

# A Unique and Effective Approach to Conservation

Letter from Luther Propst, Executive Director  
and Andy Gordon, Board Chair



Ben Alexander

Claricy and Randy Rusk are ranchers working with the Sonoran Institute to make a difference in Custer County, Colorado.

**Sonoran Institute**  
THE SONORAN INSTITUTE WORKS WITH PEOPLE TO PROTECT HEALTHY LANDSCAPES, SUPPORT VIBRANT ECONOMIES, AND PROMOTE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES.

Despite difficult economic times, the demand for the Sonoran Institute's approach to conservation continues to grow. Why? Because we fill a unique niche in the conservation community. By working both on the ground and with the key groups whose decisions determine the future of the West—county officials, public land managers, private landowners (including ranchers and developers), conservation organizations, and policy makers—we develop specific collaborative conservation strategies that work.

In 2003 we celebrated several exceptional successes. A few examples include:

## Place-Based Conservation

- A Successful Communities Workshop led by the Sonoran Institute was the impetus for a far-reaching Wyoming Supreme Court decision upholding a Teton County land use ordinance based upon the county's efforts to define and protect "community character."
- After attending a Sonoran Institute land use training program, Sublette County, Wyoming commissioners adopted and funded the state's first county program to protect working landscapes by purchasing agricultural conservation easements.
- The Sonoran Institute led the formation of the Cienegas Corridor Conservation Council to address growth and conservation issues in a rapidly urbanizing area just east of Tucson. The Institute also sponsored the Cienega Corridor Pioneer Day to bring attention to the need for conservation—an event that drew nearly 1000 people.

- Following a local visioning workshop led by the Sonoran Institute, Custer County, Colorado made significant strides toward its \$10 million program to protect 10,000 acres of working rangelands through a privately funded program to acquire conservation easements.
- The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation and the Sonoran Institute partnered to involve local people in monitoring ecological and public health along the Santa Cruz River in Arizona and Sonora.

## Analysis and Outreach

- The U.S. Bureau of Land Management adopted our Web-based Economic Profile System to guide all their land management plans.
- The Sonoran Institute convened an "experts workshop" to identify priorities for conservation for the Colorado River Delta.
- Our Resources for Community Collaboration (RCC) program awarded \$103,000 in small grants to local collaborative conservation groups. RCC also hosted a "Best Practices" workshop gathering grantees together to discuss the successes and challenges of collaborative conservation and assistance.

## Policy Reform

- In partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, we established an office in Phoenix and a new program to improve management of state trust lands (also known as "school lands") in Arizona and throughout the West.

## Leadership Development

- 2003's Western Community Stewardship Forum (WCSF) provided land use planning and conservation training for more than 30 local leaders from seven rapidly growing counties in the Northern Rockies. WCSF also received the 2003 Sheldon D. Gerber Award for Excellence in Environmental Planning from the Western Planning Association.

The phone continues to ring with requests for our expertise, our Web site has the highest volume ever with more than 13,000 visits per month, and our staff is tireless in their efforts to meet the challenge. Sonoran's fundraising team is in full gear to provide needed financial support. We will continue our collaborative approach both to produce tangible conservation on the ground and to influence the key groups whose decisions are determining the future of the West. We consider our work a success when Western communities have the resources, authority, and confidence to effectively respond to their conservation challenges and opportunities.

We invite you to join us in these efforts.

Luther Propst  
Andy Gordon

# 2003 *Finances*

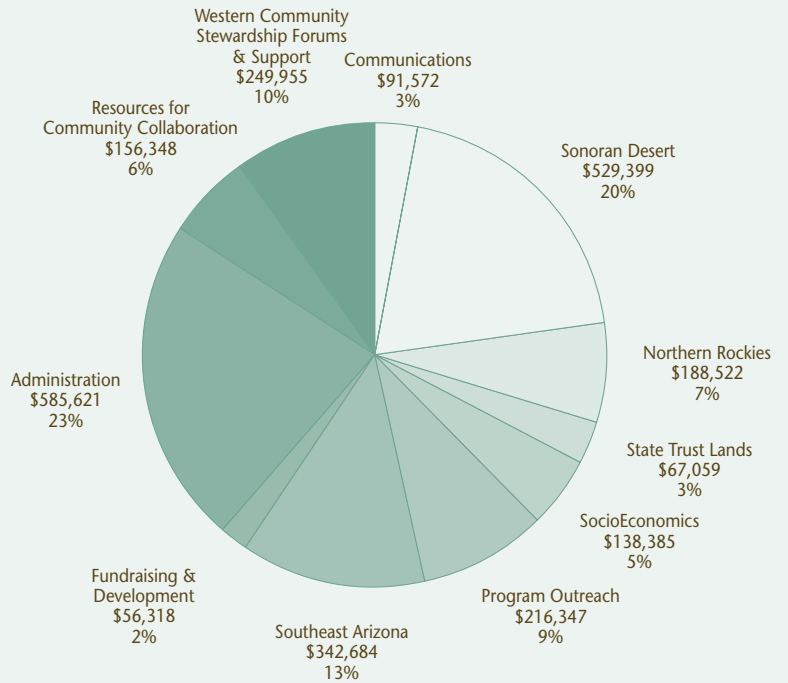
**TOTAL EXPENSES 2003**  
\$2,622,210

**EXPENSES:**

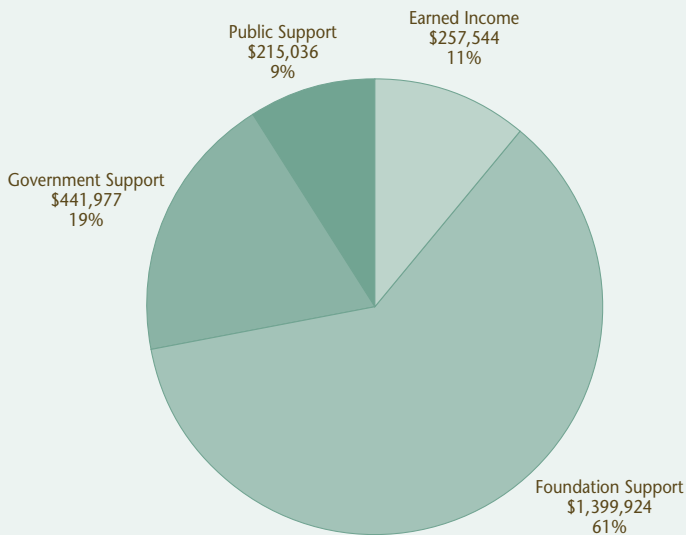
- The Sonoran Institute’s expense budget has almost doubled in the past five years.

**REVENUE:**

- Individual contributions to the Sonoran Institute have increased five fold in the past five years, from \$42,509 to \$215,036.
- Foundations provide the largest share of revenue to the Sonoran Institute, though their percentage of total revenues has decreased over five years from 83 percent to 61 percent.
- Our second largest source of funding, government grants, comprise a greater share of the Sonoran Institute’s revenue, from three percent in 1999 to 19 percent in 2003.



**TOTAL REVENUES 2003**  
\$2,314,481



# ESRI SUPPORTS SONORAN INSTITUTE WITH A MAJOR GIFT

## DONOR PROFILE



### Lollie Benz Plank

Treasurer, Sonoran Institute Board of Directors Executive and Finance Committees

**“What I like best about the Sonoran Institute is that they have found a way, through informed consensus, to integrate inevitably diverse human perspectives in order to achieve shared environmental goals,” said Lollie Benz Plank. “They are working in places that are important to my psyche. I applaud that they bring collaborative, information-based perspectives to the discussion on conservation.”**

ESRI is the world leader in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mapping. When the company began in 1969, they felt an almost limitless enthusiasm for the possibilities of GIS, understanding even then that new geographic information system technology could bring about a better future.

ESRI made that promise a reality by making a major gift of their software to the Sonoran Institute. “I heard Ray Rasker from the Sonoran Institute in an interview on National Public Radio,” said Jack McCarthy, Director of Strategic Accounts at ESRI Inc. Ray spoke of the challenges facing rapidly growing communities, and how the Institute was using GIS software. “It really caught my attention, so I looked into the Sonoran Institute and saw they had a proposal in our queue,” Jack said. “I felt the Institute was putting our technology to its best possible use in places where it’s really needed, so I did what I could to support them.”

“The difference with the Sonoran Institute is that they have both the interest and the talented people to make things happen in the right way. Those two factors were key in our decision,” Jack stated.

Randy Carpenter, Land Use Planner with the Sonoran Institute, explained the benefits ESRI and GIS software provide. “We can now make incredibly accurate maps integrated with appropriate data to show conservation priorities with other non-profit environmental partners and community groups,” Randy

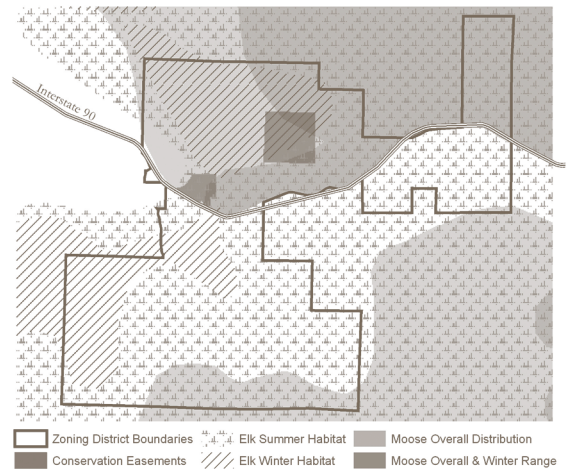
said. “The software provides more accurate analytical decision making tools by helping communities plan better for growth, while protecting important open space.”

Through the software and data, a base map can be layered with geographic and demographic features like topography and waterways, then layers can be added to show land ownership, potential growth areas, income levels, animal migration routes, roadways, and almost endless data gathered from various sources.

“We see the powerful reaction from many people we’ve worked with once they’ve seen what these maps can show,” Randy continued. “ESRI’s donation helps us be more efficient, improve communication, make better decisions, understand change, and implement better science.”



Wildlife Migration in the Bozeman Pass Zoning District



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## Moving on

We thank and wish the best of success to Amy Liposky Vincent who has left the Sonoran Institute to pursue other work. We also sincerely thank Lorraine Eiler for her years of service on the Board of Directors.

## Welcome

Welcome to Peter Culp, Laurie Dixon, Karen Gaulke, Erin Quinn, and many interns in all our offices.