



In this edition of the **Sonoran Post**, we are connecting people with their local rivers, large and small, to make a difference in communities throughout the Colorado River Basin. **Donate today** to continue the connections!

LINKING LAND, WATER, AND HOUSING IN A CHANGING COLORADO.

The Sonoran Institute and the Colorado Water Conservation Board presented the new Water Secure Communities Program to key stakeholders at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference. As a part of this program's development, we dedicated significant time to audience feedback, which offered valuable insights and helped refine the direction of this collaboration.

During the American Planning Association of Colorado (APA CO) conference, in partnership with the Sonoran Institute and the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, we presented the Growing Water Smart Honor Award to Larimer County for their **Water Master Plan**. This award recognizes Colorado cities, towns, and counties that have made exceptional strides in integrating water conservation and efficiency into land use plans and policies. Congratulations Larimer County!

During the APA CO conference, we lead a panel with partners that examined how Colorado's SB24-174 law strengthened the connection between housing, land use, and water supply planning. Panelists highlighted planning tools and standards that support water adequacy and shared strategies for aligning water supply and housing goals through model code language and local policy to drive lasting impact.



CELEBRATING A REVIVING COLORADO RIVER

On Friday, October 17, the Sonoran Institute participated in the Revive the River Festival, organized by the Raise the River Alliance. Guests enjoyed educational and recreational activities that deepen their understanding and appreciation of the restoration sites. An expert panel provided insights on various essential aspects of Colorado River restoration. The event concluded with a dance performed by members of the Cucapá community.

On Saturday, October 18, the community, authorities, school groups, and the Sonoran Institute reforested the Camino Real site as part of the Mexicali Fluye project. More than 300 trees were planted, with the participation of over 250 people.

A LIVING RIVER THRIVES!

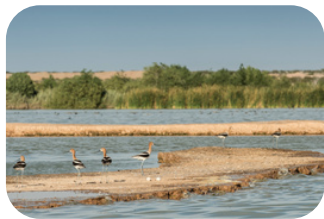
October was an active month for the Santa Cruz River Program. We celebrated the release of the newest **Living River report for the Tucson Reach** by sharing findings with the Regional Wastewater Reclamation Advisory Committee and the Pima Association of Governments. These presentations helped highlight the continuing progress of the river's ecology, showcasing new infrastructure projects, and inviting the community to join us in ongoing data-driven restoration efforts.

We also hosted a lively evening at Whiskey Del Bac, where CEO Mike Zellner, Senior Director of Development Caitie Dixon, and Santa Cruz River Program Director Luke Cole shared stories about Sonoran Institute's history and current work along the Santa Cruz River. Then on October 25, we organized a river cleanup at Juhan Park with our partners at Tucson Clean and Beautiful that drew 130 participants and removed over 3,000 pounds of trash—a true community success!



DONATE TODAY!

**BECOME A SONORAN
SUSTAINER**



35-YEARS OF CONSERVATION: MEXICALI CELEBRATES AND LAS ARENITAS FLOURISHES

This November, we celebrate our organization's 35th anniversary in Mexicali. From our beginnings in Tucson in 1990, to our work in Mexicali starting 20 years ago, to today--our Colorado River Delta program is filled with amazing outcomes. Since our work began, we have led and supported the restoration and environmental education site Laguna Grande, the passing of binational agreements Minutes 319 and 323, improvements to the agricultural drains through Mexicali Fluye, and the progress on the rehabilitation of the Las Arenitas Wetlands.

The Las Arenitas treatment wetland is a truly remarkable story of reclamation and renewal. Next to a municipal wastewater treatment plant in the middle of this desert appears an unlikely expanse of water, vegetation, birds, and even tourists—250 acres beginning to take shape across what was a desert landscape.

In 2007, to help manage wastewater from its growing metropolitan region, the Mexicali state water authority, through the Comision Estatal de Servicios Publicos de Mexicali (CESPM), built the Las Arenitas Wastewater Treatment Plant. Soon after it began operation, however, it was apparent that the plant was already over capacity.

We approached CESPM with a plan to create a wetland next to the treatment plant that would provide additional treatment capacity, while also enhancing the river system and the local economy. The idea was the wetland would act as a biofilter, removing sediment and pollutants from the partially treated wastewater. Natural chemical processes and microorganisms living in the wetland's vegetation would break down organic materials over time and improve the water quality. Construction began shortly after and is now roughly 80% completed.

The Delta is a critical stopover point for birds traveling along "Pacific Flyway," the major migration route that extends from Alaska to Patagonia, in Argentina and Chile. Las Arenitas Wetland has created a new habitat for these birds and provides a unique opportunity for people living in Mexicali to experience a wetland 20 minutes outside the city. In 2009, the first count of birds in the area yielded about eight species and fewer than 100 total birds. Six years later, 160 different bird species are present, with a maximum bird count of 18,000 birds.

Furthermore, thanks to a forward-looking agreement that Sonoran Institute and our partner Pronatura Noroeste reached with the state government and CESPM, the wetland's benefits extend far beyond the treatment area itself. We asked that 30 percent of the treated effluent be dedicated to the Hardy River. Ensuring that some 8,000 acre-feet of water flows into the Hardy River, and eventually into the Colorado River, every year for the next 20 years. The agreement represents one of the only instances in Mexico that effluent has been dedicated to environmental purposes.

While our direct involvement in the work in Las Arenitas wetlands has come to an end this year, we look forward to creation of new green spaces in and around Mexicali. You can stay connected and help us continue creating green spaces by connecting with us at our events, connecting with us on socials, or becoming a Sonoran Sustainer!

SONORAN INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP HIGHLIGHT: Alvaro Lucero

Alvaro has worked at Sonoran Institute since mid-2020 as a maintenance technician performing activities that keep our office and vehicles running smoothly, in addition to providing administrative support to the Mexicali team. In his personal time, he enjoys spending time with his family. Alvaro does an amazing job keeping IT and equipment in top condition, ensuring our work continues without interruption!

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



A MESSAGE FROM CEO MIKE ZELLNER

This past month has been one of collaboration, innovation, and celebration across the Sonoran Institute. We joined the Colorado Water Conservation Board to present the new Water Secure Communities Program at the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference. Stakeholder feedback from this event is shaping the program's development to ensure it delivers meaningful impact for communities across the West.

At the American Planning Association of Colorado Conference, we were proud to honor Larimer County with the Growing Water Smart Honor Award for its exceptional Water Master Plan. Our panel on the Colorado state law SB24-174 further advanced critical conversations about integrating housing, land use, and water supply planning for Colorado's future.

Our teams also led restoration and community events across the region—from reforesting the Camino Real site with 300 new trees in Mexicali to hosting another successful Santa Cruz River cleanup in Tucson that removed over 3,000 pounds of trash. We celebrated the release of the newest Living River report, highlighting the continuing progress of the river's ecology and infrastructure.

As we mark our 35th anniversary in Mexicali, we reflect with pride on the success of projects like the Las Arenitas Wetland—a 250-acre symbol of renewal and collaboration. These milestones embody the Sonoran Institute's enduring commitment to connecting people with the natural resources that sustain us all.



UPCOMING EVENTS

November 7 35th Anniversary Celebration, Mexicali BC

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

November 20 Green Drinks Tucson: Salsa Night! Tucson AZ

December 9 Colorado Gives Day at Colorado Sake, Denver CO

December 18 Green Drinks Tucson, Tucson AZ



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.

4049 E BROADWAY BLVD, SUITE 127 TUCSON, AZ 85711 | 520-290-0828 | SONORANINSTITUTE.ORG

BECOME A SONORAN SUSTAINER

DONATE TODAY!