

COLORADO RIVER DELTA RESTORATION PROJECT



Shaping the Future of the West

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Landmark Binational Agreement: Minute 319

On November 12, 2012, the United States and Mexico signed a landmark five-year agreement (Minute 319) that defined how the two countries will share the Colorado River amidst growing pressures on water resources. For the first time in the world's history, two nations made a collaborative commitment to dedicate water to a river for environmental purposes and to take conservation actions to restore a globally significant ecosystem: the Colorado River Delta. This marks a major step forward in achieving Sonoran Institute's conservation goals in the region.

What is Minute 319? The Minute is an addendum to the 1944 treaty between the U.S. and Mexico that provides new guidelines for the binational management of Colorado River water. The 1944 treaty initially established Mexico's right to a 1.5 million acre-feet share of the Colorado River's flows. However, for the first time in history, the new Minute incorporates measures to restore flows to the river in Mexico and conserve the Colorado River Delta.

Under the Minute's provisions, the U.S. and Mexico will implement several new measures and cooperative projects during a 5-year pilot period lasting through December 31, 2017. After this testing period, the goal is to revise, expand, and extend the measures and projects through a longer-term agreement that will replace Minute 319.



Above: The U.S. Commissioner of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), Edward Drusina, signs Minute 319.



Top: An aerial view of the Colorado River riparian corridor in Mexico.
Bottom: Morelos Dam, the last dam on the Colorado River.

Key Components of Minute 319:

- The return of freshwater flows to the Colorado River Delta and expansion of on-the-ground ecological restoration efforts.
- U.S.-Mexico jointly funded water conservation projects in the Mexicali Valley, which will designate conserved water to U.S. users in exchange for environmental flow commitments to Mexico.
- Flexibility to reduce water deliveries to Mexico during Lower Basin water shortages and to increase deliveries to Mexico during water surpluses.
- Ability to store Mexico's Colorado River water in Lake Mead, a federal reservoir located on the river in northern Arizona.

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Partners Involved in Minute 319: The Sonoran Institute has been involved along with partners Pronatura Noroeste and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) for more than a decade in binational governmental discussions around river water management. Through the NGO coalition's persistence in representing the environment in these negotiations, they have at last succeeded in achieving their goal to bring water and life back to the Delta with the passing of Minute 319.

The Water Trust: The Colorado River Delta Water Trust, established in 2008 by the coalition of NGOs mentioned above, plays a major role in fulfilling the water delivery commitments established in the Minute. As part of the agreement, the Trust is required to secure one-third of the total base flow that will be allocated to the Colorado River in Mexico, while Mexico and the U.S. will contribute the remaining two-thirds of the flows. Additionally, the agreement requires the NGO coalition to scale-up restoration efforts in the Delta.



Above: The happy group of NGOs and partners representing the Colorado River Delta following the signing of Minute 319 from left to right: Peter Culp (Squire Sanders, LLC), Jennifer Pitt (EDF), Osvel Hinojosa and Yamilett Carrillo (Pronatura), and Francisco Zamora (Sonoran Institute).



The Yuma Clapper Rail (above left), an endangered species, will greatly benefit along with other resident and migratory bird species with the return of flows to the river. Local communities members will have increased recreational opportunities and a healthy river to pass onto their children.

Next Steps:

Water for the Delta: The Sonoran Institute, Pronatura, Environmental Defense Fund, The Nature Conservancy, and Redford Center are dedicated to securing water through the Water Trust to fulfill the NGOs' commitment in the agreement. Our goal is to acquire at least 1,000 acre-feet in 2013 and a total of 5,000 acre-feet over the next three years.

Restoration Actions: Sonoran Institute will restore at least 50 acres per year of riparian habitat along the Colorado River and implement a bird monitoring program to evaluate the effectiveness of restoration in terms of functional habitat creation.

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