

May 20, 2022 Walk-through with Parks and Recreation and SmithGroup

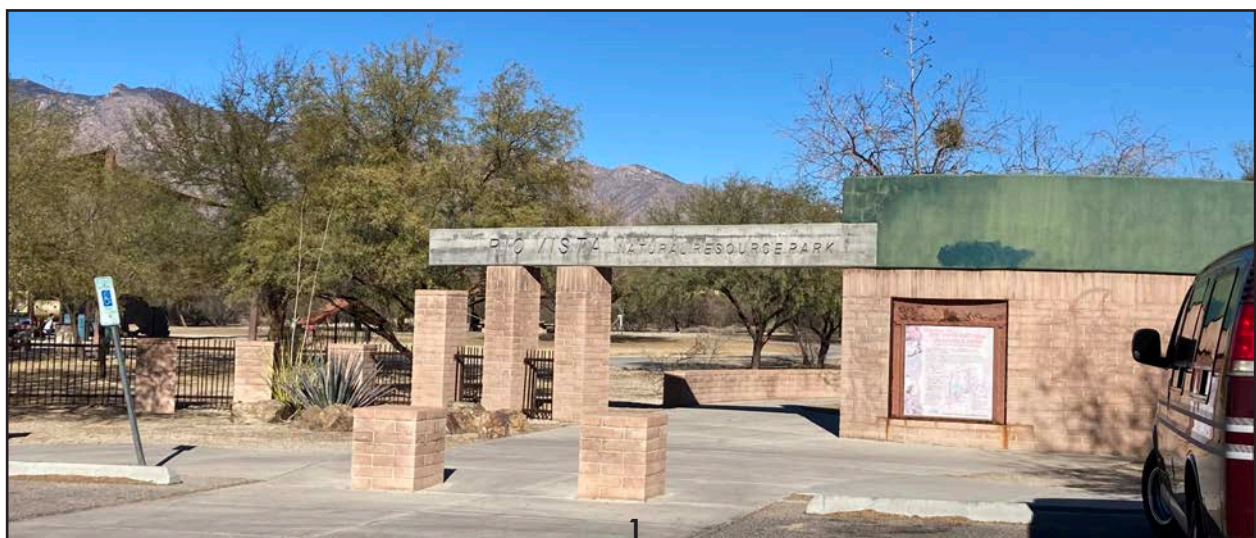
Rio Vista Natural Resource Park contains excellent and not-so-good examples of built-out amenities. The purpose of this document, prepared by the Rillito Bend Neighborhood Advocacy Group (RNAG), is to provide some perspective from local park users on what works and what doesn't.

Within the "natural" area of the Park, structures should be appear as natural as possible. To reach a wide audience, intent may vary, but the visual cues and messaging should align with the "natural resource" concept of the Park. Sections include:

- Entry Plaza**
- Labyrinth**
- Compassion Garden and Gateway Plaza**
- Benches**
- Introductory Signs**
- Wayfinding: Maps**
- Directional Signs**
- Didactic Signs**
- Rules of the Road**
- And Then There is The Garbage**

Entry Plaza

This gateway to the Park needs a facelift. The signage is faded; the structure needs painting; and it needs to be re-imagined. Some ideas are: create a ramada on the back right side for scheduled presentations; make the shaded area on the back left side more inviting; paint a mural on the wall behind; and rework the signage.



Labyrinth

The labyrinth, built on a degraded part of the Park, serves to provide an alternate activity. Its core value of solitude and reflection is in sync with the vision of the Park, and the “structure” harmonizes with its surroundings.

The labyrinth was the vision of a neighborhood high schooler. With support of family and friends, it was designed and built by the neighborhood. It has become a destination point for many visitors.

As wonderful as it is, it could benefit from some additional planting to enhance its meditative space.



Surprising Adaptions

A tree stump becomes a display area created by visitors, an example of spontaneous use of a dead eucalyptus. The labyrinth becomes a temporary memorial to a loved one.



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Compassion Garden

A place for “reflection, remembrance, and healing,” the Compassion Garden has good intentions sympathetic to the Park. Its design, however, is not conducive to collecting water for the plants; consider redoing the landscaping. It is situated in the “natural” area of the Park, in the northern section near the native mesquite bosque. It would have been better placed outside the natural area of the Park, or reworked to blend in with natural landscape.



Gateway Plaza

Situated at the entry from the Loop, the Gateway Plaza would be better served if it had been built near the entrance. It is under utilized. It has the potential to do something but what? ... Maybe chess/checkers tables like NYC’s Central Park?



Benches

Benches are a welcome amenity for any park; no doubt about it. Yet they don't have to look out of place. For a Natural Resource Park such as Rio Vista, having native rock or natural looking designs for benches are ideal.



A Gneiss Bench to Sit On, 2009

Installation by Chris Tanz

These natural stone (gneiss) benches blend in with their surroundings and are handsome additions to the Park.

This is an excellent example of form and function working side by side. And they wear well.

Below

At the George Mehl Family Foothills Park, rocks can be tables or benches.





Benches That Work

These benches are simple and unobtrusive.

Benches That Don't Work

Though with good intentions, these memorial benches were installed without any input from the community and placed in the “natural” part of Park. With their heavy concrete slabs and stark appearance, they don't align with the natural concept of the Park.



Introductory Signs

Intro signs at Rio Vista Natural Resource Park need an overhaul. Not only are they faded, peeling and damaged, they should reflect what this Park is all about—succinctly and graphically. Information needs to be parsed out. What is a natural resource park?; why is this Park important?; what are the Park rules?; etcetera; all so that the visitor can find information easily.



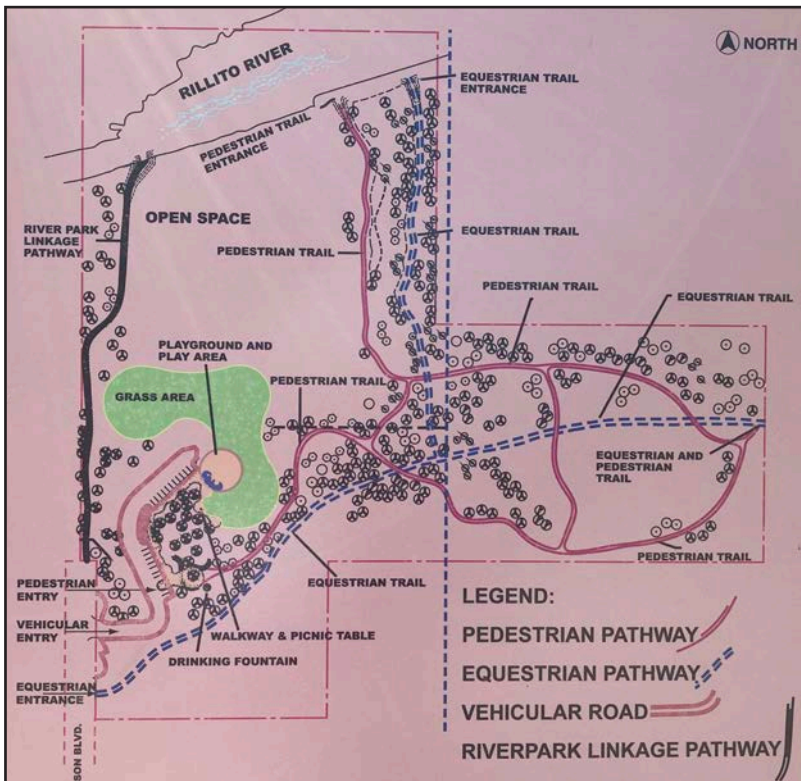
Placed at each of the Park's entrances, the tripod-shaped pylon is stable. Its three sides provide the potential for three strong messages if oriented so the viewer need not step off the path.



The off-the-shelf shadow box sign offers the flexibility to change messages. However, it is not consistent with other Park signage structures and here, the notices are outdated.

Wayfinding: Maps

Successful wayfinding orients the visitor with ease. Each sign must be placed strategically and be aesthetically pleasing and quickly understandable. The map should be easily “read” so the visitor knows where to go. At Rio Vista, the maps presented are inadequate. Trails have become indistinguishable. There are no trail markers. The Park has suffered.



Rio Vista’s map needs to reflect the entire Park and orient the visitor to where he/she is.

The aerial map at Roy P. Drachman Agua Caliente Park with its overlay of colored trails, water and and call-outs makes it easy to understand.



The highly graphic map at Atturbury-Lyman Sanctuary portrays trails along with animal viewing points superimposed on the Atturbury Wash.



Directional Signs

Protecting the natural is paramount, and here are some ways to say it. Explain to people that it's a natural park and to stay on the path. Orient visitor to where to go. Educate the visitor about the Park and its habitats and denizens. Remind them to keep their dogs on leash.

Signs are not be enough. Natural-looking barriers are necessary to protect some areas of the Park.



Humor is not only fun; it can send a strong message.

Didactic Signs



Simple line art, above, calls out the the denizens of Shannon Wash and the peaks of the Catalinas. Both are informative. The panel at right needs refurbishment and perhaps a relocation.

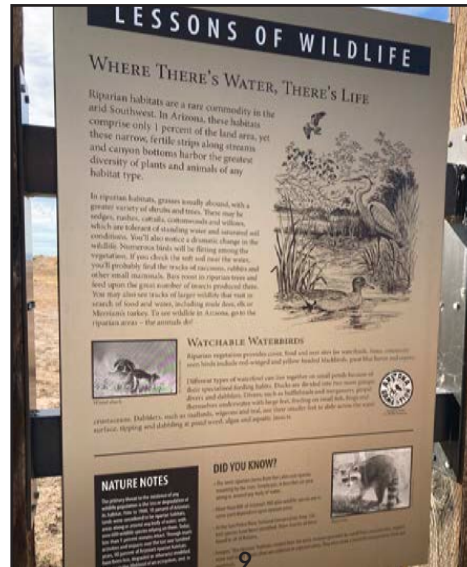
Didactic Panels That Work

The examples on this page show a variety of approaches that work.

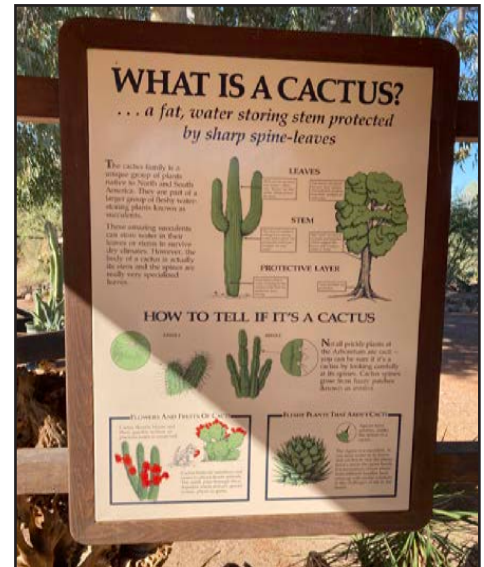
The rustic look of the signs at Roy P. Drachman Agua Caliente Park's steel signs are exquisite. Each one is unique and were made locally.



At Whitewater Refuge, the etched aluminum signs make use of side-bars, like "Nature Notes", providing tidbits of information quickly.



Boyce Thompson Arboretum's signs are the complete package: aesthetically pleasing, well written with catchy texts, and durable, many of which are afforded the protection of a covered ramada.



Rules of the Road

Keep-pets-on-leash signs need to be prominent and frequent. Additional signs could engage the visitor with why dogs need to be on leash; for example, this is a natural resource park, with habitat that needs to be protected and wildlife that could be harmful.

A sign at Rio Vista, left, could look like sign at right.



A smattering of signs at the entry is visual blight.



And Then There is The Garbage

We need animal-resistant garbage and recycling cans. The cans could look more attractive if they were placed in wood or stone holders.

All garbage cans should be located at the Park perimeter so that the maintenance vehicles need not drive through the Park.

