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25 Years Strong, Shaping Our West




2040 VISION: Bold Plans for the Changing West

*The goal is a West “both prosperous and healthy,
with a civilization to match its scenery.”*

Wallace Stegner

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.



“The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald

THE PARADOX OF THE WEST

The remarkable growth and economic prosperity over the last 100 years have shaped the character of the West, but the assumptions and policies that have propelled this growth no longer best serve the needs of future generations.

While growth has been a defining element of the West, the global economic recession and prolonged drought have underscored that other powerful and sometimes unanticipated drivers may have a profound impact on our region, with significant implications for our quality of life.

As we grapple with the uncertain and volatile aspects of these drivers of change, how do we, as a region, find the right balance between conserving and developing our natural resources? How do we encourage economic prosperity while ensuring that future generations are provided with similar opportunities?

A Foundation to Draw On

Since 1990, the Sonoran Institute has brought together diverse interests to successfully forge effective and enduring conservation solutions in the face of rapid growth and change. Through civil dialogue, collaboration, and capacity-building, we work with local communities and partners toward a shared vision of lasting prosperity. We have assisted others in better understanding the drivers of change and their implications for their quality of life. The constancy of change has always been a narrative thread in explaining the work of the Sonoran Institute. Rather than resist change, we have helped others embrace it and ultimately emerge the better from it.

A Renewed Commitment

In June 2015, the Sonoran Institute’s Board of Directors adopted a new strategic framework that sharpens our focus and ensures the best use of our skills and resources in tackling the challenges facing the West. This framework recognizes that the world we live and work in will be defined by rapid and unforeseen changes. Navigating and, ultimately, succeeding in this environment will require that the Sonoran Institute be nimble, while ensuring that our organization, the communities we assist, and the landscapes and quality of life we seek to protect have the necessary resources to remain resilient in the face of change.

While we can’t predict the future, we can aspire to a certain type of future, one that draws on the lessons learned through 25 years of experience shaping the future of the West.

First and foremost, we believe that economic prosperity is positively correlated with environmentally responsible practices. This requires that we live and work more seamlessly with nature and use our natural resources more efficiently and equitably.

Second, communities must be constructively engaged in defining their future, becoming both beneficiaries and stewards of conservation.

Finally, communities should continue to be a source of innovation for sustainable development and conservation, striving to achieve harmony between the built environment and the natural world. The rugged individualism of the West means that change will more likely be embraced from the “bottom up,” where communities learn from their peers and policy makers respond to “on the ground” results.



OUR PROMISE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

We will work across three ancient and iconic regions—the Desert Southwest, the Colorado River Basin, and the Rocky Mountains.

- We will work within and across these regions to protect and restore ecosystems, value cultural assets, appropriately site and sensitively design large transportation and energy infrastructure, and help ensure that communities benefit economically from both development and conservation.
- We will employ science-based, field-tested methodology toward ecological restoration and community planning.
- We will respect the values, traditions and history of the people who rely on the West's natural resources.

We will provide the resources communities need to make decisions about how they grow and prosper consistent with their vision and values.

- We will use and develop tools that let communities consider a range of future scenarios and responses that will influence economic and community development priorities, infrastructure investments, and decisions regarding how to best steward their natural resources and other local assets.

We will partner with communities to foster new ideas and approaches that address both development and conservation concerns.

- We will support efforts to restore degraded rivers and wetlands, make sustainable investments in water resources and infrastructure in response to drought and climate change, and make the case that water dedicated to the environment provides a wide range of community benefits.
- We will inspire new ideas, innovative planning, and new funding strategies to aid communities in building capacity to achieve their goals.

We will build broad and diverse constituencies that will advocate for actions and policies that serve the needs of this and future generations.

- We will work across the West's diverse communities to engage and support them in their efforts to address the impacts of growth and change, identifying, mobilizing, and connecting community leaders and stakeholders to campaigns to create a sustainable and more prosperous region.
- We will inspire and motivate people and communities to plan for and own a future that provides both economic opportunity and a healthy environment.



We are working with communities in the Colorado River Delta, Mexico, to restore riparian habitat and reconnect the river with the sea.

Along Arizona's Santa Cruz River, we are seeking to enhance in-stream flows and wildlife habitat that benefits both the environment and communities.

WHAT SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE

We are optimists. Despite the challenges facing the West, the Sonoran Institute believes that our region can experience a sustained prosperity and a renewed sense of community stewardship through civil dialogue and collaboration that transcends today's divisive political environment. We envision a future where:

- Wildlife thrives with plenty of room to roam.
- Scenic vistas and open spaces are preserved.
- There is enough water for people and wildlife.
- Communities have access to clean, safe, and reliable sources of energy.
- Transportation systems improve livability and enhance economic prosperity.
- Development integrates open space and multiple uses.

These are the hallmarks of successful communities that contribute to a vibrant regional economy and, ultimately, to a future West we can all embrace.

WHERE WE WORK:
**The Desert Southwest, Colorado River Basin,
 and the Rocky Mountains**

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Throughout the Desert Southwest, we are creating opportunities for renewable energy and "smart" infrastructure development through improved siting, design, and mitigation.



We are assisting communities in the Rockies make better land-use decisions given limited water resources and uncertainties around drought.



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