



Big Vision, Bold Plans for the Changing West

Sonoran Institute 2007 Strategic Plan Overview

"We can either be victims of change or we can plan for it, shape it and emerge stronger from it..."

Luther Propst, Sonoran Institute Executive Director

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

The Sonoran Institute's strategic plan, adopted in June 2007, sharpens our focus and ensures the best use of our time, skills, funding and passion for the land to tackle challenges facing the West — rapid growth, the changing role of public lands and much more. The goal is a West where civil dialogue and collaboration are hallmarks of decision making; people and wildlife live in harmony; clean water, air and energy are assured; and healthy lands, resilient economies, and vibrant communities reflect a West, "both prosperous and healthy, with a civilization to match its scenery," as the great western writer Wallace Stegner envisioned. With the support of organizations and people who care about the West, the Sonoran Institute is committed to making this vision a reality.

Grizzlies. Saguaros. Iconic landscapes — think Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountains and Yellowstone. The West is a mythical land where many aspire to travel or live, whether in a modern city flanked by rugged wild lands or in a mountain town with world-class skiing or fishing a few minutes from work. Profound change is underway as more people move west. Nature's gifts created over eons can be destroyed in a few years if we are not careful.

From railroads and dams to public lands, the West has been the home of big ideas. Now is the time for another — an ambitious vision for a West with healthy land, clean water, sustainable energy, resilient economies and vibrant communities where conservation supports prosperity and quality of life.

Realizing this vision in an inclusive and sustainable manner requires engaging diverse perspectives and interests to make collaborative decisions. Since 1990 the Sonoran Institute has carved out a unique niche, bringing together local

officials, civic and business leaders, ranchers and other land owners, conservation groups, developers, public-land managers, and engaged citizens to successfully forge effective and enduring conservation solutions.

The Institute is dedicated to *inspiring and enabling community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America*. Our work is informed by and supports local conservation efforts.

We demonstrate how conservation and smart growth are key elements for quality of life and economic prosperity. We help communities agree on land-use plans that preserve natural and cultural assets. We draw on a full range of land-use strategies, from outright protection to better managing growth to integrating conservation into development. We build and support statewide coalitions that work to give local jurisdictions resources to better guide development. Through innovative partnerships, we train local leaders and protect public and private lands across the West.



Snapshot: Changes & Challenges in the West

Growth. Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Colorado and Utah are the nation's fastest-growing states; Phoenix and Las Vegas are the fastest-growing cities. Ranches and open space are giving way to subdivisions. Rapid growth strains energy and water sources. Many newcomers are attracted to rural communities, which then outgrow their small-town character. Single homes consume land even faster than the rapid population growth rate.

Public Land. Nearly half of the West is public land. Current federal policies impede public land managers' collaboration with private landowners, tribes and other organizations, although threats to public lands often arise outside their boundaries. Development on neighboring land hampers wildlife migration and fire management. Growing numbers of off-road vehicles damage rivers and meadows that understaffed, under-funded public land management agencies are unable to protect.

Laws & Policy. State and federal laws offer inadequate incentives and authority for communities to plan for and regulate growth. Resulting poorly planned development decreases property values, compromises wildlife and conservation values, and increases costs for infrastructure and other services.

Energy. Parts of the West are in the grip of an energy boom, temporarily benefiting from a spike in high-paying jobs. However, many counties and cities are not prepared for the devastating impacts of careless oil and gas development on their land, air and water, as well as on their social fabric.

Drought & Climate Change. In the arid West, impacts of a prolonged drought and global climate change are evident in reduced snowpack, earlier run-off, falling river levels, more intense wildfires, and the expanding range of noxious weeds.

Changing Economy. Scenery, recreation, open space and other natural amenities are the West's new competitive advantage, attracting visitors, retirees and those who work in the knowledge economy.

The West's challenges loom large, but they can be overcome. We can all make better decisions about how to develop our communities and preserve the open spaces and wild places we cherish. To help that happen, ...

The Sonoran Institute's new strategic plan ...

... focuses on public lands, growth, water, energy and climate change – the core issues that define how the West is growing and changing. With the goal of a West with healthy lands, resilient economies, and vibrant communities where civil dialogue and collaboration are hallmarks of decision making, people and wildlife live in harmony, and clean water, air and energy are assured, *the Sonoran Institute is restructuring, focusing and deepening its work in two principal ways:*

1 Legacy Programs: long-term, multi-faceted work in four regional landscapes, applying the full range of our expertise and conservation approaches (page 3)

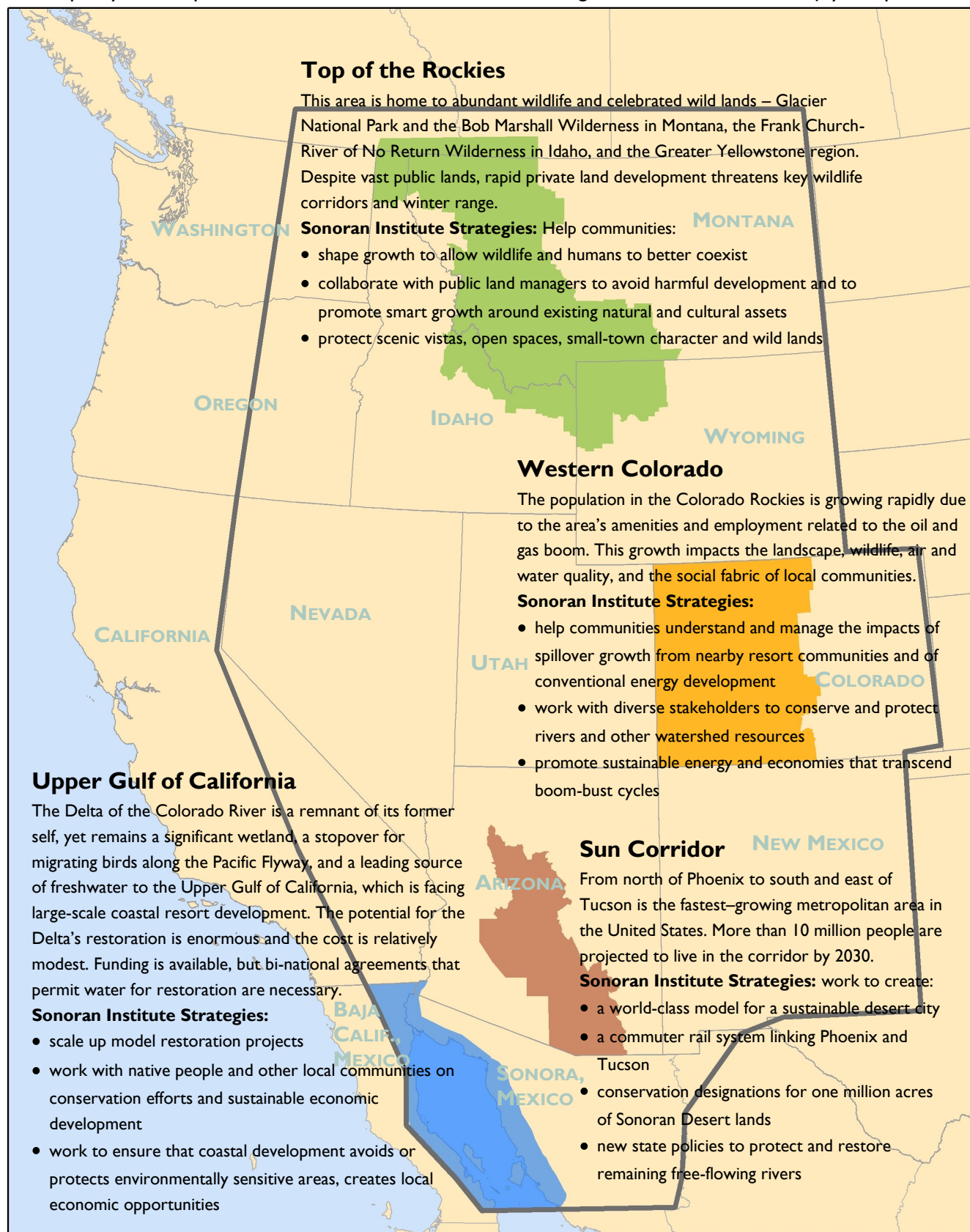
2 West-wide State & Federal Policy Reform: a more systematic focus on state and federal policy reform to support collaborative, community conservation (page 4)



Consumptive land use that fragments habitat (above) and drought (top of page) are among the challenges facing the West.

1 Legacy Programs

The Sonoran Institute is launching four keystone initiatives in the specific landscapes shown on the map below to tackle growth and other challenges, to serve as models that positively influence conservation policy, and to preserve communities and lands that future generations will want to enjoy and protect.



2 State & Federal Policy Reform

The Sonoran Institute is significantly increasing its efforts to reform state and federal policy to give counties, communities and public-land managers in the West the tools, authority, funds and capacity to better manage growth and change and to protect our natural heritage. We will employ these principal strategies to have a deeper, more focused impact in the policy arena:

Public lands conservation projects. We will expand our work with diverse local stakeholders, conservation advocates and government agencies to improve the conservation and management of public lands in selected Western landscapes. Long a staple of the Sonoran Institute's work, such collaborative efforts permanently advance protecting and managing public lands of high conservation value.

Statewide smart growth policies. The Institute will build and strengthen diverse statewide coalitions – initially in Montana, Arizona and Wyoming – to advocate for improved state-level smart growth policies. The success of the Institute's Montana Smart Growth Coalition provides a model for these efforts.



Federal policy reform. Building on our extensive county and community contacts throughout the West, the Sonoran Institute will create *action networks* of local officials who will engage in the federal policy arena to influence decision-makers on a broad range of conservation and smart growth issues. Bolstering these reform efforts will be our ongoing economics and land policy research on topics such as the impacts of growth, the changing Western economy, and the changing role of public lands.

Strategic Partnerships. We will join with other organizations and agencies in developing new information and expanding policymakers' and the public's understanding of the need for policy reform. These partnerships bring invaluable expertise and experienced perspectives to Western policy issues. We are fortunate to include among our partners the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, the National Association of Counties, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and other state and federal agencies.



7650 E. Broadway . Tucson, AZ 85710

520.290.0828 . sonoran@sonoran.org

Bozeman, Montana

Phoenix, Arizona

Grand Junction, Colorado

Helena, Montana

Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico

Cheyenne, Wyoming

The people of the Sonoran Institute are conservation advocates, land-use planners, economists, scientists, facilitators, researchers, communicators, and more. We are passionate about and committed to a West that is “prosperous and healthy, with a civilization to match its scenery.”