



In this edition of the **Sonoran Post**, we celebrate art, science, and community throughout the region. From families kayaking Laguna Grande, the first ever Sonoran Sashay, and the launch of the Water Secure Communities program, we engage with the rivers of the Colorado River Basin in meaningful and transformative ways. [Donate today](#) to continue the transformations!

CONNECTING MEXICALI TO THEIR RIVERS

At the beginning of September, we held our third "Beers for the Colorado River Delta" at ICONO Brewery, where Sonoran Institute's Edith Santiago and Raise the River Alliance's Aída Navarro spoke about our work in the Colorado River Delta.

The Mexicali Fluye project had a busy month, meeting of the Oversight Committee of the Mexicali Fluye Master Plan and the Mexicali Economic Development Council to present the Mexicali Fluye project. At each of these meetings, we talked about our work with representatives from various business organizations promoting the economic development of Mexicali.

And finally, we closed the month with the first *Sabados Familiares* of the Fall-Winter 2025 season at Laguna Grande. Be sure to keep up with our Sonoran Institute Mexico pages to see when the next *Sabados Familiares* will be held.



SASHAYING THROUGH THE SANTA CRUZ RIVER DRAGONFLY FESTIVAL

The Santa Cruz River Program wrapped up its month-long Dragonfly Festival with record participation and new events. We co-hosted and sold out the first-ever Queerd Science *Sonoran Sashay*, a scientific cabaret at Club Congress with over 300 tickets sold, generating major visibility for the Sonoran Institute, and the work along the Santa Cruz River. *Bugs and Bites* featured three University of Arizona researchers presenting to an engaged audience, while two days of Dragonfly Tours at five river locations drew more than 150 participants. The community science Dragonfly BioBlitz also surpassed all previous years, with unprecedented numbers of sightings reported through iNaturalist.

The month concluded with the release of the newest *Living River Report* for Tucson. This bilingual report, available on the [Sonoran Institute website](#), serves as both an educational resource and a showcase of our ongoing commitment to the Santa Cruz River.

COLORADO MERGES DATA AND WATER

In partnership with the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), we announced the Water Secure Communities Program and hosted the first Advisory Committee Meeting on September 25. This meeting showed the dedication of leaders representing diverse stakeholders from across the state, who shared ideas and explored the challenges and opportunities of building regional water resilience.

In September, we presented "*Community Comprehensive Plans: A Data Forward Approach to Integrating Water and Land Use*," at the Colorado WaterWise Conservation Symposium. With partners Abbye Neel from Brendle Group, Scott Williamson from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, and Nick Eagleson from Adams County, we explored how local communities are navigating recent legislation requiring water elements in comprehensive town and city plans. A key takeaway of the discussion was the importance of breaking down silos between water and land use planners to align assumptions for better outcomes.

This month, our team will be presenting at the Colorado APA Conference, local university classes and local governments.



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35-YEARS OF CONSERVATION: ARIZONA'S COMMUNITIES GROW WATER SMART

In our 35-years of work we have always highlighted the importance of convening stakeholders to plan for a resilient Colorado River Watershed. The Growing Water Smart program is an initiative of Sonoran Institute and Babbitt Center for Land and Policy that does just that. Free workshops introduce each attending community to the full range of communications, public engagement, planning, and policy implementation tools to realize their watershed health and community resiliency goals.

Since 2020, Arizona Growing Water Smart Workshop brings local leaders together to craft action plans for water resilience. In five years, the Arizona Growing Water Smart Workshop has trained leaders from 32 communities, serving over 44% of Arizona's residents, to integrate water and land use planning. Arizona Growing Water Smart alumni are scaling solutions to Arizona's water challenges.

As funding allows, we provide technical assistance grants to supplement the projects they identified and designed in our workshops. Since the launch of our Arizona programming, we have funded:

- Pima County's update of its Landscape Design Manual to include stormwater infiltration, with McGann & Associates.
- Town of Florence's contract with University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center to draft sustainable water policies for the General Plan.
- City of Avondale's contract with Carollo Engineers to update the General Plan's water element using their Utility Master Plan.
- City of Apache Junction's hiring of Carollo Engineers to create a One Water strategy for planned developments.
- This year, two participants from our regional Verde Watershed workshop cohort were awarded funding. City of Jerome is addressing its policy gaps identified in the Growing Water Smart community self-assessment. And Yavapai County is facilitating a regular, regional committee focused on water resources and open space for the entire watershed, providing a venue to continue conversations and action planning from participants of the regional Growing Water Smart workshop.

Along with funding, all alumni gain access to our Growing Water Smart newsletter with monthly funding avenues highlighted for each of our regions. Our next Arizona workshop is slated for March 2026 as we shape and expand our work for the next 35-years of Sonoran Institute.



SONORAN INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT: Kashja Iler

Kashja joined the Sonoran Institute in October 2021 as the marketing communications intern and now serves as the marketing manager. From the University of Arizona, she has her bachelor's in environmental science with a minor in Spanish, and extensive work towards her master's in watershed management and ecohydrology, focusing on translatable science for policy with a focus in extreme weather events. She helped form the University of Arizona's HydroCats program which focuses on water harvesting and green infrastructure planning and implementation in and around the campus. Kashja has been a lifelong advocate for equitable access to the outdoors and protecting the natural environment. Outside of work she enjoys dancing with her non-profit dance company Leaps for Lives, spending time with her pets, gardening, cycling, backpacking, and any other form of connecting with nature.

Help the work we do in the Colorado River by joining our [membership program, Sonoran Sustainers](#)



A MESSAGE FROM CEO MIKE ZELLNER

September was a month of connection, collaboration, and continued progress across the Sonoran Institute.

We began with our third "Beers for the Colorado River Delta" at ÍCONO Brewery, where Edith Santiago and Aida Navarro shared insights into our restoration work and the efforts of the Raise the River Alliance. Our Mexicali Fluye team met with both the project's Oversight Committee and the Mexicali Economic Development Council, engaging key partners to integrate economic development and environmental planning.

Our Santa Cruz River Program wrapped up a record-setting Dragonfly Festival, featuring the sold-out Queerd Science "Sonoran Sashay" and expanded community science events that drew our largest participation yet. The release of the *Living River* report capped off the month, underscoring our enduring commitment to restoration and education.

Across the region, we continue advancing water resilience. The launch of the Water Secure Communities Program and our presentation at the Colorado WaterWise Conservation Symposium highlight how Sonoran Institute bridges policy, data, and collaboration.

Our Growing Water Smart initiative—which has now worked with leaders representing nearly half of Arizona's residents—demonstrates our 35-year legacy of uniting communities for sustainable water and land use planning.

Together, we're shaping a resilient future for the communities of the region.



UPCOMING EVENTS

October 16 Meet the Sonoran Institute with Whiskey del Bac, Tucson AZ

October 22 AZ XWN Lunch & Learn: Growing Water Smart, Tucson AZ

October 23 - 24 Colorado APA Conference, Grand Junction CO

October 25 Days of Connection River Cleanup, Tucson AZ

November 7 35th Anniversary Celebration, Mexicali BC

November 19 Fika and Potluck with The Alliance Center, Denver CO

December 9 Colorado Gives Day at Colorado Sake, Denver CO

At Sonoran Institute, we believe that by connecting people and nature today, we can create a positive future for all. We are dedicated to protecting and restoring the Colorado River Basin, and to ensuring that our communities have access to the water they need to thrive. Join us in our mission to create a sustainable future for the Colorado River Basin and beyond.

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