



BORDERLANDS  
RESTORATION  
NETWORK



SONORAN  
FIELD  
COURSE



2023 REPORT





**T**his year 12 young professionals from Hermosillo, Ciudad Obregón, and Moctezuma, Mexico, participated in the Sonoran Field Course. Over nine intensive days, participants, ages 19-33, were immersed in a comprehensive curriculum focused on holistic approaches to the ecological challenges of the southern Arizona and northern Sonora borderlands region.

The field course is designed to inspire the next generation of environmental leaders in the Sky Islands. This experience provides an opportunity for young professionals in the region

to learn from diverse subject experts, receive hands-on experiential learning, and gain deeper understanding of the socio-environmental aspects of conservation in the borderlands by connecting with others and the land.

The course included various lectures, workshops, field trips and hands-on learning opportunities covering a wide breadth of topics spanning technical skills in watershed restoration, native plant propagation and seed pelletization, permaculture, cross border collaboration, humanitarian aid, and the fundamentals of building a restoration based economy.

## FACILITATORS

**JORGE  
CHACÓN**



**IVANNA  
PAOLETH  
TAUTIMEZ**



**ANAYS  
BLANCO**







“Without a doubt, the Sonoran Field Course is one of the best courses I have attended. Not only because of the great information that was shared, but also because of the great experiences.”



**JOSÉ LUIS SALAZAR,**  
SFC PARTICIPANT



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## RESTORING THE SONORAN DESERT

Participants completed a nature walk with founders of Caminantes del Desierto, a nonprofit organization that promotes the care and restoration of the Sonoran Desert for future generations. At Cerro Johnson, a mountain range that is preserved by the local government, participants learned how the organization coordinates volunteers to pick up trash, plant native trees and wildflowers, and provides educational workshops.

Caminantes also showcased their passive rainwater harvesting efforts within the medians of the local highway by working with the local government to install curb cuts that collect rainwater, mitigating flooding and surface water runoff. Berms, swales, basins, and compost work together to support native vegetation. These projects beautify the city while positively impacting water, environmental, and human systems.





## RESTORATIVE ECONOMIES & HUMANITARIAN AID

Throughout the program, students toured various locations to network with business owners, nonprofit leaders, and knowledge sharers. Participants toured the Centro de Atención al Migrante Exodus (CAME) with Frontera de Cristo in Agua Prieta, and completed maintenance tasks on the property to support humanitarian work. CAME is a newly expanded migrant resource center that can host up to 100 people per day to provide shelter, meals, and resources to those recently deported.

Café Justo (Just Coffee) is a fair trade plus coffee cooperative, established to create an alternative to migration for coffee farmers in southern Mexico by selling freshly roasted coffee to individuals, churches, and organizations across the US at a fair and just price. The coffee farms are in Chiapas, Mexico, and the roasting facilities and coffee shop are in Agua Prieta, Sonora. Participants visited the sister organization, Café Justo y Más, to learn more about how the organization supports a restoration-based economy. Participants learned about the business model and saw first hand how the coffee is processed, packaged, and distributed.

Douglaprieta Trabaja, located in both Douglas, Arizona and Agua Prieta, Sonora collaborates to assist individuals and

families in colonias populares, or poor neighborhoods, by developing local capacities for economic self-sufficiency. Participants toured with the women who run the cooperative learning about the items they make, such as jewelry and bags, to sell to support the center.

Participants learned about sustainable food security at the centerpiece of Douglaprieta Trabaja, a permaculture demonstration site designed to teach families sustainable food production techniques including gardening, aquaculture, and small livestock raising to help reduce the cost of living and build a culture of support for neighbors in order to reduce dependency on weak job markets, government assistance, charity, and border crossing.

The center also provides carpentry workshops for migrants and locals utilizing recycled materials to teach skills that could help them find valuable employment in their hometowns.







“My experience at the Sonoran Field Course was great! It allowed me to recognize that ecological restoration is what I want to dedicate myself to.”



**ADRIANA QUIÑÓNEZ,**  
SFC PARTICIPANT



## **BIODIVERSITY IN THE SKY ISLANDS: CUENCA LOS OJOS**

Throughout the course, attendees visited and camped at various ranches owned by Cuenca Los Ojos (CLO), a 121,000 acre protected area in the Sky Islands of Sonora, Mexico. They learned how CLO staff are stewarding the desert wetlands, open grasslands, mountain ranges, and the importance of restoring watersheds through erosion control and sustainable ranch management. Participants also learned about the biodiversity of CLO, biological corridors, and were able to walk the beautiful landscapes that species like ocelot, black bears, and jaguars roam.







“The course was very good from beginning to end, from the content and the way in which it is taught by each one of those involved, to the places that we were able to visit and discover. I really liked being able to meet so many people with different perspectives and backgrounds.”

**ANDRÉS VERVER  
VARGAS MÉNDEZ,  
SFC PARTICIPANT**



## NATIVE PLANTS & AGAVES FOR BATS

Francesca Claverie and Perin McNelis from Borderlands.Nursery & Seed, BRN's native plant program, led a workshop about native plants and the operations of the nursery and seed lab. Participants were interested to learn more as there is no access to restoration quality native plant material in their area.

Participants learned about seed collection, cleaning, and proper seed storage as well as different plant life cycles and germination times. They also learned about seed germination techniques to grow them in a greenhouse setting.

After learning about healthy soil and native plant data collection, participants got their hands in the dirt to plant agave seeds, transplant agave, and made seed balls contributing to BRN's agave for bats collaboration with Bat Conservation International to produce 2,000 *Agave palmeri* to support migratory bats.

## ARTS & ECOLOGY

Ceramics artist and sculptor, David Tarullo, led an art and ecology section of the course as a part of his residency project with the Artists At Work borderlands program, for which BRN served as an organizational partner alongside Border Arts Corridor. This workshop introduced the students to theories of sculpture and design, natural building techniques, and incorporated hands-on learning where students collaborated to create two large living sculptures using carrizo, cob, and native seed balls.

Carrizo is an invasive species that was removed from Cuenca Los Ojos and served as the primary structural component of the sculptures. The workshop aimed to reframe how we think about invasive species by viewing them as a potential resource, therefore incentivizing removal and ongoing tending practices. The art and ecology workshop offered students an interdisciplinary approach to connecting with ecology while simultaneously inspiring environmentally responsible creative practices.







# THANK YOU

## PARTNERS

Artists At Work  
Borderlands Nursery & Seed  
Café Justo  
Centro de Atención al Migrante Exodus  
Centro de Recursos para Migrantes  
Colectivo Caminantes del Desierto  
Cuenca Los Ojos  
DouglaPrieta Trabaja  
Frontera de Cristo  
Rancho El Aribabi

## GUEST SPEAKERS

Leonela Báez, Escuela Palo Alto  
Omar Caballero, Cuenca Los Ojos  
Ever Castro, Cuenca Los Ojos  
Tonatiuh Castro, Dirección General de Culturas Populares  
Francesca Claverie, Borderlands Nursery & Seed  
Adrián González, Café Justo  
Luis Ignacio González, Colectivo Caminantes del Desierto  
Eduardo Gracia Escalante, Borderlands Restoration Network  
Gerardo Lagarda, Cuenca Los Ojos  
Gustavo Adolfo Maldonado, Nuestra Vida Verde  
Miriam Maldonado, Frontera de Cristo  
Perin McNelis, Borderlands Nursery & Seed  
José Manuel Pérez, Cuenca Los Ojos  
Adalberto Ramos, Centro de Atención al Migrante Exodus  
Germán Robles, Rancho El Aribabi  
Rosalina Sagaste, DouglaPrieta Trabaja  
Jordan Sene, Borderlands Restoration Network  
Citlali Sierra, Colectivo Caminantes del Desierto  
Rodrigo Sierra Corona, Borderlands Restoration Network  
Dave Tarullo, Artists At Work

## FUNDERS

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**SONORAN FIELD COURSE**

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