

COLORADO RIVER DELTA RESTORATION PROJECT



Shaping the Future of the West

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Colorado River Delta Legacy Program Evaluation

In late 2010, the Sonoran Institute contracted Blue Earth Consultants to perform an external assessment of the Colorado River Delta Legacy Program (previously the Upper Gulf of California Legacy Program). The goal of the evaluation was to determine strengths and weaknesses of the program, identify future opportunities and challenges, and provide recommendations to the program as it moves forward. Blue Earth Consultants produced a final report in June, 2011.

Blue Earth Consultants (BEC) implemented five primary activities to conduct the program assessment including a review of program documents, site visits, interviews, targeted research, and the development of an assessment ranking methodology. BEC made two trips to the Delta—one was a general tour of the Delta region and the Sonoran Institute’s restoration sites, and the other was to conduct in-person interviews with 12 informants. In total, 20 main surveys and 30 online surveys were completed by informants from multiple sectors: non-governmental organizations, academic, government, stakeholder, funder, and other.

To evaluate the success, challenges, and constraints of the Legacy Program, BEC assessed progress toward projected goals and outcomes (Fig.1), evaluated success and challenges of the program’s eight projects (Fig.2), and evaluated the overall strategic impact of the program. The evaluation indicated that Sonoran Institute is having a significant strategic impact in the region, most notably in environmental restoration, by increasing the number of key indicator species and improving habitat conditions. The program’s strategic impact also encompasses bringing awareness to conservation and restoration and influencing the environmental agenda in the region.



Sonoran Institute Restoration Specialists

Figure 1. Measure of Progress Towards the Program’s Ultimate (dark blue) and Intermediate (light blue) Outcomes

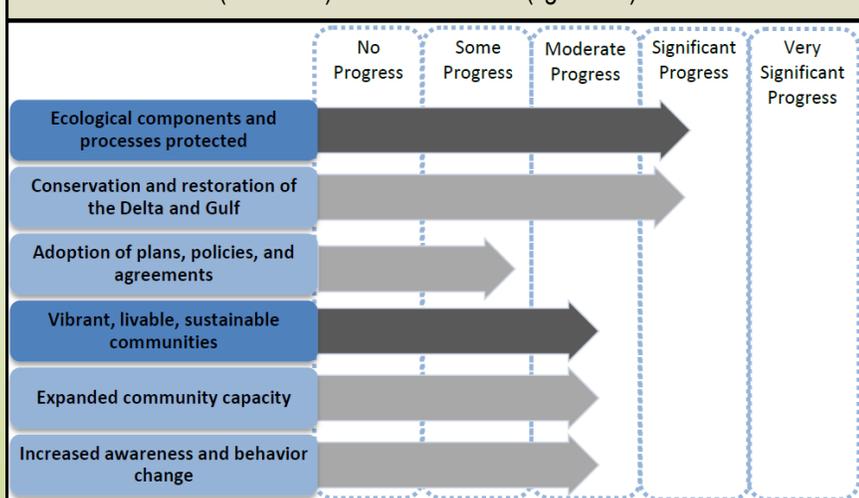


Figure 2. Summary of Delta Projects Assessment

Common Themes in Project Success:

- Strong partnerships with NGOs that are highly aligned in vision and goals
- Government buy-in and participation
- Strong leadership and coordination on the part of the Sonoran Institute
- Staff engagement and dedication
- Strong community engagement
- Financial support

Common Challenges and Constraints

- Staff time and expertise
- Securing adequate funding
- Availability of water
- Bi-national water politics
- Mexican political climate
- Governmental bureaucracy
- Managing expectations with partners

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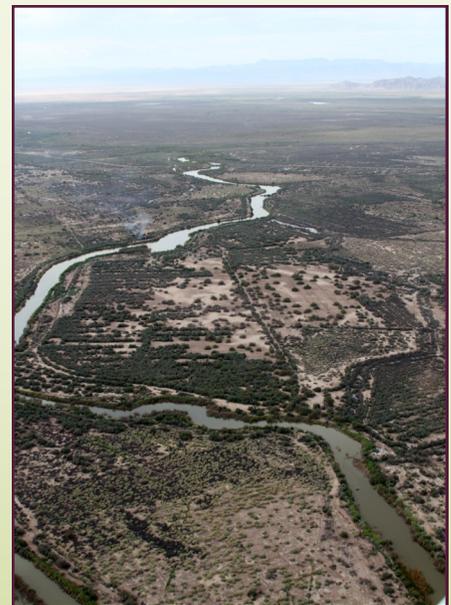
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Blue Earth Consultants provided recommendations for the program to move forward with current resources. Several are listed below.

1. **Rename the Program:** To better reflect the geography in which they work, Sonoran Institute should change the program title from Upper Gulf of California Legacy program to the Colorado River Delta Legacy program.
2. **Reduce the Number of Projects to Address Staff Capacity Issues:** The assessment showed that the Delta program currently does not have sufficient staffing capacity to effectively manage all of its existing projects. By transitioning one or more of their projects to governmental agencies, the program will be able to more efficiently manage current projects.
3. **Communicate Successes:** The Delta program does not often showcase what it has achieved and has limited media presence. Better visibility could help increase funding opportunities and expand its capacities.
4. **Scale up Impact:** The Delta program is widely recognized as having a strategic impact within the communities; however, the impact is not on a regional level, but rather at a site scale.
5. **Pursue Funding Opportunities from Mexican Sources:** By establishing an *Asociación Civil* (Civil Association) in Mexico, the Sonoran Institute would have more funding opportunities from Mexican governmental agencies and private donors.
6. **Develop Clear Vision and Long-Term Strategy for Program:** The Delta program should refine its vision and strategy to strengthen links between individual projects and outline a long-term plan for the organization's role and outcomes in the region.

Sonoran Institute's Response to the Evaluation

1. The program name has been changed to the Colorado River Delta Legacy Program, which is now reflected on our website and current publication materials.
2. All of the Sonoran Institute's Delta projects are essential components of our restoration strategy for the region. That said, we are focusing on fundraising with the intention of hiring additional staff to fill in project management gaps. We are also exploring the potential of transitioning one or more projects to governmental agencies.
3. The Delta program has significantly ramped up communications efforts in the last few months. Patagonia, the outdoor clothing company, is promoting our work through various outlets; a video was produced on our work in the Delta; we have developed an extensive social media presence; and we are considering hosting a media tour in the Delta for the upcoming year.
4. We are scaling up our restoration efforts in the Delta and have recently developed a funding prospectus to: 1) create a 1,200 acre nature preserve within the Colorado River riparian corridor; and 2) secure more water for the Rio Hardy which would subsequently reconnect the Colorado River to the sea.
5. The Sonoran Institute Mexico, A.C. was established on September 24, 2011. We will be moving forward with fundraising in Mexico in the coming months.
6. The Delta Program has created a **Plan of Action**, which illustrates how each of our projects fits into our wider conservation strategy for the Delta and describes our future goals and desired outcomes for restoration in the Delta. For more information, visit our website: www.sonoraninstitute.org.



The Colorado River Riparian Corridor