

# Development Plan for the Río Sonora Special Economic Zone

## *Policies, Programs and Projects for a Competitive and Sustainable Region*

### Executive Summary

The Río Sonora Special Economic Zone was created in February 2017 by the Sonora state legislature. The creation of this zone was one of a series of responses to one of the most significant environmental disasters in the history of Mexico when a large quantity of copper sulfate was accidentally released into a tributary of the Río Sonora in August 2014.

In the fall of 2017, the state of Sonora requested technical assistance from the North American Development Bank to draft an economic development plan for the Río Sonora region. Since its creation in 1994, the Bank has managed a portfolio of loans, grants and technical assistance for U.S.-Mexico border communities. The Bank in turn asked the North American Research Partnership—which had coordinated the Arizona-Sonora Environmental Strategic Plan in late 2016—to lead the assessment and organization of the development plan. The state government’s Interagency Commission for the Río Sonora Special Economic Zone formally approved the Plan on December 14, 2017.

The Río Sonora region is a unique rural area within the state of Sonora. Eight *municipios* comprise the area: Bacoachi, Banámichi, Huépac, Ures, Baviacora, San Felipe de Jesús, Aconchi, and Arizpe. Approximately 23,000 people live in these eight *municipios*, which include several towns founded during the seventeenth century.

While a number of factors have kept the area from reaching its full development potential, attention to a number of public policies and related efforts will be key to the area’s development. The area already has a number key assets in terms of agriculture, ranching, mining and tourism, which will undoubtedly aid in facilitating the sustainable development of the region.

This development plan articulates the major strategic efforts in policies, programs and projects of the Sonora state government that will together enhance the development of the Río Sonora region. **Enabling policies** such as the Río Sonora branding, the Zona Libre Río Sonora, and creating new efficiencies in municipal government will be strategic efforts that will take time but which are likely to yield significant results in the area’s development.

**Multi-year, cross-cutting programs** will be the heart and soul of the plan; infrastructure is key, and packaging a number of key infrastructure efforts together in areas such as health, education, and highway infrastructure as the *Programa de Infraestructura del Río Sonora* (PIRS) will allow the state government to focus efforts across agencies over the course of several years. And finally, a number of **key region-wide projects** will serve to create momentum for the plan’s implementation toward key outcomes and help to build the area’s unique regional, national and international brand.

At the same time, it is understood that the plan’s activities will evolve over the 15-year period when the plan is in effect. For this reason, the Interagency Commission and the Technical Committee created to oversee the Special Economic Zone will have numerous opportunities to review the State’s progress under the plan and make course corrections on the plan if needed. In addition, regular and periodic calls for proposals and public forums will serve to connect the public to the Plan’s development and provide a forum for public input and feedback. In this way the Plan will build a legacy in the state and, it is hoped, serve as a model for other Special Economic Zones in Mexico.