



Shaping the Future of the West

Connections

2013
Annual Report



CONNECTIONS

shaping the future of the west

Connecting.

It is the essence, the history, the heartbeat of the Sonoran Institute. It is what distinguishes our unique approach to conservation and community development. And after 24 years of engaging with communities from Mexico to Montana—across varied projects, diverse communities, and changing landscapes—we know that connecting, not directing, is an approach that brings results that work and success that lasts.

Our beloved West is confronting urgent challenges. An unrelenting drought and looming water crisis demand new ways of thinking about and planning around this vital resource. The next chapter of growth and change in the West also calls for fresh approaches. The future of our cities and towns, our working farms and ranches, and our cherished natural areas hang in the balance as communities make far-reaching decisions about how they will grow and respond to change.

The Sonoran Institute's mission is to help communities navigate these difficult decisions by providing the experience, skills, and knowledge needed to inspire

informed choices. We specialize in convening at the local level, bringing all sides together to agree on a community's best path forward and then working alongside them as they take action.

We've learned from the hard lessons of the past. We've seen what happens when people lose sight of how every aspect of nature is connected to the rest of the world—how water diversions can devastate a fishing industry downstream; how boom-time rural development can bust a community's economy; how fragmentation of our iconic frontier and agricultural lands can jeopardize the heritage and allure of the West, and undermine the very qualities that make living here so appealing.

That's why the Sonoran Institute believes that community prosperity is inextricably linked to the well-being of the natural world, and that the best outcomes result when a community's actions bridge the needs of its people and its natural resources.

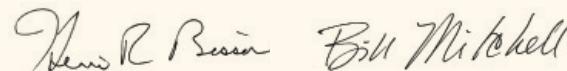
Thanks to your generous support, we are on the ground and helping attain these outcomes all across the West. Major achievements this year included

reaching a historic milestone in returning water to the Colorado River Delta, partnering on an innovative water conservation program that also helps restore groundwater supplies, and launching a comprehensive initiative designed to build communities that are livable, sustainable, and thriving. And that's just to start.

Connecting people and communities to each other, to the natural resources that define and sustain them, to the information they need and partners who can help, and to the values and vision they share for their community's future:

That's Sonoran Institute engagement, and it's working.

Sincerely,



Henri Bisson
Chairman, Board of Directors

Bill Mitchell
Immediate Past Chairman, Board of Directors

A local child in Mexico experiences water flowing in the Colorado River for first time in his life.

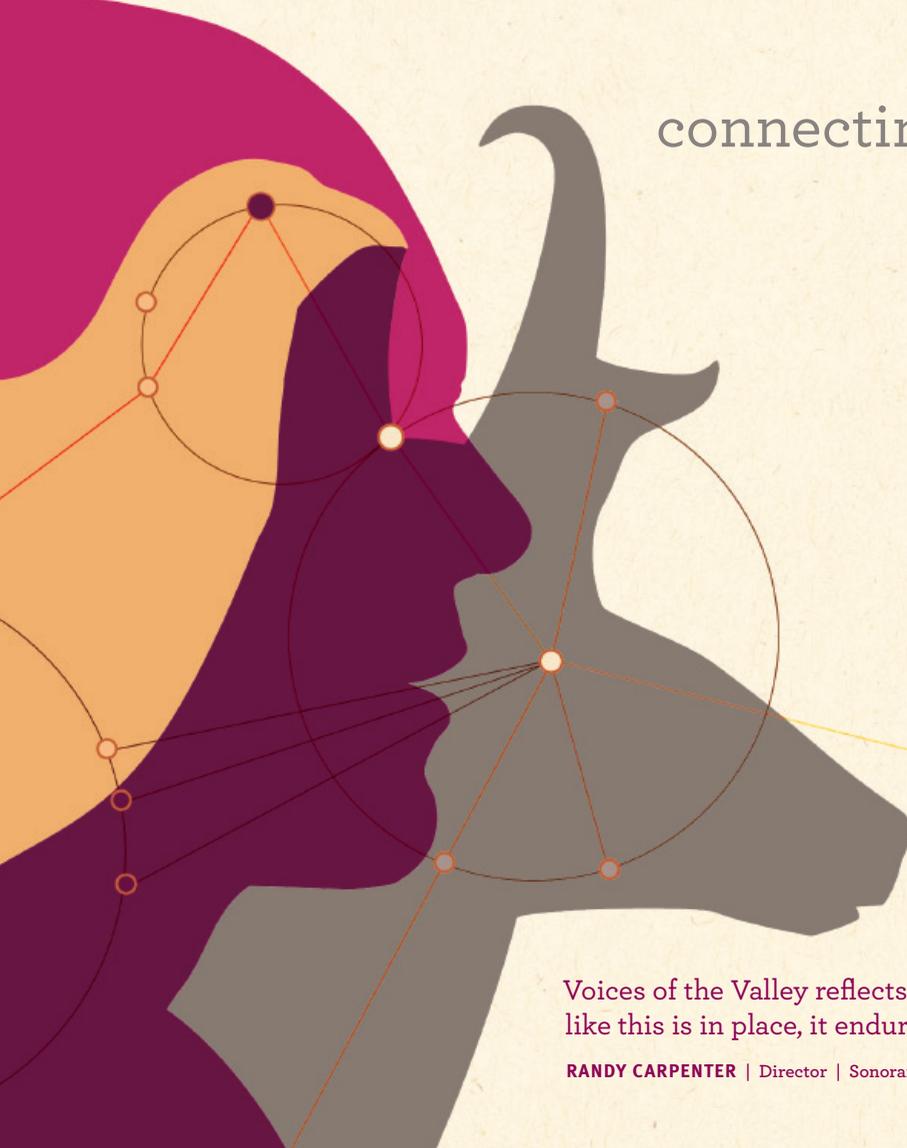
When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he feels it attached to the rest of the world.

JOHN MUIR | Scottish-American naturalist

A RIVER RUNS, ONCE AGAIN.

On March 23, 2014, the gates of the Morelos Dam situated just south of the U.S.-Mexico border opened to release some 105,000 acre-feet of water into the river corridor leading to the depleted Colorado River Delta. Part of a groundbreaking agreement between the United States and Mexico to allocate water to the Delta for environmental purposes, the “pulse flow” marked a major milestone in the Sonoran Institute’s longstanding efforts to bring water, life, and economic opportunities back to the Delta. While this two-month event represented less than one percent of annual Colorado River flows, the Sonoran Institute and partners hope it is just the beginning of long-term water commitments that will consistently reconnect the river with the sea.





connecting communities **TO THEIR VISION AND VOICE**

Local engagement, customized to each community's culture, heritage, challenges and opportunities, is the foundation of the Sonoran Institute's conservation and community development work. When invited, we help each community come together, unite on common goals, and grow leaders from within. This is an approach we know helps communities make their good ideas better, their good decisions stronger, and their good initiatives more enduring.

The Voices of the Valley organization in the Upper North Platte Valley in Carbon County, Wyoming, is a recent example of Sonoran Institute capacity building at its best. Residents of this quiet, rural county suddenly found themselves at the center of the country's wind energy and natural gas development activities. Facing an influx of thousands of workers, they knew they needed to get informed and engaged—fast—in order to have a say in the future of their valley. The Sonoran Institute nurtured what began as a loosely organized citizen's group into a full-fledged, independent organization with its own funding, its own board of directors and employees, and its own clear voice.

There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

MARGARET J. WHEATLEY | American Writer

Voices of the Valley reflects perfectly what the work of the Sonoran Institute is all about. Once an organization like this is in place, it endures and has the capacity to deal with any challenge that comes along.

RANDY CARPENTER | Director | Sonoran Institute Northern Rockies Program

VOICES OF THE VALLEY: With massive wind energy and natural gas projects planned in their county, Voices of the Valley is ensuring that community concerns are heard. The group spoke up when a federal study of the potential air quality impacts of a planned natural gas plant did not include their community. Voices of the Valley also commissioned a study showing that there is not enough housing in the area to accommodate new energy-related workers. Local government officials and energy project proponents are actively using the study results in crafting future growth plans for the valley and surrounding area.

The Sonoran Institute helped us realize that if you want to have an influence on outcomes, you have to take a balanced approach. Instead of being against all development, be in favor of guided development. Instead of having these new people distributed all throughout the valley, look for ways to direct them toward the town centers where they can better contribute to the local economy.

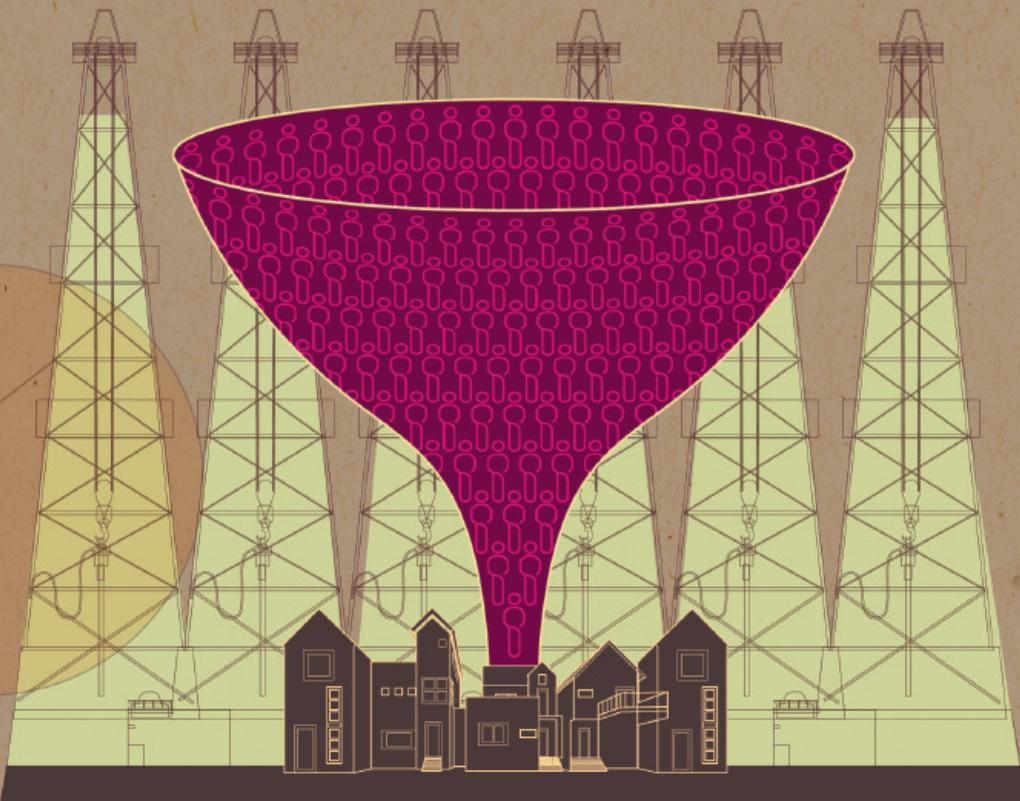
JIM STATES | Vice President | Voices of the Valley



THE RESILIENCY OF RIFLE: When Rifle, Colorado, decided to break free from boom-bust economic cycles, the Sonoran Institute was there to help the city shape its own future. By investing in downtown improvements, developing renewable energy, and diversifying its business base, Rifle has transformed itself into a more vibrant and resilient city.

The Sonoran Institute's approach to community building comes from a genuine care and concern for communities. It doesn't come in with a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead assesses what a community is attempting to accomplish and then applies its expertise and experience toward the goals of that community. It's surprising that this approach is unique, but it is.

MATT STURGEON | City Manager | Rifle, Colorado



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January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013

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The Sonoran Institute networks with communities, businesses and environmental groups to achieve smart growth. People trust us and think we're reasonable; therefore, we get results.

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I live in the West, and I love the West. I think the Sonoran Institute has the last best ideas for preserving what we love while planning for the inevitable growth and development.

JANE LERNER | Conservation Advocate | Sonoran Institute Board | Bozeman, MT

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IN-KIND

STEVE CLEMANS
LEWIS FRAMING STUDIO
LIGHTHAWK
PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS

The Sonoran Institute's commitment to connecting often disparate issues and diverse organizations to improve communities and landscapes means that my work makes a difference in the West.

MIA STIER | Sonoran Institute Staff | Phoenix, AZ



It has been a great satisfaction to see my contribution as a LightHawk volunteer pilot—working in partnership with the Sonoran Institute—bring clear progress toward the goal of breathing life into the Colorado River Delta once again. Of the dozens of conservation groups I have flown with throughout North America, I believe none is more effective than Sonoran Institute in making a real difference to pressing conservation issues.

WILL WORTHINGTON
LightHawk Volunteer Pilot | Carefree, AZ

connecting the WATER DROPS

Water. Nothing is more basic to our lives or more vital to our livelihoods. The Southwest's prolonged drought, wildfires, crop failures, and California's water emergency declaration have revealed just how quickly lack of water can threaten our well-being and our economy. What is harder to see is that our water systems, even with normal rainfall, are increasingly stressed. Dam building and diversions cause the Colorado River to no longer reach the sea, and the Santa Cruz River to run dry in parts of Arizona. The effects on the nearby communities, wildlife, habitat, and the people that depend on these water flows are devastating. Even worse, demands from our growing population are continuously depleting precious groundwater reserves that can take years, even decades, to recharge.

The foremost challenge for the West's future—water scarcity—is at our doorstep.

But how can we draw attention to the critical need to protect a river that barely flows or to conserve groundwater supplies that no one can see? The Sonoran Institute is “connecting the water drops” for people and communities from the headwaters of the West's major river systems to the sea.

Giving citizens a voice in projects that impact their communities is a vital part of community building in the West. In the Colorado River Delta, people sometimes don't even know there's a river, because they don't see it—they haven't experienced that in their lives. The process of reconnecting people with the river is critical not only to restoring the health of the Delta, but also for the opportunities of the people who live here.

FRANCISCO ZAMORA ARROYO | Director | Sonoran Institute Colorado River Delta Program

Restore: Our on-the-ground projects are restoring water quality, washes, river habitat, and groundwater supplies from Montana to Mexico.

Renew: Through education and volunteer activities, we are renewing the connection between people and their water systems to encourage long-term stewardship of vital water resources.

Reconnect: With innovative solutions to bring more water and life to the Colorado River Delta, we believe our ultimate goal of reconnecting the Colorado River with the sea is within reach.



The Sonoran Institute is leading on-the-ground efforts to **restore** river washes to encourage more water to replenish underground reserves. Through *Conserve to Enhance*, water customers donate savings from personal water conservation to fund this restoration work.

The Sonoran Institute and partners have launched *Raise the River*, a campaign to raise the \$10 million necessary to acquire enough water to **reconnect** the Colorado River with the sea.



Programs like *Adopt-the-River* renew an appreciation for and involvement in the Colorado River Delta. Over 30 local community groups are currently involved in the program, helping **restore** over 65 acres of habitat, maintain restoration sites, and install community park infrastructure.



To put your hands in a river is to feel the chords that bind the earth together.

BARRY LOPEZ | American Writer



Documenting the Santa Cruz River's fascinating history and cultural significance, our dynamic *State of the Santa Cruz* publications aim to renew community interest and inspire involvement in one of Arizona's major rivers. An inventory of the multifaceted conservation and cultural projects in progress on the river encourages communication and collaboration among the diverse organizations working to protect this important water system.



Using our trademark collaborative approach, the Sonoran Institute helped launch the *Middle Colorado Watershed Council* in Colorado, a partnership working to protect and build awareness about this vital watershed.

connecting communities WITH IDEAS THAT INSPIRE

The stakes couldn't be higher. Communities today are facing decisions that will determine the course of their future, and the future of the West we love. In many places in the Intermountain West, half of the homes and businesses that will exist 25 years from now have not yet been built. Once they are built, they are here to stay.

By connecting community leaders with forward-thinking planning principles and the latest research, we have a tremendous opportunity to shape our neighborhoods, communities, and regions to become stronger

economically—while at the same time protecting their distinctive character and natural assets.

Sonoran Institute-sponsored research finds compelling reasons for shifting away from the auto-oriented, suburban-focused building practices of the past, toward more walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods closer to the downtown. Our Community Builders program is spreading the word that “smart growth” not only creates great places to live, but also builds communities that are attractive to business and better able to preserve their open space and productive agricultural land.

In just its first year, Community Builders has engaged over 1,000 people through its webinar series in discussions about new ideas and creative options for community development. Another 100 community leaders participated in its eight-week Community Builders Leadership Institute training sessions.

The Sonoran Institute is changing the conversation about growth in the West. And, with more great, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods being built, we are seeing the results on the ground.



The future of the West remains unwritten. Our resources and heritage are not yet squandered, and can forever be preserved if we grow smartly today.

JILLIAN SUTHERLAND | Sonoran Institute Staff | Glenwood Springs, Colorado



THE COMMUNITY BUILDERS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE: builds partnerships and teaches community leaders how to effectively align planning and economic development. Participants from the public and private sectors form teams, and each team departs with an action plan for its community that is based on common goals and priorities.

This event will have a lasting effect on what we do in Gunnison. We came here as a county, two towns, a ski area, an entrepreneur, and a university. We are leaving as one valley with one voice.

RUSS FORREST, Gunnison County Assistant Manager, Gunnison County, Colorado, after attending a Community Builders Leadership Institute workshop



INTER-CONNECTIONS: The Sonoran Institute is using the Internet to connect communities with our expertise and with the collective knowledge of other communities across the West. We provide training and information through special websites, webinars, blogs, and social media sites. Websites like scotie.org, statetrustlands.org, and communitybuilders.net provide toolboxes of information and research, ideas, success stories, and technical support on issues specific to our region.



I eventually learned that I was not building and selling houses—I was selling a different, more convenient lifestyle to my customers.

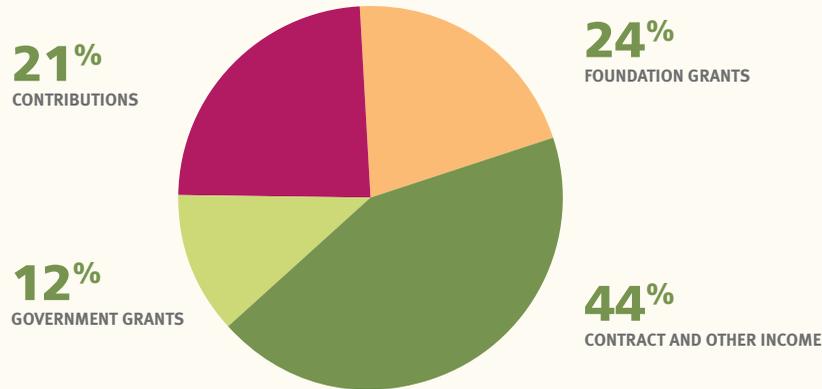
PAUL DEL ROSSI, a residential developer in Sheridan, Wyoming, speaking at the Community Builders Summit in Bozeman, Montana

Financial Summary

FY 2013: July 1, 2012 – June 30, 2013

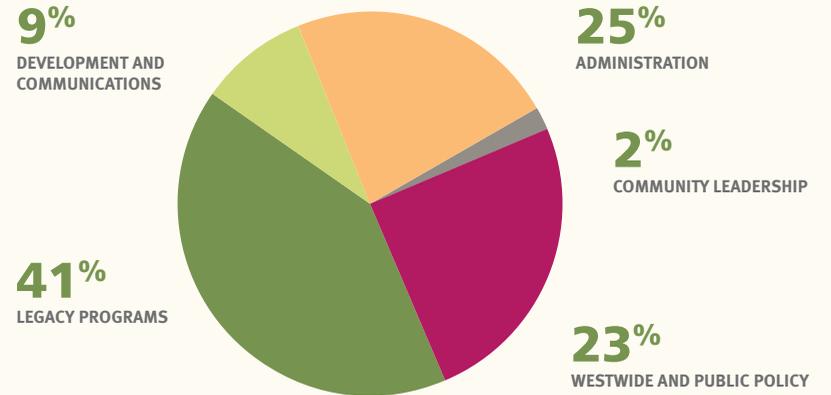
Revenue

Contributions	\$660,080	21%
Foundation Grants	\$760,518	24%
Government Grants	\$391,943	12%
Contract and Other Income	\$1,401,540	44%
	\$3,214,081 *	100%



Expenses

Legacy Programs	\$1,772,178	41%
Westwide and Public Policy	\$999,066	23%
Community Leadership	\$100,524	2%
Development and Communications	\$398,910	9%
Administration	\$1,087,261	25%
	\$4,357,939	100%



The Sonoran Institute is audited annually by Keegan, Linscott & Kenon, PC.

* In addition, resources for FY'13 include net assets of \$1,795,264 carried forward from previous years and restricted for use in this and future fiscal years.

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COLORADO RIVER DELTA LEGACY PROGRAM

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Dave Richins—Director (through July 2013)

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Stephanie Weigel

My commitment to Sonoran Institute comes from knowing that the “behind the scenes” work I do allows our team to protect the West that I have come to love.

RYAN VANDERO | Sonoran Institute Staff | Tucson, AZ

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SONORAN INSTITUTE MISSION AND VISION

The Sonoran Institute inspires and enables community decisions and public policies that respect the land and people of western North America. Facing rapid change, communities in the West value their natural and cultural resources, which support resilient environmental and economic systems.

Founded in 1990, the Sonoran Institute helps communities conserve and restore those resources and manage growth and change through collaboration, civil dialogue, sound information, practical solutions and big-picture thinking.

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