## **Engaging the Next Generation** 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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"Meaningful exposure to natural environments is essential to developing informed connections between youth and their surroundings. Sonoran Institute's efforts to engage youth in restoration of the Colorado River Delta is an important step in training dedicated stewards of Earth's natural resources."

David A. Crown, scientist, educator, supporter

"Although I now call Nashville, Tennessee, home, I am a Westerner at heart. I choose to give my time and resources to the Sonoran Institute because the organization occupies a unique niche in the nonprofit landscape. Our hallmark for the last 25+ years has been collaboration-no other organization works at the nexus of commerce, community, and conservation across the West in quite the same way. Sonoran Institute is special. It's an organization I am immensely proud to be a part of!"

Kara Teising, Sonoran Institute Board Member

## **Dear Friends**,

Thanks to you-your passion for the North American West, your contagious optimism for the future we can shape as we work together on its behalf, and your incredible generosity-the Sonoran Institute is stronger than ever.

Our successful 25th Anniversary Campaign surpassed our goalraising nearly \$2.5 million. Thank you! Building on this success, we are launching an Endowment Campaign to raise an additional \$250,000 each year for our future. Ensuring the Sonoran Institute is around for the next generation and beyond is vital to the future of the West and the investments you have made in our organization. Please join this effort!

We continue to invest in our work on the Santa Cruz River by expanding our team. By documenting the value of effluent's role in providing water for nature, and engaging the community to recognize this valuable resource, we are protecting our region's "Living River" to the benefit of all. As you will see in our main story, we are also engaging our most valuable resource, our youth.

Our leadership in restoring the Colorado River Delta continues to be internationally recognized. As we write this, our team is at the table, alongside our partners on both sides of the border, negotiating the next binational agreement (or Minute) to ensure continued progress of the efforts under the current Minute 319. Important to the success of the next Minute, we are leading the effort to engage the region's next generation of leaders in the effort to renew, restore, and reconnect the river to the sea.

Military bases make vital contributions to our economy in the West. Less well known is how important they are to natural resource

conservation and wildlife habitat. We are building relationships with our military and providing research to help leaders protect their mission—as well as the natural environment—by recognizing potential impacts of development on base operations.

Water is the lifeblood of the West, and its availability will be the defining issue of our future. Sustainability will depend on making water a core consideration in decisions of where and how to grow. Working with our partners at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and experts across the region, we are building innovative planning tools and training resources that will help communities protect their future by better incorporating water planning with their land use plans.

We know we cannot meet the challenges of the West on our own, so we continue to build capacity by developing and launching organizations that complement our work. This year, we successfully spun-off Community Builders and New Mobility West to form their own organization. We also helped launch The White Tank Mountains Conservancy, which supports sustainable development in Phoenix's most rapidly growing area, the West Valley. We look forward to collaborating with these new organizations!

This annual report is dedicated to the next generation. It focuses on the future, not just for the Sonoran Institute and all of us who support this work, but for those who will inherit it from us.

Stephanie Sklar

CEO

Stephanie Coklar Christoph M. Pery

Chris Perez Chair, Board of Directors



#### LAUNCHING A MODERN WEBSITE

Beautiful, modern, and completely rebuilt, our new website is allowing us to more effectively communicate our successes, engage new audiences, and provide communities the resources they rely on. The new design adapts seamlessly to mobile and tablet—and it's catching eyes. The new website saw a 25% increase in traffic during its first quarter!

#### PRAGMATIC CONSERVATION

Introducing a new framework to evaluate encroachment pressures that could impair military facilities in Arizona and other states, our report, *Mutual Benefit: Preserving Arizona's Military Mission and the Value of Publicly-Owned Lands*, demonstrates how collaborative conservation can help preserve both the military mission and the natural environment.



### DEMONSTRATING THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF CONSERVATION

Our report studying California Senator Dianne Feinstein's California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act of 2015 (CDCRA) and its impacts on mining and the regional economy concluded that the legislation has minimal impact on mining and protects the natural and cultural attractions that have been significant drivers of the regional economy for the past four decades.

**OUTCOME:** The report's independent research and hard facts helped change the conversation and build consensus amid an emotionally charged debate. In February 2016, President Obama designated three new national monuments in the California desert (Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails, and Castle Mountains), protecting 1.8 million acres, most of which had been included in the CDCRA.

#### INCUBATING NEW COMMUNITY CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS

The Sonoran Institute is a charter member of the White Tank Mountains Conservancy, an organization whose mission is to ensure that open space and natural habitat in the fast-growing West Phoenix area are conserved, permanently protected from development, and made more accessible for public recreation. The conservancy's reach will eventually extend over 70,000 acres and include two regional parks.

#### **HELPING COMMUNITIES WEATHER CLIMATE CHANGE**

At its first Resilient Communities Workshop, Western Lands and Communities helped representatives from Missoula, Montana, create an action plan to tackle health risks related to hotter, smokier summers in their community. A collaboration of elected officials, technical staff, and nonprofit personnel worked together to craft an actionable plan to prepare for future events. **OUTCOME:** The conservancy is up and running as an official nonprofit organization and will soon begin a search for a permanent part-time executive director. It recently trained its second group of volunteer stewards, who are busy planning and building trails, leading guided nature walks, and conducting environmental education and other outreach activities.

**OUTCOME:** The Missoula team took their plan home and ran with it, developing and receiving funding for "Summer Smart," an initiative that will help citizens "weather the weather" with new refuges from heat and wildfire smoke, and tools to lower power bills by providing shade, energy efficiency, and passive cooling education and resources.

#### **CONNECTING RIVER AND SEA**

Our science-based restoration strategy in the Colorado River estuary will benefit marine life through improved connectivity between the river and the sea. This approach includes research on the system's hydrology, dredging to reconnect river and tidal channels, and testing different freshwater delivery scenarios.

#### WATER AND LAND USE NEXUS

In partnership with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, we surveyed water and land experts across the West to determine how we can help communities make better land use decisions based on available water resources. Their feedback led us to jointly launch a community assistance program in the Colorado River basin to plan for water uncertainties associated with climate change.

#### **GETTING THE WATER FLOWING**

Trash-clogged agricultural drainage canals running through many Mexicali, México, neighborhoods pollute the water and block its flow to rivers. Stagnant water also breeds germs and mosquitos. Spearheading communitywide education and drain-cleaning efforts to get the water flowing, our "Mexicali Fluye" program is immediately improving the health and aesthetics of these neighborhoods. We've currently removed over 2,000 cubic meters of debris from five drains.



Now more than 70 percent complete, the Las Arenitas treatment **OUTC** wetland, which we designed and are helping to build in the has Colorado River Delta, is improving the quality of Mexicali's e wastewater while transforming a barren landscape into an oasis for native plants and wildlife. In Arizona, our efforts to improve the health of the Santa Cruz River continue, conducting ongoing monitoring and documenting the benefits of adding highly treated effluent to that river system.

OUTCOME: In the Delta, birds are flocking back! The wetland has become a breeding ground for the Yuma Clapper Rail, an endangered marsh bird, and an important stopover location for hundreds of migrating bird species. Thanks to improved water quality in the Santa Cruz River, we discovered last fall that the endangered Gila topminnow has reappeared in the river, a rare example of a native fish returning to occupy its former habitat.

### **Financial Summary**

FY 2014: July 1, 2014–June 30, 2015

#### Revenue

	4,406,471 *	100%
Other Income	\$12,937	<1%
Program Service Income	\$4,734	<1%
Contract Income	\$2,345,531	53%
Government Grants	\$235,235	5%
Foundation Grants	\$627,172	14%
Contributions	\$1,180,862	27%

#### **Expenses**

\$249,901 5%
\$535,009 12%
\$90,814 2%
\$411,682 9%
\$563,349 12%
\$930,907 20%
1,835,186 40%

Reporting based on most recent available audit. The Sonoran Institute is audited annually by Keegan, Linscott & Kenon, PC.

\*In addition, resources for FY'15 include net assets of \$1,649,943 carried forward from previous years and restricted for use in this and future fiscal years.

# We Engage the Next Generation

You often tell us you support our work so your children and grandchildren can enjoy the natural beauty, unique habitat, and cultural heritage of the West you know and love. Since passion inspires stewardship, we believe the more the next generation experiences and appreciates the West's precious resources, the more enduring our conservation efforts—and your investment—will be.

Our restoration activities in the Colorado River Delta and on Arizona's Santa Cruz River provide living laboratories for students to learn about, and even participate in, the amazing transformations our work is producing in their communities. Getting these young people engaged in their local environments early will prepare them to be the future leaders in their communities.

Through our education program in México in the past year, we engaged over 3,000 local students ranging from grade three through college on the environmental importance of the Colorado River and its Delta. Activities included in-school workshops, guided visits to restoration sites, and even hands-on restoration work where student volunteers plant native trees, monitor vegetation and bird populations, and extend our interpretive trail system. A generation who grew up without the Colorado River has seen it come back, and they will be the voices we need to make sure it stays!

In Arizona, we partner with Pima County to bring a local spin to the international River of Words arts and poetry program. The *Living River* of Words encourages students to explore how water moves through the landscape and the connections that plants, animals, and people have to water. Our *Living River* reports guide science-based classroom activities and field trips to the river where students conduct water quality tests, record wildlife sightings, and survey riparian vegetation. Working with local artists, students take what they have learned and create poetry or art entries for a contest open to all youth from ages 5–19. The 2016 *Living River of Words* Youth Poetry and Art contest received 950 submissions, and winning entries are displayed in a yearlong traveling exhibit.

We plan to double the impact of both these programs in the next year.

"I joined the Delta Program in 2010. We were a tiny team still defining our vision and role. To see the progress we've made—the pulse flow, hundreds of acres of restored riparian and estuarine habitat, new jobs for local communities, new partnerships—imagine what we'll do the next six years!"

Karen Schlatter, Monitoring Program Manager, Colorado River Delta Program

#### **SPARKLING WATER**

Drifting through our world During the rise of day and the show of night Through cracks of our dry desert land To care for every living creature

> Alexie Gonzalez, age 10 (from *Living River of Words*) Mesquite Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona

# Thank You For Your Support

The Sonoran Institute is grateful to all our donors for their support. Please note, these contributions reflect contributions for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. We apologize for any errors or omissions.

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## Remembering Bill Mitchell

It is with great sadness that we report that our friend and colleague, Bill Mitchell, passed away on May 27, 2016. Bill served on the Sonoran Institute's Board of Directors from 2010 to 2016, including two years as Board Chair. He was a passionate conservationist, avid outdoorsman and hunter, and strong advocate for engagement of underserved communities in the protection of our environment. If Bill had had a personal motto, it would have been, "greater strength through diversity." He was unstinting in bringing diverse elements of progressive movements to work together while also calling on mainstream environmental groups to confront their lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Most of all, he was a beloved member of the Sonoran Institute family, mentoring new staff and board members, quick with wise counsel or subtle wit. We will miss him dearly.

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GIFTS WERE MADE IN MEMORY OF PEDRO JOAB AGUIRRE MR. JAKE KITTLE ROSEMARY & WILLIAM EDMONSTON DR. MARK NICOLICH "Because of Sonoran Institute's tireless work, my eyes are now open to the value of the West's resources, especially for the future of my generation."

Elizabeth Stowe, Marketing/Communications Intern, 2016 college graduate

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#### **OUR MISSION**

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.

#### WHERE WE WORK

Colorado River Basin Desert Southwest Rocky Mountains CONNECT WITH US

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