

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

## Rio Grande Forum: Building Collaboration for Aquatic Restoration



*The Coca-Cola Company*



**SOUTH CENTRAL**  
CLIMATE ADAPTATION SCIENCE CENTER

The binational Rio Grande/Río Bravo (RGB) Basin, a region totaling 355,500 sq. miles in the U.S. and Mexico, provides water for 16 million people. Water flows are decreasing due to climate change, overallocation, and increasing hydrologic variability, while demand is increasing. The geographic spread and binational nature of RGB management makes communication and basin-wide planning challenging. In 2017, stakeholders met to address these challenges at the first Binational RGB Water Forum, convened by the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative (DLCC) and World Wildlife Fund, in El Paso, Texas.



RGB in Big Bend National Park/Genevieve Johnson/Bureau of Reclamation

### KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

The RGB faces severe degradation through river impoundment, diversion, pollution, invasive species, and other concerns. The river is stressed by growing water demands as it flows through both urban and agricultural areas in the U.S. and Mexico. Urban growth is increasing the demand for water from the river, but the water is already over-allocated. Climate change is affecting the region, with increasing hydrological variability in rain, snow, and drought conditions. While there are many agencies, research institutions, Tribal authorities, and non-governmental organizations implementing projects to address these and other concerns in the basin, the binational management and size of the region make it difficult to share successes and challenges.

### PROJECT GOALS

- Share creative approaches to meet river management and water challenges in the RGB
- Inspire collaboration by highlighting successful conservation projects throughout the basin
- Build relationships and partnerships that will lead to long-term solutions

## (NOT) LOST IN TRANSLATION

With equal representation from Mexico and U.S. stakeholders, the Forum provided Spanish and English language translation for all presenters and printed materials throughout the conference.



Small Group Discussions/Genevieve Johnson/Bureau of Reclamation

## LESSONS LEARNED

The Forum produced many creative solutions to basin-wide management issues in areas ranging from water policy that promotes saved water credits to research on successful water conservation projects in irrigation districts across the Southwest.

Binational RGB Water Forum participants noted the benefits of testing projects on a small scale. In addition, some solutions may only be appropriate to specific geographies or parts of the basin.

This Forum was planned by staff from the partner organizations in addition to their regular responsibilities. Hiring professional facilitation for the planning committee was key. DJ Case's facilitation helped the committee work through a decision process that met everyone's goals in the limited time they had to plan the Forum.

While the DLCC ceased to operate shortly after the Forum was held, various stakeholders are now working on creating new opportunities to bring people together throughout the basin.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

**Planning and Partners:** The Binational RGB Water Forum took two years to plan. The planning committee included representatives from U.S. federal agencies, educational institutions in Mexico, funding agencies, and professional facilitators from DJ Case and Associates. This group continues to meet and support basin-wide planning.

**Brainstorming Benefits:** Forum participants proposed a number of solutions to address the RGB's challenges. Forum attendees agreed the basin's water management challenges need to be addressed by a diverse coalition, representing urban and rural, social and scientific, and industry and agricultural interests.

**Forum Satisfaction:** The Binational RGB Water Forum was a well-received event. Sixty-eight percent of attendees said they heard about solutions and innovations relevant to their work within the basin. Seventy-five percent said they formed new relationships among colleagues. Ninety-seven percent said they wanted to see another Forum convened. Many participants expressed a desire to continue the conversations throughout the basin.

**Technical Report:** The World Wildlife Fund completed the English and Spanish versions of the technical report summarizing Forum results by mid-September 2018.

## Collaborators

- Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative
- World Wildlife Fund
- See online for full list of partners

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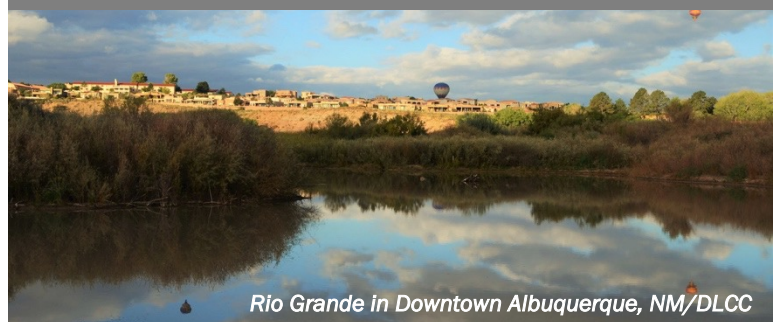
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## NEXT STEPS

- Create more partnerships and build relationships across sectors
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration and increase communications by putting research and projects together in one place
- Schedule regular video conferences and use social media and videos to educate a wider range of audiences
- Plan future basin-wide gatherings

For more information on this project, contact Genevieve Johnson: [gjohnson@usbr.gov](mailto:gjohnson@usbr.gov)



Rio Grande in Downtown Albuquerque, NM/DLCC