



On the Water Front

June 2022 | A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

EPWater fine-tunes approach to monsoon season

After enduring heavy damages from record rainfall events in 2021, El Paso Water is taking a proactive approach to this monsoon season. The Public Service Board approved an emergency resolution June 8, allowing the utility to expedite resulting storm repairs immediately following damages to stormwater structures.

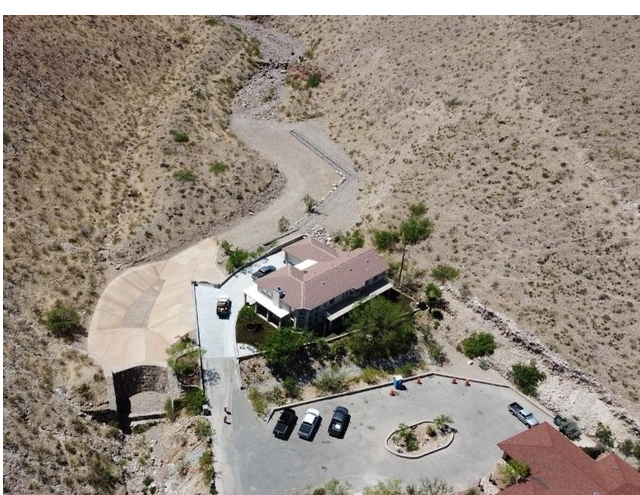


Upper Memphis Dam before construction.

It's tough to predict what the season has in store for us, but this resolution puts EPWater in a better position to mobilize immediately, if necessary.

Wreaking havoc

Last summer's destructive storms left in its wake a flurry of stormwater infrastructure challenges for EPWater to address. After the monsoon, dozens of projects were identified as priority repairs or improvements across the city. Because the older parts of the stormwater system were not designed to current drainage standards, many sections were overwhelmed by the record-setting volume of stormwater.



Upper Memphis Dam after construction.

To date, 43 projects totaling more than \$4 million have been completed, with several more in progress. Some of the biggest projects include the Mesa Park Arroyo, and the Ojo de Agua and High Ridge channels. Correcting erosion issues, replacing inlets, removing sediment and rebuilding some channels were among the multitude of citywide repairs.

Four stormwater projects remain under construction, including two heavily damaged structures in Central El Paso – the Morehead and Memphis dams. Capacity has been expanded on both, and slopes were strengthened to contain rushing water that will also reduce debris and damage downstream.

It's clear last year's intense storms exacted a heavy toll on EPWater's stormwater infrastructure, but the completion of 43 localized and 11 large projects has made our system that much stronger. Ten more large projects are under design with construction expected within the next year.

Devoted workforce

Throughout the year, our dedicated employees forge ahead with essential operations in the field to keep El Paso safe. EPWater invested \$9.2 million in maintenance and operational costs.

From August 2021 to April 2022, 22 stormwater maintenance employees tackled 472 service requests and cleaned more than 4,000 inlets, 13 miles of channels and conduits, and more than 600 acres of ponds and dams. These employees may not be visible from the streets, but trust that they are working daily in the ponds, dams, conduits and channels. Our team takes great pride in keeping our city safe for all residents.

Among the biggest challenges they face is the hundreds of thousands of pounds of trash that are illegally dumped in ditches, arroyos and across El Paso every year. The problem is worsened during monsoon season when trash clogs stormwater channels and inlets, prompting flooding in El Paso's neighborhoods.

It takes a lot of coordination to get through a stormwater season, and we rely on a small team of engineering and operations employees overseen by Gisela Dagnino, Chief Operations Officer for Stormwater. Aside from in-house assistance, we collaborate with a hydrometeorologist and the National Weather Service who alert us to significant weather events and contractors who help us complete our infrastructure projects.

Since EPWater took over the stormwater utility in 2008, EPWater has invested about \$225 million building ponds, channels and pump stations that safely yielded results. Every one of the flood-control projects we built worked as designed, but much more work remains. Despite weather's unpredictability, proactive investments to make stormwater capital improvements will help us improve public safety. Please bear with us as we address critical projects to improve our stormwater system.

As we navigate through monsoon season, EPWater highly encourages our residents to be our eyes in the community. Please report any damages or concerns about our stormwater system to stormwateroperations@epwater.org. In the case of illegal dumping, residents may call 311 to report activity. Also, please heed storm warnings and avoid driving in floodwaters.

We thank you for your support.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water. Contact Christina Montoya at 915.594.5596 or cmontoya@epwater.org with any comments or questions.

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