The University of Arizona and its partners in the Colorado River Minute 319 Binational Partnership have been awarded a Department of Interior 2013 Partners in Conservation Award.

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell presented awards to 20 public-private partnerships for achieving exemplary conservation results through cooperation and community engagement. The ceremony was held at Interior headquarters in Washington, D.C., last week.

“The Department of the Interior is proud to recognize the accomplishments of those who are innovating and collaborating in ways that address today’s complex conservation and stewardship challenges,” Jewell said in a prepared statement. “These partnerships represent the gold standard for how Interior is doing business across the nation to power our future, strengthen tribal nations, conserve and enhance America’s great outdoors and engage the next generation.”

Ed Glenn, professor emeritus of soil, water and environmental science, accepted the award on behalf of the UA.

Colorado River water has been the subject of controversy, dispute and litigation along the U.S.-Mexico border for decades. Minute 319 to the 1944 Water Treaty has been touted as one of the most innovative negotiated agreements between nations to include environmental river flows.

After years of intense negotiation, a historic partnership agreement between the U.S., Mexico, the Colorado River Basin states, U.S. water districts, and environmental organizations from both countries was signed in November 2012.

The agreement is a framework for cooperation on Colorado River management to provide multiple benefits for water users in both countries, including environmental flows to the delta. Minute 319 identifies criteria for sharing of future water shortages and surpluses between the two countries, allows storage of Mexican water in Lake Mead and funds improvements to Mexican irrigation infrastructure.

"We are honored to be one of the many partners that contributed to the signing and implementation of Minute 319," said Karl W. Flessa, UA professor of geosciences. "This award recognizes the UA's leadership in understanding water and the arid environment."

"This agreement provides the first allocation of environmental water to the Colorado River Delta in Mexico and provides for a scientific evaluation of these environmental flows."

UA alumni Peter Culp (J.D., 2001) of Squire Sanders, a law firm, and Osvel Hinojosa-Huerta (Ph.D., 2006) of Pronatura Noroeste, a Mexican environmental conservation group, are representatives of other organizations that are part of the Minute 319 partnership.

Many other UA students and researchers have conducted research that contributed to current knowledge about the delta. Many federal and state agencies, non-government organizations, and the UA Water Resources Research Center have supported UA research about the Colorado River Delta over the years.

Sonoran Institute, a Tucson-based nonprofit conservation organization, is one of the Minute 319 partners.