Binational Cooperation in Restoring the Colorado River Delta – Stakeholder and Government Engagement Across Borders

Gabriela Caloca & Osvel Hinojosa
A diversity of stakeholders in the Colorado River Delta

- Urban – Mexicali, Tijuana, Tecate, San Luis
- Border Region Industry
- Agriculture
- Tourism (river related, sport fishing, hunting)
- Fisheries
- Cucapá Tribe
- Environment
- Binational Context
Key strategies for Delta Restoration

• Research, planning, monitoring
• Outreach and community involvement
• Binational negotiations and public policy
• Water for the environment
• Protection of key sites
• Restoration
Creating a Social Support System for the Restoration of the Delta

1. Public support for restoration in the Delta

2. Policy work with government agencies both in Mexico and the US

3. Integrating a binational process for restoration
Community Outreach

Started in 1997

• Stakeholder involvement
• Participatory mapping
• Community-based restoration strategies
• Environmental education

Developing a Vision for Restoration
Community Outreach

Organization of local stakeholders as the voice of the river:

Ecological Association of the Hardy and Colorado Rivers (AEURHYC)

Tourist camps, fishermen, farmers, Cucapá tribe
Working with landowners to protect key wetland areas

Conservation easements at the Cienega de Santa Clara and El Doctor

4,000 acres
Working with farmers to design a strategy to allocate water for restoration

- Over 1,000 surveys
- Building a relationship with water managers and users
- Understanding water law, water markets and water delivery practices
Fresh Water Allocation for Restoration

- Voluntary, market-based strategies
- Acquisition of water rights in the Mexicali Valley
- Water Trust for the Restoration of the Colorado River Delta
Restauremos el Colorado

Pronatura Noroeste, Sonoran Institute, TNC, National Audubon Society

8,900 Acre-feet per year of permanent water rights for restoration
Policy Support for the Colorado Delta

Federal Biosphere Reserve in Mexico (1993)

Wetland of International Importance - Ramsar Site (1995)

Priority Wetland in Mexico & North America (1997)

Key Species: Yuma Clapper Rail (1999)
Binational Workshop with scientists, government officials, planners, conservationists and stakeholders

- Map of the possible
- Building a common understanding and vision for the delta
Public Support for Delta Restoration

• Involvement of all the key agencies and stakeholders at the region and at the national level

• Understanding the needs and motivations of the agencies

• Creating a vision for restoration – benefit for nature and for the people
Public Policy Support in Mexico

Progress in 20 years – from “not an issue” to a regional and national priority

National Water Law
• Recognition of environmental water uses and wetlands in 2004
• Floodplain land concessions for restoration
• Instream flow determination and water reserves
Public Policy Support in Mexico

• Work with the **National Water Commission (CONAGUA)** at the national and local level

• Environmental representation in the Watershed Council of Baja California

• Wetlands Working Group of CONAGUA

• Recognition as a top priority by multiple agencies

• Gain a seat at the table
Public Policy Support in the US

• Colorado River Basin wide effort

• Reaching out to key federal partners (USBOR, DOI, USFWS)

• Reaching out to the basin states, especially lower basin (CA, NV, AZ) and key stakeholders and water leaders

• Gain a seat at the table
Binational Process through IBWC

- 1944 International Water Treaty
Minute 319 – Historic agreement (2012)

5-year agreement

• Water conservation

• Shortage and drought

• Environmental component

Federal agencies, plus basin states and environmental organizations
Environmental component

Allocation of water for restoration of the delta
158,000 acre-feet in 5 years

Contributions from the US, Mexico and NGO’s
Media Coverage of the Pulse Flow in Mexico
361 media items during 2014

Liberan flujo pulso de agua ambiental en río Colorado

Se libera agua en el Río Colorado con fines ambientales

Revive caudal del río Colorado mediante acuerdo entre México y EU

Llega el "flujo" al Golfo

El gran río del Oeste llega al mar

Credit: Pronatura Noroeste and Karl Flessa
Media Coverage of the Pulse Flow in the US
263 media items during 2014

A pulse of life at the mouth of the Colorado
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

INFUSION OF RIVER WATER
HITS RESTORATION SITE

Water, wildlife surge back into once-parched
Colorado River delta
Los Angeles Times

Colorado River reaches gulf
Arizona Daily Star™

Credit: Karl Flessa
Sábados Familiares en Laguna Grande
¡Descubre el delta del río Colorado!

15 sep - 27 oct - 24 nov - 08 dic | 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
Minute 323 of the Colorado River

- Environmental Component – 9 years
  - Joint commitments of funds and water from NGO’s, US and Mexico
  - 210 K AF of water for environmental restoration in the delta
  - $9 million dollars for restoration
  - $9 million dollars for monitoring and science
Conclusions

Restoration is a human process – legal, economic and political context

Find common ground, understand the needs of agencies and stakeholders

Multiple tools: outreach, policy, media, field trips, diplomacy

Goal: create a social support system for restoration