

LIFE RETURNS

# Drop by Drop



SONORAN  
INSTITUTE

Dear Friends,

At a time when Lake Mead and Lake Powell are falling to historically low levels, 40 million people across the Colorado River Basin are bracing for a new era of uncertainty. It is undoubtedly a troubling moment, but one that Sonoran Institute is meeting with action—and hope. If there is one thing our three decades of work in this basin have proven, it is that nature only needs **small amounts of water to do GREAT things.**

On our cover this year, we are honored to feature a leader who captures this spirit of resolve: Antonia Torres González, a longtime partner to Sonoran Institute and cultural promoter for the Cucapá Tribe in the Mexicali Valley. **Our mission speaks directly to collaboration among stakeholders and community members like Antonia.**

Our work with Raise the River to support U.S.-Mexico cooperation has helped bring the promise of regular water flows to the Colorado River Delta and our restoration sites. Thanks to Minute 323, an international agreement between the Mexican and United States governments, water deliveries to the region will continue through 2026. In the Delta and in the U.S., we continue to build new partnerships and expand awareness and support for initiatives to conserve vulnerable water supplies and the ecosystems that depend on them.

In our efforts to restore and protect water, rivers, and natural resources across the Colorado River Basin, we measure success by the amount of water and its quality, by the return of diverse species to the ecosystem, and, most importantly, by the JOY we see in the people who live there. The reason for Antonia’s smile perfectly sums up the ultimate goal of our work:

**“I have grown up watching a river die and today I see a river revived,”** says Antonia.

We believe life returns drop by drop—from the small amounts we dedicate to restoring rivers, to basin-wide water conservation measures. **Life also returns hand by hand—though the support of every donor and partner.** We are so thankful to have a vast network of supporters across the United States and Mexico who sustain our growing work, strong vision, and commitment to culture of diversity, equity, and inclusivity to truly represent and acknowledge the communities we serve.

Thank you for making these incredible stories possible.

Sincerely,



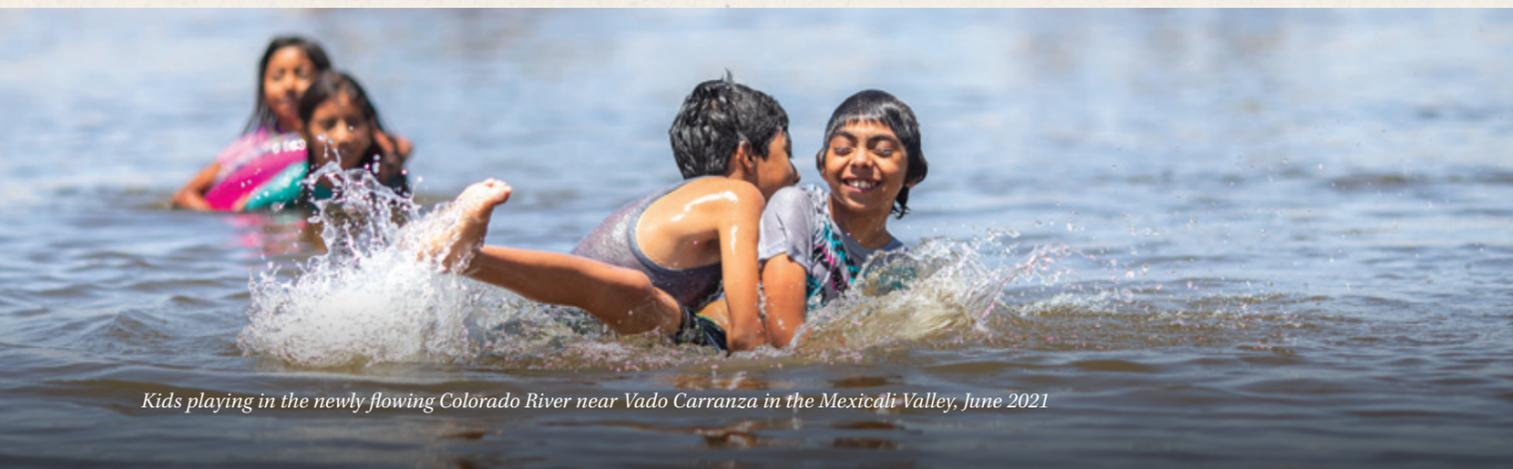
*Mike Zellner*

Mike Zellner  
Chief Executive Officer



*Mary S. Alexander*

Mary Alexander  
Board Chair



*Kids playing in the newly flowing Colorado River near Vado Carranza in the Mexicali Valley, June 2021*

## A Spirit of Connection in the Delta

While standing next to the Colorado River in the Mexicali Valley in June, Antonia Torres González describes bringing her mother, Inocencia, the Cucapá traditional chief, to see the water flowing in the typically dry channel the day before. Inocencia spent her life reviving the spoken Cucapá language, promoting the culture, and inspiring her daughter and community to care for the river given to them by the ancestors. “For my mom, seeing water in the river is everything in her life. It’s what she’s waited for for many years, and this gives her life to think that the water comes back.” The flowing river brought tears of joy.



*Inocencia González Sainz,*  
Cucapá Traditional Chief

Thanks to historic cooperation between the United States and Mexico, targeted water releases into the Colorado mimic the natural spring flows that no longer reach Mexico because of dams and diversions. Using scientific results demonstrating the success of the 2014 pulse flow, Sonoran Institute and partners successfully advocated for Minute 323, the binational agreement signed in 2017, to provide small amounts of water for environmental restoration. These flows are helping sustain some of our key restoration sites, like the cottonwood-willow forests of Laguna Grande and the estuary. People from all over the Mexicali Valley visit the river with their families and friends to swim, play, and relax.

Not long after she saw the river flowing, Inocencia passed away. The following day, on June 24, 2021, the river flow reached the sea. Many felt she helped guide the water to complete its rightful path, from the headwaters in the Colorado Rockies to the Gulf of California. We are grateful for her accomplishments and her inspiration. Because Minute 323 promises water deliveries through 2026, our team is preparing to steward several future flows—to restore life drop by drop!



*The first release of water to the Colorado River on May 1, 2021 began at a site managed by one of our Raise the River partners, Restauremos el Colorado, A.C.*

## Supporting Community Resilience

Across much of the Colorado River Basin, prolonged drought and extreme weather events have made our water supplies more vulnerable. With our Growing Water Smart workshops, Sonoran Institute assembles forward-thinking communities across Colorado and Arizona to share concerns and collaboratively craft plans and policies to address these challenges—even as populations grow. After the workshops, we continue to support these communities by offering small grants to jumpstart the initiatives identified as critical to their water resilience.

In 2020 alone, ten communities (six in Colorado and four in Arizona) received funding to finalize powerful projects tailored to their specific needs. One of these communities, Casa Grande, Arizona, incorporated water conservation measures into their planning policies. In partnership with Arizona Water Company, they created a public outreach campaign to promote their water-saving programs and their updated General Plan. Mayor Craig McFarland, says, “Our expectations were that we would come out of the Arizona Growing Water Smart workshop with a plan that we can incorporate into our General Plan update. We have done exactly that. It is key to our city’s health and growth!”

Sonoran Institute continued to support this fast-growing town throughout 2020, and the effort brought residents together to learn about the new programs and key approaches added to the General Plan that will conserve water for the city’s future. Workshop participants even returned to present at a subsequent Growing Water Smart workshop to share their experience and encourage new attendees to make similar strides. This is how our programs work: we deepen relationships, provide space to thoroughly consider water conservation, develop leaders, and improve local policy—drop by drop.

*We want to acknowledge and thank our Growing Water Smart partner, the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, a Center of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, and Growing Water Smart funders: the Arizona Community Foundation of Cochise, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Gates Family Foundation, Flume, and Northern Water.*



*Claire Zugmeyer, Sonoran Institute ecologist, and Doug Duncan, US Fish and Wildlife Service, during the annual fish survey on the Santa Cruz River*

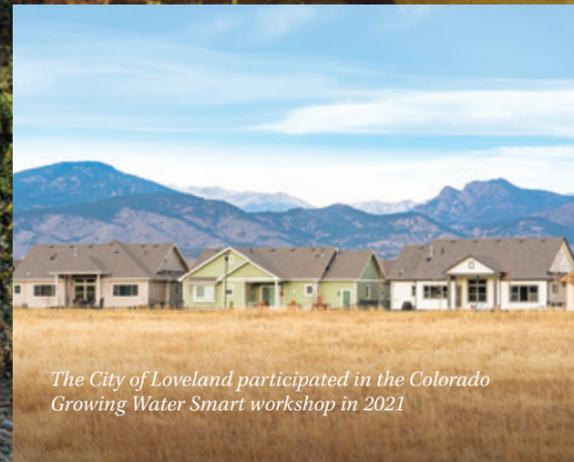
## Santa Cruz River Research Days: New format, new connections

With 156 participants, our first *virtual* Santa Cruz River Research Days saw the highest attendance since the program started in 2009. And because of a generous sponsorship from Tucson Water and Friends of the Santa Cruz River, we were able to offer live English-Spanish interpretation to expand our audience to the many native Spanish-speaking researchers, academics, cultural historians, and stakeholders in Southern Arizona and Northern Mexico.

During the symposium, our lead sponsor, Pima County, announced a HUGE success for the health of the river. For the first time, a minimum level of water flow has been designated to prevent a stretch of the river from running dry, thereby protecting critical habitat for the endangered Gila topminnow.

By bringing so many participants together, we were able to have open dialogue about the current projects that are restoring the river as well as the future opportunities for partnership and collaboration—all of which will increase the health and sustainability of the river and the community. Evan Canfield, Division Manager Watershed Studies Division, Pima County Flood District praised the event, saying, “Santa Cruz River Research Days has always been a great way to work on our partnerships with the research community and this year it allowed us to move forward with the things Pima County leadership really cares about.”

*Santa Cruz River Research Days was generously sponsored by Pima County, Tucson Electric Power, Kimley Horn, CMG Drainage, Friends of Santa Cruz River, Leila Gass, and Tucson Water.*



*The City of Loveland participated in the Colorado Growing Water Smart workshop in 2021*



*The Santa Cruz River in Marana, AZ*

*Casa Grande, Arizona has incorporated water conservation measures into their planning policies after receiving technical assistance in 2020*

# Our Home

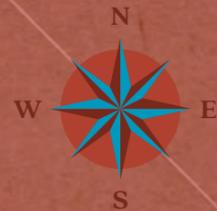
## THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN

Welcome to the Colorado River Basin, a landscape where every stream and wash eventually makes its way to the Colorado. Covering seven states in the U.S., two in Mexico and the lands of more than thirty tribes, this arid region is home to 40 million people that rely on its water every day.

NEVADA



○ Cities & Towns



CALIFORNIA

○ Los Angeles

○ San Diego

○ Tijuana

○ Mexicali  
○ Las Arenitas  
○ Rio Hardy Estuary

BAJA CALIFORNIA

Gulf of California

UTAH

○ Salt Lake City

○ St. George

○ Las Vegas

ARIZONA

○ Phoenix

○ Tucson

○ Nogales AZ

○ Nogales SON

SONORA

MEXICO

WYOMING

○ Cheyenne

○ Ft. Collins

○ Denver

○ Colorado Springs

COLORADO

○ Santa Fe

○ Albuquerque

NEW MEXICO

## CONSERVING AND PROTECTING THE MIGHTY RIVER

From restoring the Delta to championing water conservation, Sonoran Institute works to bring communities together to address the challenges people and nature experience in the face of climate change.

**Growing Water Smart** Cities and towns throughout the Basin are growing fast and face hotter, drier climates. Our workshops host elected officials, planners and community leaders to set policies that conserve water.

**Santa Cruz River** Many southern Arizonans rely on the Colorado River for their drinking water supply. Once the water has been used at home it is highly treated at treatment plants and released to the river. We protect and track the health of the Santa Cruz River, which flows year-round thanks to this process. The river provides homes for wildlife and a beautiful place for recreation.

**Las Arenitas** Half of all the water used in Mexicali comes here to be treated. Artificial wetlands naturally help purify wastewater, and the aquatic plants and trees provide homes to over 140 resident and migratory bird species. Some of this water flows into Río Hardy benefitting tourism, agriculture, and native communities such as the Cucapá.

**Laguna Grande** Home to more than 500 acres of revived cottonwood, willow and mesquite forests, this restoration site is the largest and densest riparian forest along the river in Mexico. Visiting families and schoolchildren enjoy our Laguna Grande Interpretive Center and nature walks.

**Estuary** While the estuary has faced many dry decades, Sonoran Institute's efforts result in flowing water to the sea, improved water quality, and increased habitat for diverse bird and marine species. We are reconnecting the river to the sea drop by drop!



SONORAN INSTITUTE



[www.sonoraninstitute.org](http://www.sonoraninstitute.org)



*Gabriela González Olímon, environmental education coordinator, and instructor for our first online course on the Colorado River Delta*

## Bringing Nature Home for Students in Mexico

Before the pandemic hit, we were hosting an average of 3,000 Mexicali students and families each year in classrooms and field trips to our Laguna Grande Interpretive Center in the Colorado River Delta. With schools across Mexico closed this year and visits to our sites also paused, we launched our first digital environmental education platform. Available online in Spanish, it provides students ages eight-and-up with a way to learn about the river and conservation. The three modules: *Restaurar, Renover y Reconnectar* (*Restore, Renew, and Reconnect*) are readily accessible on phones, tablets, and computers—with downloadable resources to learn more!

We premiered the platform at a Facebook Live event in February with the Alianza WWF | Fundación Carlos Slim, whose generous funding made the course possible. Another proud co-host of the event was CONABIO, the federal Mexican Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity, whose support has been essential. More than 450 viewers watched live as Rocío Torres, our Colorado River Delta program director, welcomed our many partners and supporters from across Mexico. The broadcast included special presentations by the esteemed Dr. José Sarukhán Kermez, national coordinator of CONABIO, Jorge Rickards Guevara, director general of WWF México, and our CEO, Mike Zellner. By the end of the day, over 200 people had enrolled in the course, and within hours dozens had already viewed every video presented by our environmental education and research coordinator, Gabriela González Olímón.



As of October, 550 students had enrolled in the online program, equivalent to the number of students in 20 field trip groups. The program is also reaching people who live too far away to visit. “Even though I am in Monterrey, I want to continue learning about the Colorado River Delta because it is part of Mexico, too, and my students can learn about it virtually,” posted Mayita Estefanía Rodríguez Salinas. Hers is just one of hundreds of positive comments letting us know the program is building awareness about conservation and the incredible ecosystem of the Colorado River Delta.

*Liliana Gaytán Cruz, one of the first thirty people to complete the course won a set of Delta-related gifts curated by our staff*



*Laguna Grande restoration site and interpretive center*

## Financial Summary

FY 2021: July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021

### REVENUE

Contributions: \$966,977  
 Foundation Grants: \$924,794  
 Government Grants: \$393,569  
 Contract Income: \$369,254  
 Other Income: \$448,343

**Revenue Total: \$3,102,938**

### EXPENSES

Programs USA: \$941,899  
 Programs MEX: \$856,388  
 Administration: \$441,981  
 Fundraising: \$308,869

**Expenses Total: \$2,549,136**

*Reporting based on unaudited FY21 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.*

# THANK YOU

With your support the Sonoran Institute made positive impact throughout the Colorado River Basin in 2021. Our community-based conservation approach provided the vision of a sustainable water future for all residents and wildlife.

The Sonoran Institute is grateful to all our donors, partners and volunteers for their support. Please note, the contributions listed below reflect gifts for the period July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. Please contact Abigail Clarke (aclarke@sonoraninstitute.org) with any errors or omissions.

👉 - Hummingbird Circle Donor   ✨ - Sonoran Institute Board Member

Anonymous (34)  
Adelante Foundation  
Audubon Southwest  
Rowene Aguirre-Medina and Roy Medina 👉 ✨  
R.A. Ainsworth  
Mary Alexander and Chris McNichol 👉 ✨  
Alliance for Arizona Nonprofits  
Willa Altman-Kaough  
Margaret Alvarez  
Cheryl Alver  
Amazon Smile Foundation  
Dawn Bardessono  
David Baumgarten 👉 ✨  
Jan Mulder and Greg Bedinger  
John Bedoy  
Priscilla Benbrook  
Lollie Benz Plank 👉 ✨  
Henri and Pam Bisson 👉  
Gail Bliss  
Russ and Tracy Bodnar  
Kevin Bonine  
Michelle Bonito  
Frederick Borchardt and Lynn Taber  
Katherine and B.K. Borgen 👉  
Diane Bowden 👉  
Brophy College Preparatory  
Em Brott 👉  
Theresa and Larry Bucher  
Toni Bullington  
Emily Butler  
Elizabeth and Carlos Clinton Campbell  
John and Pat Case 👉  
City of Tucson  
Abigail Clarke  
Claud Cluff  
CMG Drainage Engineering  
Horst Engineering & Mfg. Co.  
Richard and Arlene Cole  
Kitty Collins 👉  
Arlan Colton  
Community First Foundation  
Stephen and Brigitte Cornelius  
Sandra Correa  
Pima County  
Hanna Coy  
Dr. David Crown 👉  
Joan Dangerfield  
Karen Davidson  
Cristina De La Torre  
Alan Dennis 👉 ✨

Dino J. and Elizabeth Murfee DeConcini  
Denison Family Foundation  
Bill Doelle and Linda Mayro  
Linda Gale Drew  
Kim Egita  
Sam and Bea Ellis 👉  
Chris English  
Elizabeth Epsen  
The Fanwood Foundation  
Gerald and Judith Farrington  
Nancy Felker  
Flume  
Guillermo Franco  
Friends of the Santa Cruz River  
Frontstream  
Lydia Garvey  
Michael and Carol Gass  
John Geddie  
Katharine Gerst  
Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation  
Louise and Jim Glasser 👉 ✨  
Thomas Gougeon  
Mary and Chuck Graf  
Steven Granger  
Allison Green ✨  
Barbara Green 👉 ✨  
Wendy Greeney  
Tom and Cande Grogan 👉 ✨  
Thomas Gougeon 👉  
Barbara Groseclose  
Phil Hall  
Jan Hancock  
Sue Heaton  
Andrew Henschen  
Anna Hill Price ✨  
Amanda Hill  
Darcy and Pierre Hill  
Peggy Hitchcock  
Mark Homan  
Kimley Horn  
Gary and Yvonne Huckleberry  
Gordon Hunt  
Ann Hunter-Welborn and David Welborn 👉 ✨  
Michael Ismail  
Bill and Jane Jackson  
Marty Jakle  
Frederic Jandrey  
Evan Jensen  
Jeffrey Jewett  
Joan Sanger Charitable Trust

Charles Jonaitis  
John Paul Jones III  
Mary Ann Jones  
Barbara Jones  
Marie Jones and Marvin Glotfelty  
Nyda Jones-Church 👉 ✨  
Robert and Beverly Jones  
Peter Kadrich  
Joseph Kalt and Judith Gans 👉 ✨  
Sandra Kane  
Michael and Beth Kasser 👉  
Frances Kaster  
Jonathan and Janet Kempff  
Karen Kennedy  
Dan and Kit Kimball 👉 ✨  
Kenneth Kingsley  
Barbara Kittle  
Waverly Klaw  
Kenneth Kroese  
David Landon  
Gabriel Langbauer  
Lauran and Mark Lansdon  
Selena Larson  
Sandra Laursen  
Lee and Lisa Leachman ✨  
Steven C. Leuthold Family Foundation  
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy  
Rob Linehan  
Johnathan Lutz  
Kevin and Jill Madden  
Sirena Madrid  
Steven Magallanes  
Pamela Maher and David Schubert  
Anne Maley-Schaffner and Tim Schaffner 👉  
Christina Manriquez  
Felicia and Warren May  
Jonathan McLaren  
Gary McNeil  
Linda and Michael McNulty  
Michael and Laurel Milczarek  
Dwight Minton 👉  
Jesse Moore  
Paul Moreno  
Catherine Morton 👉  
Janice Rickert Mueller 👉  
Susan North  
Northern Water  
Norwell Fund  
Edward Notz and Sandra Keep Notz  
Edlin Nuñez

Kathleen Oneill  
Laurinda Oswald 👉 ✨  
Nick Paretti  
Karen Pelton  
Christopher M. Perez and Kathryn J. Lincoln ✨  
Charles Pettis  
Bruce Plenk  
Tara Kane Prendergast 👉  
Cynthia Pruett  
Tracy Rhodes  
Nancy Robertson  
Jeffrey and Sharon Rosenblum  
Carol Rose  
Babs Rosenthal 👉  
Brit Rosso  
Deborah Roth  
Thomas and Toni Rotkis  
Arbeth Sackett 👉  
Claudia Sanchez  
Lynn Scarlett  
Helen and John Schaefer  
Richard and Stella Schaefer 👉 ✨  
Katherine Schmidt  
Stephanie Schmidt  
Jeffrey Scott  
Eve Shapiro and Paul Gordon  
Patricia Craven Shepard  
John Shepard and Carol Evans  
George Sibley  
Stephen Simpson  
William Singer  
Dean Sipe  
Susan Skaar  
Stephanie Sklar and Jeffrey Wilkinson  
Patricia Smith  
Charles Smith  
Susan Snedaker

Michelle Stearns  
Max Stein  
Lally Stowell  
Daniel Sylvester  
Target  
Matt and Sarah Teeters 👉 ✨  
Richard Tennent  
Luke Thom  
Buzz and Holly Thompson 👉 ✨  
Alan Timmerman  
Nina Trasoff and Rodney Jilg  
Judith Tuck  
William Vancil  
Cynthia Wallace  
Luann Waters  
Northern Water  
David Wegner and Nancy Jacques 👉 ✨  
Florence Weinberg  
John Welch  
Wendy Erica Werden and Don Eugene  
Where There Be Dragons  
Donald Wilkerson  
Eric Williamson  
John Wise and Evelyn Wachtel  
Kelsey Wolf-Donnay  
Gerry and Vicki Wolfe 👉  
Norman and Frances Wright  
WestLand Resources, Inc.  
Virginia Zaccheo  
Francisco and Rocío Zamora  
Agnes Zellner 👉  
Michael Zellner 👉  
John and Kim Zevalkink  
Tessa Zugmeyer  
Claire Zugmeyer  
Vasyl Zuk

## In Honor

AZ Gives Day  
Desert Conservationists  
Leila Gass  
Louise Glasser  
Ellie Gottlieb  
Siri A Khalsa  
Waverly Klaw  
Roy and Rowene Medina  
C. Ruby Rose  
Diane L Sipe  
Stephanie Sklar  
Jill Tidman  
Grace Wofford  
Francisco Zamora  
Mike Zellner  
Claire Zugmeyer

## In Memory

Fred Bowden  
Gary Farquhar  
Bill Mitchell  
Kathleen Zavatsky

## In-Kind

Anonymous  
Charlie Alolkoy  
Colorado Water Conservation Board  
Dell  
Abbie Gepner  
Global Water Resources  
Nextrio  
Northwest Colorado Council of Governments Water  
Quality/ Quantity Committee  
J. Emanuel Stuart  
Walker & Armstrong  
Christy Wiseman



The Santa Cruz River flowing in northwest Tucson



*The Laguna Grande restoration site also offers a place to experience nature in the Colorado River Delta in Northern Mexico*



## SONORAN INSTITUTE

### OUR MISSION

The Sonoran Institute mission is to connect people and communities with the natural resources that nourish and sustain them.

### OUR VISION

A Colorado River Basin where rivers flow, landscapes are healthy, and all communities thrive.

### WHERE WE WORK

Colorado River Basin | Northwestern Mexico  
Desert Southwest | Rocky Mountains



100 N. Stone Ave., Suite 1001, Tucson, AZ 85701  
tel 520.290.0828 · [sonoraninstitute.org](http://sonoraninstitute.org)

## Sonoran Institute Board of Directors

Rowene Aguirre-Medina | Mesa, Arizona  
Mary Alexander | Scottsdale, Arizona  
David Baumgarten | Gunnison, Colorado  
Alan Dennis | Mexicali, Baja California  
Louise Glasser | Tucson, Arizona; Lake Forest, Illinois  
Allison Green | Atlanta, Georgia  
Barbara J.B. Green | Boulder, Colorado  
Thomas M. Grogan | Tucson, Arizona  
Anna Hill Price | Rhinebeck, New York  
Nyda Jones Church | Rancho Santa Fe, California  
Joe Kalt | Tucson, Arizona; Bridger, Montana  
Dan Kimball | Tucson, Arizona; Grand Haven, Michigan  
Lee Leachman | Fort Collins, Colorado  
Laurinda Oswald | Amado, Arizona  
Chris Perez | Scottsdale, Arizona  
Lollie Benz Plank | Tucson, Arizona; Banner, Wyoming; Long Lake, Minnesota  
Roberto F. Salmon Castelo | El Paso, Texas  
Richard Schaefer | Tucson, Arizona  
Matt Teeters | Denver, Colorado  
Buzz Thompson | Stanford, California  
David Wegner | Tucson, Arizona; Durango, Colorado

### Image credits

Front and back covers: Sonoran Institute/Rabí Hernández  
Pages 1-2: Julius Schlosburg; Sonoran Institute/Rabí Hernández; Courtesy of the González family  
Pages 3-4: Julius Schlosburg; Charlie Alolkoy  
Map: Design by Terry Moody  
Pages 7-8: Courtesy of Liliana Gaytán Cruz; Sonoran Institute/Rabí Hernández; Rodrigo Marta  
Page 10: Charlie Alolkoy/[www.alolkoyphotographics.com](http://www.alolkoyphotographics.com)