

Connect. Nourish. Sustain.



SONORAN
INSTITUTE



Stephanie Sklar,
CEO (retired)



Lollie Benz Plank,
30th Anniversary Celebration Honoree



Mary Alexander,
Board Chair

Dear Friends,

2020 marks Sonoran Institute's 30th Anniversary—30 years of connecting communities to the natural resources that nourish and sustain—providing the tools they need to plan for uncertainty and build resilience; 30 years of restoring our iconic rivers and building a constituency for their long-term protection. We held a celebration in the early spring and were able to honor our friend, a passionate conservationist, committed philanthropist and dedicated board member for over 15 years: Lollie Plank. Our former and current board, partners, staff and many wonderful supporters came together to hear our vision for the future focused on water sustainability in the North American West. “You may say I’m a dreamer,” as we said that evening quoting John Lennon, however, the successes noted in this annual report are only possible with your belief in what we can do together.

Almost immediately after the celebration, COVID-19 began spreading across the world changing our plans but strengthening our commitment. Guadalupe Fonseca, pictured here on the cover, is our restoration field crew leader and instrumental in helping us adapt. Guadalupe and his team were able to nurture saplings in our greenhouses for extended periods of time, waiting for the days we can bring the communities in Mexicali and the Delta back together at Laguna Grande to plant trees. Our staff’s creativity and ability to be resilient is the reason why Sonoran Institute is uniquely prepared to adapt to a warmer, drier future and the effects it will have on our climate.

Thank you for dreaming with us.

Thank you for being resilient with us, and for being the beating hearts of Sonoran Institute; together we are committed to working with courage and hope to restore rivers, secure healthy water for the natural world and all communities residing within it.

Without you, none of the work in the following pages would be possible.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Sklar
CEO (retired)

Sincerely,

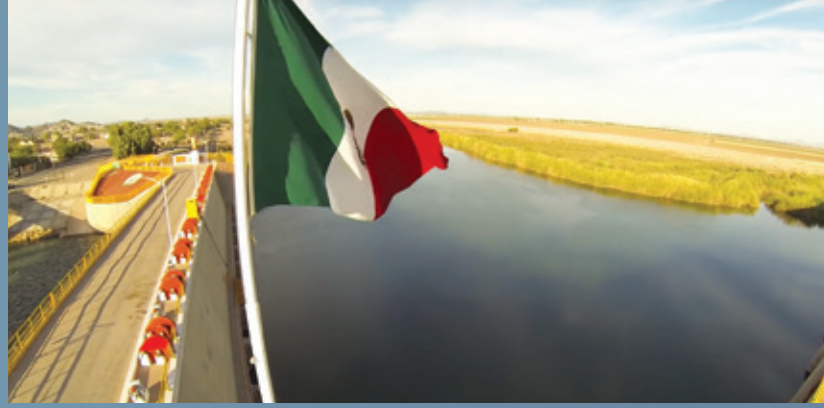
Mary Alexander
Board Chair

Bold Plans for Thriving Communities and Ecosystems Vision 2020-2025

Every five years our board and staff create goals to further our mission and vision. Our most recent vision statement, *Nourish and Sustain*, outlines opportunities and challenges, and defines what success will look like:

- We will restore another 1,500 acres in the Colorado River Delta, deepen relationships with urban Mexicali residents, rural *ejidos* and the Cucapá tribe, and improve year-round connection of the river to the sea.
- We're expanding our Growing Water Smart workshops with new offerings in Arizona and planning for workshops in California and Mexico.
- On the Santa Cruz River we will enhance in-stream flows, continue to monitor ecological conditions, share findings, and connect with people through our shared river.
- Ensure diverse communities from many cultural backgrounds throughout the region benefit from community-based conservation.

Read the full Vision statement on our website:
sonoraninstitute.org/resource/vision2020-2025



Morelos Dam, U.S.-Mexico border. Our efforts address water security and river health in both countries

Overturning systemic racism and protecting natural resources

We are strengthening our commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Truly meeting our mission, transcending borders and bringing together diverse communities to create positive environmental change requires becoming a more welcoming, transparent, respectful, diverse, and equitable organization. We are appreciative of the generous grant from the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation to support this critical ongoing work.

Our process is being led by a working group of U.S. and Mexico staff representing various programs, departments, and leadership levels. This collaborative approach embeds the commitment to DEI values and accountability throughout our organization.

Our goals:

- Increase staff and board diversity to reflect the communities in our region.
- Improve equity between U.S. and Mexico offices.
- Ensure that diverse and cultural communities in the Colorado River basin are engaged in and directly benefitting from conservation.



Cristina Perea, urban projects assistant, and Gabriela González, environmental education and investigation coordinator



F.



H.



G.

CONNECT

Engaging with Community

Our Santa Cruz River team enjoyed engaging with community members from Nogales to Marana in deep and meaningful ways this year. People all along the river told us about their enduring connections to the Santa Cruz. We shared their stories online and brought others together to enjoy the river through free public events. Our ongoing outreach is ensuring policymakers understand how much their constituents value the flowing river.

#NOTINMYRIVER

When COVID-19 canceled a trash cleanup event, we created a virtual campaign. Apr. '20

- A. Our first cleanup challenge video had over 10,000 views in two months
- B. We're protecting habitat and cultural values through research, advocacy, and cleanups

SANTA CRUZ RIVER HERITAGE PROJECT

Celebrating new flow in downtown Tucson. Jun. '19

- C. Neighbors get their feet wet!

DRAGONFLY DAY ON THE SANTA CRUZ

Family fun event in Marana, featuring pollution-sensitive bugs now thriving in a cleaner river. Nov. '19

- D. University of Arizona Professor Michael Bogan leads tour
- E. Marana Parks & Rec. staffer Wayne Barrett, enjoys the sun
- F. River near Trico Road
- G. Hamdhani's daughters draw river wildlife
- H. Masks made with help from Pima County Parks and Recreation
- I. Dragonfly search at El Rio Preserve

TUMACÁCORI FIESTA

Community and cultural festival at historic mission. Dec. '19

- J. SI staff with Folklorico dancers from Magdalena, Sonora. Tumacácori National Historic Park

SANTA CRUZ RIVER STORIES

Online storytelling

- K. Diana Madril, Tumacácori National Historic Park ranger and lifelong resident
- L. Rancher Tony Sedgwick shares his life along the river



E.



D.



J.



A.

B.

C.

“We need to be aware of the connection between our lives and our river.
These lands and the river—they are my family’s roots.”

– Tony Sedgwick, rancher & philanthropist, Santa Cruz County



L.

I.

K.



Wetlands at Las Arenitas, Baja California, MX

NOURISH

Celebrating Wetlands

Before our Colorado River Delta team's education staff started meeting with them, the sixth graders at Guillermo Prieto Primary School outside Mexicali knew the basics about water: it comes out of the faucet and goes out down the drain. Weeks later, as honored guests at the World Wetlands Day celebration at Las Arenitas treatment wetland, they had learned all about how this wetland helps turn water from their homes into a flowing river and habitat for birds and wildlife.

Just in their lifetime, we have recreated an environment not seen in the region for generations. In 2009, when Sonoran Institute and our partners built the wetland to supplement the municipal wastewater treatment plant, the surrounding landscape was almost completely dried up along with the river that once nourished it. At the time, fewer than 100 individual birds could be found there. Today, there are over 150 different species of birds, with tens of thousands flocking to Las Arenitas each year.

World Wetlands Day in February celebrated wetland restoration and our strong relationships with the government agencies and conservation partners making it possible. Featuring nature walks at Las Arenitas, and conferences and fun activities in the city, the events honored the many ways wetlands nourish nature and people.

When we build and repair wetlands, "we use our hands to allow nature to make its home near us," Dr. Francisco Zamora Arroyo, senior director of water and ecosystem restoration at Sonoran Institute, told attendees.

Throughout the Delta, along with birds and waterfowl, beavers and bobcats are also making a comeback. So are fishing, hunting, and recreation industries. In the city, our Mexicali Fluye program is turning trash-filled drainage canals into clean-flowing neighborhood greenways.

What's next? A new demonstration wetland planned at Las Arenitas will filter raw sewage producing cleaner water for environmental purposes. What we learn there can help areas lacking treatment plants improve the health of their communities and the environment.

Thank You to Our Partners

Government of Mexicali, CDEM (Economic Development Board of Mexicali), CESPM (Public Service Commission of Mexicali), IMACUM (Municipal Institute of Art and Culture), Cucapá Indigenous People's Cooperative Society, Pronatura Noroeste, AEURHYC (Río Hardy and Colorado River Ecological Users Association), and The Nature Conservancy.



Students learning with Daniel Cruz, hydrology technician, Sonoran Institute



Carlos Eliseo Roano, biologist, Mexicali City Council, with art exhibition

“It is important that our students obtain and interact with well-founded information to forge a **commitment to care for and respect the environment around them.**”

– **Profesora Lourdes López C.**, Guillermo Prieto Primary School



Guillermo Prieto Primary School student with water sample

Mexico Celebrates Our Success

We received the 2019 Honorable Recognition in Conservation of Nature from Mexico’s federal government. This highly prestigious award is presented by the National Commission for Protected Areas (CONANP) for contributions in preserving the biodiversity of Protected Areas.

Good Things are Multiplying

This year we focused on preparing sites and growing new life by propagating more than 11,000 native plants and providing daily watering and care to 29,000 more. Some of our tallest mesquite trees are promising to provide shade right away for urban Mexicali residents. We are applying our experience in wetland restoration to enhance urban landscapes.



Students during a nature walk at World Wetlands Day celebration, Las Arenitas

SUSTAIN

Teamwork Protects Water Resources

“We’re all in this together” is a spirit that has long sustained the communities of Gunnison County in western Colorado. Nestled in the Rockies and surrounded by national forests, Gunnison Valley is several mountain passes removed from most other places, including the metropolitan centers of the Front Range. As breathtakingly beautiful as it is remote, the region’s geography binds its rural-agricultural and tourist communities together, forging a culture of interdependence and community spirit.

It is no surprise then that the team that came to our Growing Water Smart workshop in April 2019 was not from a single city or town but rather from up and down the valley: the City of Gunnison, the Town of Mt. Crested Butte, the Town of Crested Butte, and Gunnison County.

These communities already knew the power of collaboration from creating a valley-wide economic development and prosperity initiative together. Our workshop helped participants aim their collective spirit toward water sustainability. The Gunnison County team is confronting potential future agricultural water shortages as well as challenges associated with population growth and increased tourism in the region. Each member came seeking answers for how their community can grow without using more water.

They left the workshop armed with action plans for improving water management and decision making in their communities. With the help of our funders, Lincoln Institute for Land Policy, Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, Colorado Water Conservation Board, and the Gates Family Foundation, we committed eighteen months of ongoing support for plan implementation throughout this fiscal year. Recommendations included revising local regulations to promote water conservation and efficiency and encouraging planning processes that more thoroughly consider water resources. The progress each town and local government is making in water conservation and sustainability strengthens the entire valley.

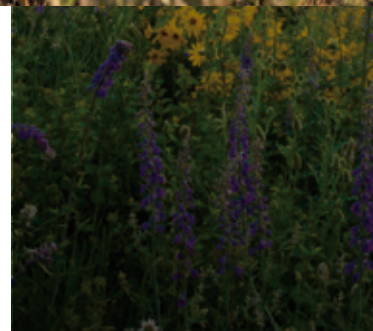
“Building the strengths of our team through Growing Water Smart has led to true coordination and reaching our goals,” says Will Dujardin, the Town of Crested Butte’s mayor pro-tem. “A regional approach is one of the best paths toward protecting water.”



Gunnison County Team. Pictured: David Baumgarten, Ashley Bembenek, Will Dujardin, Janet Farmer, Russ Forrest, Roland Mason, Julie Nania, Rachel Sabbato, with workshop facilitators, Faith Sternlieb, Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy and Danielle McPherson, WaterNow Alliance



Hartman Rocks Recreation Area, Gunnison County, CO



“Growing Water Smart was a fantastic experience, in the nick of time for our planning processes. It was excellent to have staff and elected officials sharing information. Hearing from other cities reinforced the need for action: **water is a real issue, and it’s universal!**”

– **Lacey James**, water resource & regulatory manager, City of Avondale, Arizona

Growing Water Smart in Arizona

The first Growing Water Smart workshops for Arizona communities were held in February 2020. Seven teams from local governments met to address their water needs despite an uncertain future and gained range of communications, planning, and policy implementation tools to realize their watershed health and community resiliency goals.

Sunset at Crested Butte, Colorado

Financial Summary

FY 2020: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

REVENUE

Contributions: \$1,227,244

Foundation Grants: \$1,155,839

Government Grants: \$748,305

Contract Income: \$365,415

Other Income: \$74,339

Revenue Total: \$3,571,142

EXPENSES

Programs USA: \$1,454,520

Programs MEX: \$1,142,935

Administration: \$597,937

Fundraising: \$260,221

Expenses Total: \$3,455,613

*Reporting based on unaudited FY20 results. The Sonoran Institute will be audited by Ludwig Klewer and Rudner PLLC and a copy of the audit will be posted on our website as soon as it becomes available. *In addition, resources for FY20 include estimated net assets of \$552,815 carried forward from previous years and restricted for use in future fiscal years.*

THANK YOU | With your support the Sonoran Institute made positive change throughout the North American West in 2020. Our community-based conservation approach provided the vision of a sustainable water future.

The Sonoran Institute is grateful to all our donors, partners and volunteers for their support. Please note, the contributions listed below reflect contributions for the period July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. Please contact Darcy Hill (dhill@sonoraninstitute.org) with any errors or omissions.

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Thank you to the many volunteers who dedicate copious hours to make our work possible in Colorado, Arizona and Mexicali. Your time and efforts are appreciated and recognized by all the staff and board at Sonoran Institute.

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Volunteers working during tree planting event at our Laguna Grande restoration site.



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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.

Our Vision

We envision resilient communities living in harmony with the natural world, where flowing rivers and healthy landscapes enable all people and nature to thrive. Our work transcends borders, bringing together diverse communities to promote civil dialogue about complex conservation issues that know no boundaries. All aspects of our work are guided by inclusivity and collaboration to create positive environmental change in the western United States and northwestern Mexico.

Where We Work

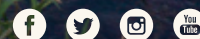
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