



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Desert Museum Announces Prestigious Conservation Award Winners

**Tucson, AZ** (July 3, 2014) The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum recognizes individual's significant achievements in conservation with its *Sonoran Desert Conservation Award*. This year's recipients are the bi-national team of Osvel Hinojosa Huerta, Director of the Water and Wetlands Program for Pronatura Noroeste, Mexico, and Jennifer Pitt, Director of the Colorado River Project for the Environmental Defense Fund.

This prestigious award is presented only every one or two years to those whose work has had a significant impact on conservation in the Sonoran Desert Region. This year's awardees were chosen in recognition of their careers of distinguished dedication to conservation in the Sonoran Desert and most recently for their collaborative efforts to return Colorado River water to the Colorado River Delta. Their individual and impressive endeavors as well as their bi-national collaboration are a model for conservation efforts in this region.

According to Meredith de la Garza Treviño (Executive Director, Niparajá) who nominated the pair, they have been instrumental in the implementation of strategies to reestablish water flows in the Colorado River Delta. In the past, the Colorado River, at its delta, used to form a vast and lush oasis that sustained a high diversity of life and vibrant local economies. Irrigation and water demand from the growing populations of the southwestern U.S. and Northwestern Mexico reduced the delta to almost nothing and left the river with no connection to the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez).

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“These two were tireless in their efforts and instrumental in putting water for ecosystem restoration on the agenda,” states de la Garza. With Osvel Hinojosa’s expertise in healthy river ecosystems and Jennifer Pitt’s expertise in border environmental issues, legal policies and economics of water use and transfers, the pair was an essential part of a larger team that secured an historic deal which guarantees flows to restore the Colorado River delta.

The award itself, a spectacular sculpture of a Mexican wolf by Mark Rossi and an accompanying Certificate of Achievement, will be presented on August 2, 2014 at an evening event at the Desert Museum. “The public is invited to attend and the evening’s activities, which will highlight the work of many regional conservation organizations,” adds Debra Colodner, Director of the Museum’s Conservation Education & Science Department. Desert Museum visitors will be able to talk with conservation organization representatives and learn how to become involved in conservation efforts.

This year’s nominations were made by regional conservation organizations from both sides of the international border. A set of outstanding nominations were evaluated by a committee consisting of Rick Brusca (University of Arizona and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Emeritus), Rodrigo Medellin (Instituto de Ecologia, Universidad Autónoma de Mexico), Sherry Barrett (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and the past award winners Jorge Torre and Chuck Huckelberry.

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The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum is one of the nation’s leading outdoor, living museums, featuring more than 230 animals and 1,200 varieties of desert plants. Its purpose is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the bi-national, Sonoran Desert Region. The Museum is located at 2021 N. Kinney Road, in Tucson Mountain Park adjacent to Saguaro National Park (West). It is open daily year round with operating hours varying by season. Call (520) 883-2702 or visit [www.desertmuseum.org](http://www.desertmuseum.org) for more information.

### **SONORAN DESERT CONSERVATION AWARD CRITERIA**

1. Nominee has shown outstanding, long-term leadership and commitment to the conservation of the Sonoran Desert Region.
2. The actions of the nominee, including programs, projects, investments, legislation, strategies, plans or research, have significantly contributed to the long-term conservation of the Sonoran Desert Region.
3. The nominee has educated/informed large audiences, including other conservation biologists, the general public, or those making public policy, on conservation and wise stewardship of the Sonoran Desert Region.
4. The nominee has enhanced coordination and collaboration among federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and/or other partners.
5. The work of the nominee has positively affected land (or water) use policy, wildlife populations, habitat protections, esthetic values, public attitudes, cultural conservation, climate change policies/adaptation or community economics.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Osvel Hinojosa Huerta** is the Director of the Water and Wetlands program for Pronatura Noroeste. He obtained his Ph.D. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Arizona and his B.Sc. in Biochemical Engineering and Marine Sciences from ITESM (Monterrey Institute of Technology) Guaymas Campus. Dr. Hinojosa has been working in multiple conservation and research projects in northwestern Mexico since 1997, in particular in riparian and wetland areas of the Sonora Desert, first with the Center for Conservation and use of Natural Resources of ITESM Guaymas, then with the School of natural Resources of the University of Arizona, and finally with Pronatura Noroeste.

Some of his recent activities include the evaluation and recovery of endangered species, the implementation of community-based restoration projects, and the creation of conservation partnerships between government agencies and local communities. Recently, he has been a leader in the efforts to restore the Colorado River Delta, including the implementation of strategies to restore river flows and activities to recover native riparian vegetation. He is part of the binational coalition that facilitated the signing of Minute 319 of the International Water Treaty between Mexico and the United States, which guarantees water flows to restore the Colorado River Delta, co-chairing the Environmental Workgroup. In 2012, the National Geographic Society named him an *Emerging Explorer*.

**Jennifer Pitt** directs the Environmental Defense Fund's efforts on the Colorado River, to protect and restore the delta and reform water policy. She works with water users throughout the Colorado River Basin to develop practical programs to restore river habitats and, critically, to dedicate water to environmental resources. Her expertise includes U.S.-Mexico border environmental issues, the legal and policy framework for the Colorado River management, the economics of water use and water transfers, and the science of river restoration.

Jennifer participates and leads multi-party negotiations including a successful effort to find common ground between water users. Together with Osvel, she is also part of the binational coalition that facilitated the signing of Minute 319 of the International Water Treaty between Mexico and the U.S.