The Ford Foundation-Sponsored Symposium Series on U.S.–Mexico Border Environmental Policy: A Brief Perspective, 1991–2000

On the opening day of this symposium, we witnessed a remarkable sequence of events. We heard an academic, engineering professor John Hernández, who is a mentor of the top water official in the United States, Eluid Martínez, the commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, offer a presentation on drought—with his illustrious former student in the audience. Then, we watched another academic, political scientist Stephen Mumme, demonstrate the fruit of two decades of research on the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) to two of his mentors, Professors Albert Utton and Helen Ingram, and to the two commissioners of that binational agency, John Bernal of the United States side of the IBWC, and Arturo Herrera Solis of the Mexican CILA,<sup>1</sup> who then responded openly and in real time to Mumme's observations and suggestions.

When that was over, we heard Mary Kelly, the director of the Texas Center for Policy Studies—one of the most responsible and respected environmental nongovernmental organizations in Texas, if not the entire border region—tell those same officials that their responses represented a sea-change in the behavior of the commission. The contrast was particularly striking to Kelly—who along with other attendees Mumme, Utton, Ingram, and Alberto Székely—had participated in a conference on transboundary water-resources management on Gasparilla Island, Florida, in 1991, at a time when the previous U.S. commissioner was notably combative and secretive regarding IBWC activities and programs.<sup>2</sup>

All the while, Texas' top water official, Commissioner John Baker of the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission; one of Mexico's leading environmental diplomats, Ambassador Alberto Székely; a number of water researchers; several environmental lawyers; and an editorial-page writer from a leading southwestern United States newspaper, the *Albuquerque Journal*, listened and commented.

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1. Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas.

2. The proceedings of that conference appeared as *The North American Experience Managing International Transboundary Water Resources: The International Joint Commission and the International Boundary and Water Commission*, 33 NAT. RESOURCES J. 1, 1-459 (1993).

How did this happen? It would be nice to thank the University of New Mexico for its generosity, but while they have done an excellent job organizing the event, they did not provide the funds that have made this meeting possible. It was the Ford Foundation, and particularly the interest and foresight of Norman Collins, the longtime director of Ford's Mexico and Central America office, that allowed this symposium to take place.<sup>3</sup> The present meeting in Cuernavaca is the fifth of these Ford-sponsored binational programs on environmental policy in the United States–Mexico border region. The first was held in Guaymas, Mexico, in October 1991, and was attended by Susan Berresford, who has since become the president of the Ford Foundation. Three subsequent symposia were organized by the same team: Helen Ingram, Albert Utton, and me—jointly sponsored by the International Transboundary Resources Center at the University of New Mexico School of Law and the University of Arizona's Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy.

The first series, which ended in spring 1996, treated general topics such as the interaction of nongovernmental organizations and academics, the emergence of the post-North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) environmental institutions (the Border Environment Cooperation Commission [BECC], the North American Development Bank [NADBank], and the Commission for Environmental Cooperation [CEC]), and the theme of environmental sustainability in the border region. When that series ended, the organizers and the Ford Foundation agreed to convene another three-part series. This time, the major difference was to be that each symposium would treat a geographic subregion of the border and address a specific issue. Further, we all hoped that each of these gatherings would go beyond discussion and propose actual solution sets. Finally, with Helen Ingram's move from the Udall Center to the University of California at Irvine, the organizing team was extended to include her new institution.

The present program is a perfect illustration of the organizers' ideas put into effect. We have been discussing a set of problems—the sustained drought of 1993–96—and recommending long-term and short-term solutions. In February 1999, Helen Ingram will host the next of our programs, this time on the issue of whether more ought to be done to conserve dwindling groundwater resources. At that time the participants will consider five case studies: Juárez/El Paso, Columbus/Palomas, the San Pedro River Basin, Quitobaquito/Pinacate, and the lining of the All

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3. Dr. Collins retired from this position in October 1998.

American Canal.<sup>4</sup> The following year, in 2000, the Udall Center will take its turn and organize the final symposium of this series.

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4. Respectively, the case-study areas are in southwestern Texas/northern Chihuahua, southwestern New Mexico/northern Chihuahua, southeastern Arizona/Sonora, southwestern Arizona/Sonora, and southern California/Baja California.