

**Francisco "Paco" Abarca**  
International and Borderland Program Manager  
Arizona Game and Fish Department  
5000 West Carefree Highway  
Phoenix, AZ 85023  
OFFICE: +1 (623) 236-7580  
CELL: +1 (602) 761-0193  
e-mail: [fabarca@azgfd.gov](mailto:fabarca@azgfd.gov)



Bio  
May 2026

Francisco J. Abarca is the International and Borderland Program Manager for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. He was hired in 1990 as the Native Fish Program Manager, with statewide responsibilities for protecting and recovering Arizona's native fishes. Two years later, he moved into the position he currently holds. Francisco's primary responsibility is to coordinate, plan, and implement wildlife research, conservation, and management projects between the State of Arizona and Mexico. Over the last 35 years, he has served as an active member and key advisor of various working groups including several endangered species recovery teams, *the Arizona-Mexico Commission*, *the Border Governors Conference*, *the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation*, *the Science Office of the American Embassy in Mexico City*, *Mexico's Alliance for Jaguar Conservation*, *the Mexico-U.S. Joint Committee on Wildlife and Plant Conservation*, and *the Canada/Mexico/U.S. Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management*.

Francisco served as a scientific advisor during the Obama administration for the *Good Neighbor Environmental Program* whose mission is to advise the President and Congress of the United States on environmental issues along the U.S. border with Mexico.

Over the last 30 years, Francisco has led an effort in wetland training and capacity building in Mexico, with assistance from wetland scientists and managers from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. His training model has been replicated by an international program to train wetland managers in Iraq involved in wetland restoration.

Francisco received his bachelor's degree from the National University in Mexico City in 1986 (aquatic ecology and fisheries management) and his master's degree from Arizona State University in 1989 (spatial and dietary overlap between native and nonnative fish species). His professional interests include recovery of endangered species, biological diversity, bird and wetland ecology and conservation, game management, environmental education, and international wildlife policies and regulations. At the species level, Francisco is or has been involved in research and management projects on native fishes, jaguar, Sonoran pronghorn, black-tailed prairie dog, Mexican wolf, white-tailed and mule deer, desert tortoise, thick-billed parrot, golden eagle, Gould's turkey, and waterfowl

and shorebirds. He loves hiking, birding, outdoor photography, kayaking, and fishing.

Key accomplishments and awards:

- During the early 90s worked with the US Embassy in Mexico City to streamline the process for American scientists to request scientific collecting permits in Mexico.
- Over the last 30 years, Francisco has led an effort in wetland training and capacity building in Mexico with the assistance of wetland scientists and managers from the United States, Canada, and Mexico. His training model has been replicated by an international program to train wetland managers in Iraq involved in wetland restoration.
- In 2006, Francisco received the U.S. *National Wetlands Award* at the Cannon Building of the U.S. Congress and was presented by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Federal Highway Administration, and the Environmental Law Institute. The same year, he also received the *National Wetlands Conservation Award* from the Government of Mexico, Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources.
- Played a critical role in the repatriation of Yaqui catfish and Yaqui shiner into the San Bernardino and Leslie Creek National Wildlife Refuge; Gould's turkey into the Galiuro Mountains; population increases of the Mexican wolf in Mexico, Sonoran pronghorn into the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge; and black-tailed prairie dogs into Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, by coordinating, assisting in obtaining necessary permits, and/or capturing/transporting animals.
- Contributed to drafting the *Borderlands Wildlife Conservation* bill during the mid-2000s. The purpose of this bill was to secure six million dollars in annual congressional allocations for wildlife conservation along the US-Mexico border. This bill was sponsored by Congressman Raul Grijalva, but was not approved by the US Congress.
- Served as scientific advisor during the 2000s for the Biodiversity Program of the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC), whose mission was to support cooperation among the NAFTA partners to address environmental issues of continental concern, including the environmental challenges and opportunities presented by continent-wide free trade.
- Contributed to the development of Mexico's National Biodiversity Strategy and the first NOM-059 (1991) (Mexico's Endangered Species Act) for listing threatened and endangered species in Mexico. Collaborated on the subsequent updates.
- Researched fish and bird communities in the Upper Gulf of California in the early 90s. This research contributed to the creation of the Upper Gulf of California Biosphere Reserve in 1993.

- Participated as a member or advisor of many endangered species recovery teams over the last 35 years. He has served as Chair of the Sonoran Joint Venture Management Board and Co- Chair of the Agribusiness and Wildlife Committee of Arizona-Mexico Commission. He also is a member of the International Relations Committee of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.
- Contributed to designating 27 Ramsar sites in Mexico.
- *Commission Certificate of Appreciation*, for the largest small mammal translocation in the Department's history, Arizona Game and Fish Department - 2025
- *Director's Meritorious Citation*, Arizona Game and Fish Department - 2016.
- *Outstanding Service Award to the Canada/Mexico/U.S. Trilateral Committee of Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management*, presented by the Arizona Game and Fish Department during the annual meeting in San Diego, CA - 2015.
- *The Ramsar Convention Award Nominee*. Nomination co-submitted by the National Committees of Mexico, U.S., and Canada - 2009.
- *Employee of the Year Award*, Wildlife Management Division, Arizona Game and Fish Department -1995.
- *Commendation for Excellence*, Arizona Game and Fish Department – 1998, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2021
- *Contribution Award for Wildlife Without Borders*, presented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -1997
- *Mexico's Earth Day Award*, presented by the Governor of Sonora, Mexico – 1997
- *Carl L. Hubbs Best Student Paper Award*, presented by the Desert Fishes Council - 1989
- *Frances H. Miller Best Student Paper Award*, presented by the Desert Fishes Council - 1987