



# Sharing **innovations** for Sharing **a river**

## Update on the Río Grande / Río Bravo Binational Water Forum

**Hot** These two words often describe the arid region that stretches across the southern United States and northern Mexico. Yet this vast desert teems with life: cities, economies, agriculture, and biodiversity.

**Dry** The Rio Grande / Río Bravo is the lifeline of the region, supplying drinking water for more than 6 million people and irrigating about 2 million acres of land.

In recent years, the river basin has faced a number of challenges over water supply and quality. There is simply not enough water to go around to meet everyone's needs.

The 2017 Rio Grande / Río Bravo Binational Water Forum brought together more than 150 people from Mexico and the United States to share creative strategies that promote water balance among people and ecosystems to foster a healthy, resilient river.

Participants came from every portion of the expansive river basin — city officials, business leaders, university researchers, farmers and ranchers, and conservationists. The Forum drew a younger generation of participants: most had spent fewer than 10 years working on the river.



The deep commitment to making this a truly binational event distinguished the Forum from other efforts. Speakers presented in their native languages, with translators interpreting. Participants sat at round tables designed to promote meeting new people and hearing diverse perspectives. Occasionally, language differences created some bumps, but participants overall were pleased with the degree and quality of participation from both countries. One noted, “It was unclear to me beforehand how well this aspect of the Forum would work, but it was great.”

During the two days, participants heard from nearly three dozen speakers, who shared the issues they face and the work they do to overcome them. These speakers represented diverse organizations.

The Forum balanced the presentation of information with opportunities for discussion and beginning and deepening personal relationships.

Attendees shared about water availability and management, alongside related issues like climate, socioeconomics, and water flow. They also participated in solution-focused discussions on innovative water management and access for all, water quality, watershed restoration, water conservation, and basin and natural resources conservation.



### Organizations represented among speakers:

- 💧 The Coca-Cola Company
- 💧 International Boundary and Water Commission, Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP), Río Bravo Basin Council, Texas Comptroller Office, U.S. Forest Service
- 💧 Black & Veatch, Centro de Investigaciones de Materiales Avanzados (CIMAV), Colegio de Postgraduados, Instituto Mexicano de Tecnología del Agua, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Universidad de las Americas, University of California–Davis, University of New Mexico, University of Oklahoma, Utah State University
- 💧 El Paso Water Utility, Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 2, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Water Utility of Monterrey
- 💧 New Mexico Audubon Society, Pronatura Noreste, Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund

### Solutions discussed:

- 💧 Management of exotic invasive species
- 💧 Transferring of water rights and creating a water budget for ecological purposes
- 💧 Speaking of the river as a whole
- 💧 Water banking
- 💧 Purchasing, transferring, or leasing irrigation rights for environmental benefit
- 💧 Restoring and replenishing groundwater supplies
- 💧 Conserving water in municipalities
- 💧 Desalinating water
- 💧 Modeling water supply and consumption

## Respondents who felt inspired.

82%

“The brainpower and the expertise that was in that room. The type of studies and work that is being done, at present. The amount of things that I learned.”

## Participants who formed new relationships.

75%

“I will exchange data and results (research) with several people from USA and Mexico. Hopefully it could lead to bi-national research collaboration.”

“I am teaming with a small business that I met at the forum to pursue a restoration project together.”

## Participants who heard solutions, innovations, and tools to meet challenges of water management.

68%

“People began to speak of the river as a whole rather than as their reach of the river. This change in mindset could have far reaching impacts.”

## Attendees who would like to see another Forum happen. The majority would like it to happen in one or two years, and to be at least the same size if not even larger.

97%

“I would love to see this forum continue perhaps every other year - I think it was incredibly valuable to learn from others and think about the entire watershed as a whole system.”

## Next step priorities:

During the Forum, participants had the opportunity to prioritize next steps. Participants favored:

### Creating more partnerships

A. Build relationships across sectors. Be sure to involve decision makers and major users of water.

### Funding and conducting more research

B. Examine groundwater and water quality further. Interact with and understand users; apply research to their needs. Promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Increasing communications

C. Put research and projects together in one place. Schedule regular video conferences. Use social media and videos to educate a wider range of audiences.

### Identifying other stakeholders

D. Involve legislators at the state and federal levels and municipalities via presenting concrete proposals.

### Planning future gatherings

E. Participants were enthusiastic about holding a future Forum to cement partnerships and collaborate on solutions across the river. Organizers are exploring when and where a future Forum might be held.

### Summary of Forum Results

F. A report summarizing the main challenges, solutions, and other priorities identified during the Forum to be distributed to all participants by August 2018.

