

A Flow of Strength

- ANNUAL REPORT 2019 -



SONORAN
INSTITUTE

WATER CONNECTS US



At the Sonoran Institute, we see water and watersheds as shared resources that can be preserved through collective action. With the support of our donors and partners, we work across borders and boundary lines to ensure clean, ample water and a better water future for people and nature. Likewise, our communities thrive and grow resilient when we share our strengths and work through challenges collaboratively. Together, we are sustaining desert rivers, improving neighborhoods, restoring the Colorado River Delta, and helping communities grow in the face of long-term drought, rising temperatures, and other environmental impacts throughout the North American West.

Message from the CEO and Board Chair

Thanks to you, we are creating lasting conservation and strong, resilient communities

Dear Friends,

You—our donors and partners—are truly our flow of strength, and we're grateful for your steadfast support.

Here in the North American West, we have an abundance of sun and a shortage of water. Recognition is growing across the West, the nation, and the world that water is our most vital resource. At Sonoran Institute, we are dedicated to securing water for nature and people through research, restoration, education, and collaboration. We champion communities planning for their water future and the precious flow in their rivers. Our commitment is to civil dialogue and open communications that include all stakeholders.

We are proud to claim that our staff is one of the most diverse in the conservation world, and our programs are designed to provide solutions for all communities. We agree with William Gibson: "The future is here, it's just not distributed evenly." We're doing something about that. Creating an internal diversity, equity, and inclusion working group with an outside consultant will create a plan and evaluation metrics to engage our staff, board, donors, partners, and stakeholders to reinforce this important dimension to our work and encourage others to see its significance.

Meanwhile, on the ground, we're reaching important milestones. This year, our Colorado River Delta team restored 185 acres of riparian, wetland, and estuarine habitat. We removed sediment from 1.8 km of the main channel, enabling the delivery of 1,684 acre-feet of water to the estuary of the Upper Gulf of California as part of an experimental flow designed to connect the Colorado River to the sea. Through education programs, we reached more than 2,000 students and families. Further, we restored 10 acres along the Hardy River through two community-led restoration projects funded by local fishermen, hunters, vacation homeowners, and recreational visitors.



Our reputation of setting conservation priorities collaboratively continues. At the 10th annual Santa Cruz River Research Days, we brought community leaders together to identify research priorities. Top priorities for the Nogales reach of the river include addressing the repair or relocation of an aging pipeline, slowing the flow of stormwater in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, and reducing trash accumulation in the river.

Central to all our work is helping people and communities build the capacity to adapt to volatility and uncertainty. With support from our partners at the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, we have designed a new series of webinars and online tools to use Exploratory Scenario Planning to grow expertise at the local level. The addition of an associate director based in Colorado gives us additional capacity to support Coloradans through our Growing Water Smart training and assistance workshops.

As you'll see in this report, our work connects us to incredible people and organizations. We are grateful to the Gonzalo Río Foundation, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Gates Family Foundation, to all our other partners and board members—and you. Our strength and achievements flow from our shared belief that, together, we can truly make a difference for nature and communities. **Thank you.**

Stephanie Sklar

Stephanie Sklar
CEO

Dan B. Kimball

Dan B. Kimball
Board Chair

Don Gonzalo Río Arronte was a generous Mexican who led a quiet and discreet life, leaving his fortune to create the foundation bearing his name. He was a confectionery entrepreneur and lifelong philanthropist. He spent his last years structuring the foundation to address three issues affecting Mexico's society: water, healthcare, and addiction. Since 2000, his foundation has become one of the most respected and influential philanthropic organizations in Mexico.

Building Wetlands, Awareness, and Hope in the Delta

"We have a great responsibility to make the best impact with the Gonzalo Río Arronte Foundation grants," says Laura Martinez, the foundation's Water Area director. Every grant application is scrutinized for social impact and held to the highest standards. Therefore, to receive a donation is a stamp of approval and distinction, and Sonoran Institute is proud to have received one of the largest donations in the history of the foundation for our restoration and education programs in the Colorado River Delta. The \$1.7 million grant will provide multi-year support to complete environmental and community projects.

At the Las Arenitas treatment plant in Mexicali, we will expand existing treatment wetlands and build new ones. In return, more and cleaner water will be released into the Hardy River and the Colorado River estuary, improving river health and economic opportunity. Environmental education will be expanded through a new "water lab," showing how the plant recycles water and improves water quality and environmental conditions. Workshops and restoration projects in rural communities along the Colorado River will reach indigenous Cucapah youth and urban Mexicali students, and we will introduce our first workshops developed specifically for farmers. Funding will also support improvements at our Laguna Grande restoration site and will coordinate many partners in managing the Delta's "Ramsar" (Wetlands of International Importance) sites.

"This project really fits into our strategy plan and has the holistic approach we like," Martinez says. "It will improve water management, water quality, education, and opportunities for marginalized communities—the Cucapah. It will raise awareness of the importance of healthy ecosystems and help make people conscious that the challenge of water is not just an agricultural problem or a city problem; it's a problem we all face as a society. Water connects us, and while the amount of water in the Colorado River may not be much, we are using whatever we have to restore the environment and to create hope and motivation within the younger generation."

More Water Secured for the Environment

A new, 18-year agreement with other NGOs, Mexicali Public Services, and the National Water Commission in Mexico to enhance infrastructure at the Las Arenitas Water Treatment Plant will improve water quality and increase flows released in the Hardy River and the estuary of the Colorado River.

Success in the Colorado River Estuary

Removing built-up sediment from the main channel in the estuary allowed the lower 50 miles of river flows to meet the sea an estimated 171 days during 2018, up from 18 days in 2011. The number of bird species recorded in the estuary increased 47% between 2018 and 2019.



Las Arenitas Water Treatment Plant wetlands

"For me, it was something extraordinary. Visiting is not the same as attending a talk or seeing photos. Listening to wildlife, touching nature, exploring, getting covered with sand at the site is something you have to live. It is a place worth knowing. I told all my acquaintances about it. I would like to visit every year with family and friends because it represents what used to exist and it's becoming that again."

- Dr. Marlene Zamora, professor at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, after visiting the Laguna Grande Restoration Area



Las Arenitas Water Treatment Plant wetlands

"My father had such respect and appreciation for the land, and he instilled that in me. To see that beautiful area where he grew his crops come back to life—I just felt that restoring the Delta needed my support. It's restoring the people's pride and bringing responsible commercial opportunities. These days, we are so busy building fences and walls along the border. With this project, we are building hope."

- Rowene Aguirre-Medina, board member, Sonoran Institute



RÍO ARRONTE
FUNDACIÓN

Growing Fellowship and Resilience in a Tucson Rain Garden

Sonoran Institute board member Richard Schaefer's roots run deep in Tucson. His grandmother arrived in a covered wagon, and his grandfather came soon after from Mexico. Much has changed in the city since his father boated and fished on the now-depleted Santa Cruz River. Understanding how much hotter and drier it has become just in his father's lifetime, Schaefer is doing all he can to ensure Tucson remains a livable city for his own children and grandchildren. "Sustainability and clean water are clearly important to my family," he says. "I'm concerned for their future."



Channeling this concern into action, Schaefer serves on several nonprofit boards and commissions in addition to his work with Sonoran Institute. In 2017, he earned a Global Citizen Award from his employer, Royal Bank of Canada (RBC). The honor included a volunteer trip to Kenya, where he helped build a school for women, complete with wells providing onsite water. "I saw firsthand how access to clean water changed lives in this rural community," he says.

When RBC announced a 10-year, \$50 million commitment to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water across the globe, Schaefer saw an opportunity to support our work in the Santa Cruz River watershed. RBC's Blue Water Project granted Sonoran Institute \$55,000 to build a rain garden at the New Hope-Nueva Esperanza United Methodist Church in Tucson.

The project, a partnership with Watershed Management Group, addresses a major flooding problem in the neighborhood while creating an attractive community green space with cooling shade. The garden's berms and basins capture over 48,000 gallons of rainwater that irrigates native trees and plants rather than gushing into the streets and carrying pollutants into the river.

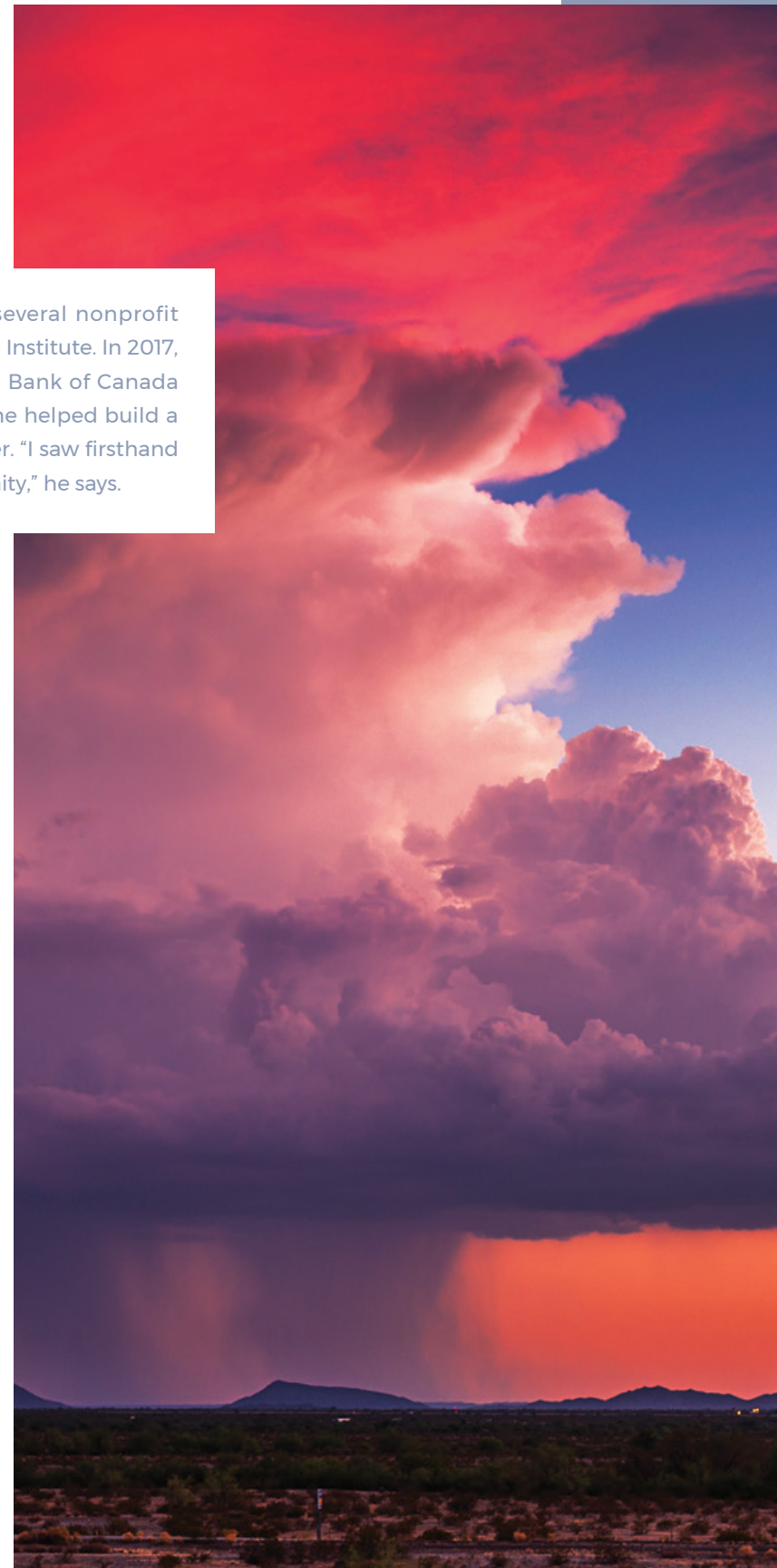
It will take time for the plantings to grow, but the garden is already doing more than alleviating flooding. At the rain garden dedication, neighbors and other volunteers gathered to share food and stories. "The theme was pride in the beautification of their neighborhood," Schaefer says. "I went away with a warm feeling that we had accomplished much more than watershed management."

Improved Water Quality and More Biodiversity

Life continues to return to the Santa Cruz River. Gila topminnow and longfin dace appear to be thriving, while the diversity of aquatic invertebrates, another key indicator of river health, has doubled. Leading the water quality improvements are decreased levels of ammonia, thanks to treatment plant upgrades.

New Incentives to Release Reclaimed Water in Rivers and Streams

We supported two important changes to Arizona's Lower Basin Drought Contingency Plan that encourage keeping treated water in rivers and streams. First, the credit for reclaimed water deposited in rivers and streams for existing projects was raised from 50% to 95%. Second, these credits will be available in perpetuity.



"I commend Sonoran Institute's interest in engaging with disinvested communities and the care they took in working with Pastor Agustin and the congregation of New Hope-Nueva Esperanza Church. While no one in the community is fully equipped to navigate through the community distrust built up over decades of disinvestment and prejudice, I am glad that Sonoran Institute is taking this challenge seriously."

- Councilor Regina Romero, City of Tucson - Ward 1



"Working with the Sonoran Institute, I learned both the practice and the value of partnerships and how collaboration creates community and natural wellbeing. The recent collaboration between Watershed Management Group and Sonoran Institute at New Hope-Nueva Esperanza Church in Tucson, Arizona, has proven once again that this is the way to create strong communities and functional landscapes. ¡Vamos por más!"

- Joaquin Murrieta-Saldivar, cultural ecologist, Watershed Management Group

It was the reputation of University of Denver's hockey team and scholarships that first attracted Tom Gougeon, a Philadelphia boy, to Colorado. What brought him back to stay was classic Western appeal: natural splendor, outdoor recreation and, above all, opportunity. "The culture of the West is different," he says. "There is an openness, welcoming of talent. Denver was growing, which created challenges and opportunities, and I felt there was a chance to make an impact."



He has. Today, Gougeon is president of the Gates Family Foundation. Created in 1946, the foundation is dedicated to improving long-term quality of life in Colorado, concentrating on public education, conservation, and the effects of growth and change on both urbanizing and rural Colorado.

Finding the Path to Sustainability in Colorado

Increasingly, water is a primary focus. "It has to be," Gougeon says. "It underpins so much in Colorado." As the state's population is predicted to double by 2060, uncertainty over the sustainability of its water resources intensifies. The Colorado Water Plan predicts a critical supply gap by 2050.

"The system governing water rights was invented in another era," Gougeon says. "It is litigious, slow, and rigid, when we need a collaborative, shared approach. Our goal is balance, and I believe everyone—the agricultural sector, recreation economy, cities—could agree on an outcome where each gives up a little but remains intact. They just can't see the path to get there."

That's why Gougeon and the Gates Family Foundation support Sonoran Institute. "It has always operated on that interface of human communities and natural systems and trying to keep them in a balanced relationship," he says.

Our Growing Water Smart program brings community leaders together to learn how to manage their water resources more sustainably. Through our workshops, each team creates an action plan tailored to its community's needs.

"Sonoran Institute has that collaborative spirit and is willing to engage the people on the ground, in a very hands-on way," Gougeon says. "We need that to collectively manage our challenges so we can continue to inhabit this place without destroying what brought us here."



Estes Park, Colorado

"We have been fortunate to partner with Sonoran in training our members on Growing Water Smart in the Headwaters. The expertise and targeted training have been unparalleled, and we continue to see the fruits of the workshops paying off as projects and studies kick off around the headwaters."

- Torie Jarvis, director and staff attorney for the Water Quality/Quantity Committee, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments



Fulfilling Colorado's State Water Plan

Our Growing Water Smart team received the 2019 APA Colorado Honor Award for Sustainability and Environmental Planning. After holding two more rounds of workshops this year, we have trained communities serving 1 in 5 Colorado residents in watershed health and community resiliency.

Growing Water Smart in Arizona

The Growing Water Smart program is expanding to Arizona. Forward-thinking communities looking to meet their water needs despite an uncertain future are currently applying to attend the initial workshop in February 2020.

Financial Summary

FY 2019: July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

REVENUE	
Contributions	\$574,836
Foundation Grants	\$305,229
Government Grants	\$403,626
Contract Income	\$1,360,779
Other Income	\$212,108
Total:	\$2,856,578
EXPENSES	
Water & Ecosystem Restoration	\$521,425
Climate Resilience	\$574,753
SI Mexico	\$655,220
Sustainable Landscapes & Communities	\$515,426
Administration	\$548,032
Fundraising	\$270,794
Expenses Total:	\$3,085,650

Reporting based on unaudited FY19 results. The Sonoran Institute is audited annually by Keegan, Linscott & Kennon, PC, and a copy of the audit is posted on our website as soon as it becomes available. In addition, resources for FY19 include estimated net assets of \$673,456 carried forward from previous years and restricted for use in future fiscal years.

Thank You

With your support the Sonoran Institute made positive change in 2019.

Our community-based approach benefits communities throughout the North American West with a more sustainable future.

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Our Mission

The Sonoran Institute's mission is to connect people and communities with the natural resources that nourish and sustain them. We work at the nexus of commerce, community, and conservation to help people in the North American West build the communities they want to live in while preserving the values which brought them here. We envision a West where civil dialogue and collaboration are hallmarks of decision making, where people and wildlife live in harmony, and where clean water, air, and energy are assured.

Where We Work

COLORADO RIVER BASIN | DESERT SOUTHWEST | ROCKY MOUNTAINS

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