

# Santa Cruz River Community Engagement and Outreach Fund Impact Report

December 2023



## Teacher Training & Student Field Experiences

During the summer of 2023, the second group of BIORETS teachers were immersed in Santa Cruz River research, connecting with community partners, and formulating how to bring the Santa Cruz River into their classrooms. The BIORETS Program provided over 2,000 hours of direct instruction from Dr. Michael Bogan, graduate students, community partners, and other members of the BIORETS team. Our 2023 cohort of teachers have nearly 700 students in their classrooms.

During the 2023-24 school year, over 500 students will have Santa Cruz River field experiences directly linked to their teachers' participation in BIORETS. The field trips are coordinated by Jacqueline Bruhn, and this reach would not be possible without her (the previous school year we only had 70 students visit the river). In addition, over 200 students will participate in Pima County's [Living River of Words](#) program after BIORETS connected teachers to the program this summer.



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## Capacity Building

The [Santa Cruz River Connections](#) website was successfully launched by Jacqueline in mid-August to coincide with Santa Cruz River Dragonfly Day publicity and web traffic generated by links on the website of our partner organization, the Sonoran Institute.



Our new website features current [news](#) stories, short [dispatches](#), [materials](#) for teachers, and an incredible [list](#) of our community partners. One of the main goals of the website is to showcase the wide range of [events](#) taking place along the Santa Cruz River. In just over 3 months, we have highlighted 22 different community events. Publicizing these events helps to better connect our community with the river that sustains and nourishes our city's wildlife and culture.

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## Community Outreach



We celebrated the 5th annual [Dragonfly Day](#) on the Santa Cruz River in September! Coordinated by the Sonoran Institute, and co-planned by Michael and Jacqueline, the event brings together UArizona, Tucson Water, Pima County Natural Resources, and Mission Gardens. This year, we expanded our scope from a single day to an entire month of activities. Our event was so popular that the [Bugs & Brews](#) kick-off event literally had a line out the door!



We also offered a total of 6 different tours to 120 dragonfly enthusiasts at 3 locations: Mission Gardens, Heritage Project in downtown Tucson, and Marana Heritage River Park. Because of Jacqueline's extensive outreach to our teacher community, middle and high school students as well as teachers from BIORETS attended tours. Donor-supported PhD student Rocío Guzmán, a member of Michael's lab, also led our first Spanish-language dragonfly tours!



To engage the public all month, a community science [bioblitz](#) took place as well. People were encouraged to record their dragonfly sightings all month using iNaturalist. Our new website included information on how to photograph dragonflies and add your observations to iNaturalist. These efforts resulted in hundreds of new dragonfly observations by over 40 community members.

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## What's Next?

We are going to be busy at the river this spring semester! We have 6 teachers bringing nearly 400 students to the river, including our first trip with students from the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind. Recruitment for our next cohort of BIORETS teachers will begin in February, with the research portion of the program starting in June for the 10 selected teachers. And our Earth Grant intern Raven Alvarez, a freshman at Tohono O'odham Community College, is busy creating video content about the Santa Cruz. Raven's videos will document biodiversity and cultural history along the Santa Cruz River, from the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation to Marana.

