How the United States and Mexico started to restore the Colorado River Delta

Colorado State University, October 7, 2019
Historic Colorado River Delta

Area:
• 1M acres
• 400,000 ha

River flows to the sea:
• 15M acre-feet
• 18,500 mcm

Freshwater influence in sea:
• 40 miles
• 65 km

Extensive estuary:
• 1.25 million acres
• 0.5M ha
Flows Below Morelos Dam 1950-2008
Making the case for Delta Revitalization

Just add water
convincing the decision-makers took years…
2008 US – MX Dialogue Begins

- NGOs stage meetings
- Key federal leaders want to improve relations
- States want rules for Mexico to share shortage
Based in Mexico, operates under Mexican law

Acquires Colorado River water rights in Mexicali Valley

Voluntary, market-based strategies

Delivers water for restoration

Current assets ~9000 af (11 mcm)

Colorado River Delta Water Trust

now managed by Restauremos El Colorado
• 1944 Treaty did not define Mexico’s shortages
• Mexico and US agree to reduced uses in times of short supply, surplus sharing in wet periods
• Binational investments in water conservation
• Mexico stores water in Mead
• Water exchanges
• Venue to explore new areas for cooperation
• Binational commitments to restoration in Colorado River delta
  – Pulse flow (federal water)
  – Base flows (NGO water)
  – $3M for restoration
  – Resources for monitoring
CHARACTERISTICS OF A PULSE FLOW

- **Magnitude of Peak**
- **Magnitude of Inflection Point**
- **Rise Rate**
- **Fall Rate**
- **Timing**
- **Peak Duration**
- **Pulse Duration**
Francisco Zamora, with support from Lighthawk
Francisco Zamora, with support from Lighthawk
Minute 319 successes

- 1214 acres (486 ha) restored
- Water delivery commitments met
- 3 monitoring reports published
- Evidence that birds are returning
- >100 Jobs created
- Substantial community engagement (1000’s/year)
HELP US BREATHE LIFE BACK INTO THE DELTA
Raise the River Organization

Steering Committee

- Binational Diplomacy Team
- Communications Team
- Fundraising Team
- Water Team
- Restoration Team
Environmental Commitments in Minute 323 (2018 – 2026)

- 210,000 acre-feet water for the environment (and possible to secure more)
- $9M for restoration
- $9M for science
- Mexico, United States, and NGOs share commitments equally