

San Dieguito Lagoon Center

The new San Dieguito Lagoon Center supports an interpretive and contemplative experience and focuses on developing a series of de-compressive site and building experiences that foster a deeper appreciation and understanding of the River Valley, the Coast to Crest trail and the Lagoon and wetlands. Overall, the project was designed to support the needs of various user groups such as: K-12 school groups, tourist/ visitors, scientists, birders, trail users, community members / groups, volunteers and rangers.

Key features of the project include:

Project provides a poetic understanding of the unique and diverse lagoon and river valley to the east.

- The site is an important portal to the River Valley
- Now the gateway from the primary north-south transportation corridor (freeway/transit/rail) into the County's most intact river system and the Coast to Crest Trail.

Project promotes the scientific understanding of the Lagoon and River Valley experience.

- Provide for citizen science on site: Provide experiences/exhibits that are science-based with opportunities for citizen interaction and development
- Regenerative planting of the site is part of message
- Demonstrate upland and wetland associations on site
- Emphasis on ecological science: regenerative ecology

Project supports a variety of recreational activities that are in concert with the lagoon habitat.

- Trails: hiking, bicycling, equestrian use, jogging, strolling, natural gardens
- Gathering spaces: community and group events
- Passive open space: relaxation, picnicking, bird watching and wildlife viewing

The entire site is engaged as interpretive and contemplative experience that is always changing related to seasons and passage of time.

- Allow people to engage the environment and site directly and minimize indoor experience/interpretation
- Use overlooks, viewpoints, natural phenomena of the site to enrich experience: views, wind, topography, drainage, vegetation, aromas, noise, quiet, etc.

Level of development in this plan makes an effort to balance desire for specific program opportunities and uses with commitment to experience of nature and open space.

- Continue to refine program components that should be on the site, but examine possible program for compatibility and suitability through this process
- Minimizes indoor program and maximizes outdoor program
- Places significant program below the view shed from the Trail
- Uses building pieces to frame outdoor space
- Places service and maintenance program at west edge of site

Site Design

The project site plan was developed to suggest an alignment of the Coast-to-Crest trail in order to link special places on the site. The site plan orchestrates arrival from the busy corner at San Andres to a new onsite parking area that is designed to minimize impacts to natural habitats and to separate vehicles from pedestrian activity. Once the visitor has exited from the vehicle upon parking, the plan provides a series of outdoor pedestrian spaces that are designed to "de-compress" the visitor from the busy urban environment of Interstate 5 and Via de la Valle to a more serene experience. This is accomplished by providing a sequence of landscape experiences that lead to the Visitor Center building site.

The project is a progression from “developed and active” to “restored and passive” environment and habitat. Some of the features include:

- Each experience can be treated in its own way to shield some views, highlight others, control noise, provide shade or wind control.
- Many areas are planned to double as staging or gathering areas for small groups so a teacher could sit down with a class or gather a group off of the trail.
- Create a hierarchy of spaces for gathering spaces for 10-20 near parking
- Parking is related to the trail and site rather than to “just the building” by separating the parking and drop-off to create a landscape experience between the two.
- An upland and a lagoon trail loop off of the Coast to Crest trail to connect to other parts of the site.
- Create plant communities of coastal sage scrub, chaparral, and upland wetlands for interpretation

The visitor decompresses further by hiking out to more remote and quiet outlooks on site that provide various learning experiences. Various conditions at these outlook locations make a variety of intimate and overview experiences of the lagoon and river valley. Some will be supported with shade structures, seating areas and scopes for distant viewing.

Lagoon Center

The new Lagoon Center will be sited on the hillside, tucked into the existing slope, to shield noise from Via De la Valle and focus views towards the lagoon and the larger habitat context. The Center provides orientation, frames views, and becomes a portal to the rest of the site. Key features include:

- The trail engages most of the major features including going through the “building” by crossing it as a deck.
- The main exhibit building is placed below the upper trail, so that the experience of the building is the deck and view of the lagoon and valley.
- The Lagoon Center includes a central open-space courtyard, and amphitheater that links the staff / ranger offices with the public exhibit space and theater.
- A lab space is provided to support the needs of visiting scientists and provides a large roll-up door to promote visibility of science activities as well as it promotes interaction by the public, when appropriate.
- The Center will be a net-zero energy uses facility that utilizes passive solar design strategies, such as using a solar chimney to cool the interior during warm months and maximizing natural daylight and ventilation.
- The Center will also utilize solar photovoltaic panels to balance the facilities’ energy needs.

By tucking and lowering the majority of the Center into the site, the view corridors obstructions from Via de la Valle to the Lagoon are minimized. This design strategy also minimizes traffic noise impacts and supports earth sheltering strategies to heat and cool the facility.

Additional structures include a solitary view deck towards the east and a ranger maintenance building that is located at the northwest corner of the site.

Landforms

One of the challenges of the site is the predominance of the automobile and the associated noise. The site plan addresses the noise with Berms that block the noise from Via de la Valle.

- Take advantage of Via de la Valle edge for auto circulation: The plan hopes to utilize a city/SDG&E maintenance road easement for fire access, horse trailer, maintenance, service and ranger circulation to east as well as part of parking circulation within parking area.
- Cluster parking to north and west.
- Locate horse trailer parking and trailhead to east end of the site with a possible shared exit with Horse Park.
- Works with potential widening of Via De La Valle with minimal disturbance to program

These bermed landforms are also conceived as poetic extensions of the topography north of Via de la Valle. The berms restore topography along with habitat and plant communities that reinforce the story about the interaction of humans with the River Valley in the restoration.