

PROJECT IDENTITY—Friends of Colorado Lagoon Landscape Vision

PROJECT LOCATION—Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach, California

PROJECT DESCRIPTION—The Friends of Colorado Lagoon (FOCL) Landscape Vision is a planning document created for restoration of a unique urban wetland located in Long Beach, California. The document serves as a guide for the careful integration of native habitats, trails, interpretation elements, and landscape features. It has become a useful tool for providing strategic and visionary development of programs and facilities within the Colorado Lagoon. The overarching goal of the document was to knit together the mission and goals of FOCL with programmatic and physical planning. Embedded in the programs and physical development of the lagoon is the message that we are stewards of the land.

Colorado Lagoon was once part of a vast tidal estuary that provided many important benefits for the Southern California region, including cleaning and transporting rainwater on its journey to the ocean and providing habitat for birds, fish and other animals. As the population around the lagoon began to grow, it also became a favorite place to enjoy recreation and leisure activities. For decades, as the land surrounding the lagoon was filled, paved and urbanized, the health of the lagoon was degraded to the point where it became one of the worst water quality conditions in California. It has taken a surge in local activism, primarily through the efforts of FOCL, to get the attention of policy makers and funding agencies to commit to making the lagoon healthy for humans, plants and animals. Tremendous progress has been made in recent years in improving the health of the lagoon.

Building on the momentum generated by this progress, this document identifies opportunities and strategies for recreation, restoration, and education in an effort to create a flexible framework for growth. In the process of developing the Landscape Vision, the FOCL Board of Directors were able to refine and establish a shared vision for the lagoon, recognizing that a project of this scope and duration needed a roadmap for guiding actions, informing stakeholders, building consensus, and preventing misunderstandings. The consultant team consisted of the landscape architect, which was the project lead, and an ecological consulting firm. The team guided FOCL through several planning workshops. The workshop topics ranged from big ideas—logo and identity development, to pragmatics—site furnishings guidelines, which are represented in the final document.

The planning processes included inventory and analysis of existing conditions and alignment with existing planning documents such as the City of Long Beach Open Space and Recreational Element of the General Plan, and the Long Beach Bicycle Master Plan. Specific recommendations for physical development include the following: trail guidelines, habitat restoration, interpretive elements, and site furnishings guidelines.

This Landscape Vision serves as a road map for the evolution of the Colorado Lagoon and ensures future projects embody the mission of FOCL. Perhaps the most important role of the landscape architect was to create visual graphics that help residents imagine a restored lagoon. This shared vision has helped shift public perception toward a future lagoon that is a healthy, vibrant place for people and a complex and interconnected coastal wetland system. This near-future and long-term-future planning effort not only helps to create greater awareness and appreciation of the Colorado Lagoon, but helps to secure critical funding for the design and construction of future projects. It is a collaborative decision-making process that has defined the future direction for the lagoon and generated partnerships with local, state and federal agencies in achieving the visionary goals of the FOCL Landscape Vision.