



Greetings!

Borderlands Restoration Network began by recognizing a problem, realizing someone else had found a solution, and hosting a potting luck party. Let me explain.

I visited Arizona a few times as a boy, and I still have fond memories of adventures on my uncle's ranch -- riding a horse three miles to get the mail, encountering a mountain lion, and being thrown from the horse on my way back to headquarters. But it wasn't until 1971, when I accepted a position as an Assistant Professor at the University of Arizona, that I really began to fall in love with the desert grasslands and the plants and animals of southeastern Arizona and northern Mexico. I was very fortunate my job at UA was half-time teaching and half-time research, meaning they actually paid me to do what I loved most, studying the ecology and biological diversity of the borderlands region. I spent almost 15 very rewarding years studying the ecology of grassland birds and exploring the backcountry on both sides of the border.

In 1984 I took a job back east at my undergraduate alma mater, the University of Georgia, and I hardly visited Arizona until I moved back in 2010. I was delighted to return but disappointed that many of my favorite places had virtually disappeared. Stretches of the Santa Cruz River and Sonoita Creek that had perennial flow in 1970 had become dry riverbeds lined with dead cottonwoods. In my absence, bighorn sheep had gone extinct in the Santa Catalina mountains, there were no more masked bobwhite quail north of the border, two species of native fish had disappeared from Sonoita Creek, I couldn't find any Botteri's sparrows in places where they had been common thirty years earlier, and several of my study sites had become subdivisions.

Shortly after moving back to Arizona, I read an account in the Patagonia Regional Times of an interview with an elderly Patagonian who said that as a young girl she had to ford three creeks on her walk to school. She was among the few people old enough to recall that most of Sonoita Creek north of Patagonia flowed year-round until about the 1930s. I mostly meet newcomers who think the creeks here have always been dry. I did come across one old-timer who knew that the creek dried up but told me, "There's nothing you can do about it." Then I met Valer Clark, who did something about it.



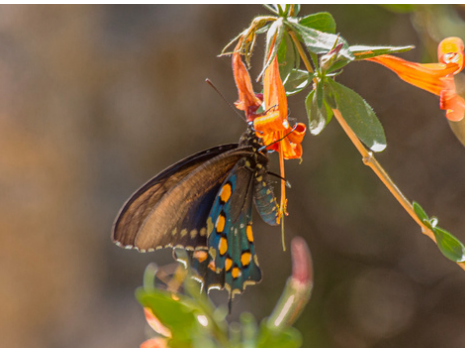
Valer has restored thousands of acres of grasslands and riparian woodlands and returned perennial flow to mountain streams on both sides of the border, including almost 20 miles of the Rio San Bernardino. I had been away from Arizona for long enough to recognize a problem when I returned, and Valer had identified a solution and inspired the creation of Borderlands Restoration Network.



Then there were the potting luck parties. Janice, my wife, and I built our first house in Patagonia in 2010 using adobe brick made on-site. There were extra bricks, so we created a little greenhouse where we later hosted the first potting luck party. The idea was to see how much interest there was in growing native plants for pollinators to bring back habitat in the Patagonia community. I invited everyone I knew in town, and quite a crowd showed up for a potluck meal and a pollinator plant potting party. Surprised by the size of the group, I was a bit overwhelmed before I realized there was someone in attendance who knew more than I did about growing plants. Kate Tirion, a permaculturist, rolled up her sleeves and saved the day with everyone going home with plants to put in their home gardens.



The idea caught on, and we had a couple more potting luck parties, including one hosted by ecologists Gary Nabhan and Laura Monti that featured local celebrity master musician and gardener Petey Mesquitey. At the time, Borderlands Restoration Leadership Initiative started as an entirely volunteer community effort. It had no money or facilities but plenty of enthusiasm and an idea that something could be done to restore the landscape. These efforts and the care and dedication of concerned citizens created what we now know to be Borderlands Restoration Network.





Over the years, I have watched Borderlands Restoration Network thrive and mature thanks to the hard work and dedication of staff, numerous volunteers, donors, foundations, and government and nonprofit partners. We now have an exceptionally talented and hard-working paid staff dedicated to scaling up from those original potting parties to restore borderland ecosystems on both sides of the border.

I am humbled by and grateful to all that have supported this idea making it a reality beyond what we imagined. I am proud to be a founder of BRN and see what it has become. I am certain that we can continue to restore the borderlands and work with others to protect these beautiful and important landscapes for generations to come.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'R' followed by a horizontal line.

Ron Pulliam  
*Founder*  
*Borderlands Restoration Network*