



Features

The Riverside County Vision builds heavily on the value of its remarkable environmental setting. Palo Verde's portion of that setting is defined by the huge expanses of desert and floodplain, a landscape ignored by many, but appreciated by those who understand the richness of this land. This point is magnified by the stark contrast between fertile, highly irrigated agricultural lands and the pencil line separating them from arid desert to the west and north. The Colorado River, almost a startling presence as one approaches from the east or west, forms the eastern border of the State of California, Riverside County, and the Palo Verde Area Plan. The River's meandering path forms not only interesting topography, but offers a remarkable natural resource and a recreational attraction as well. These defining features are shown on Figure 2, Physical Features.

SETTING



A view of the agricultural lands in Palo Verde.

Though the entire planning area lies within the Sonoran Desert, the eastern half of Palo Verde is basically a lush, flat valley floor created by the continuous flooding of the Colorado River. It is a stark contrast to the sand and rock dominated western half of Palo Verde. While the western portion is arid, the eastern half is patterned and colored by a constantly changing array of cultivated crops. Even though the east is predominantly agricultural in nature, it contains the majority of development, including resort development along the Colorado River. The incorporated City of Blythe is located in this half of the planning area and provides the only significant concentration of urban/suburban development. In a notable departure from the eastern floodplain, rougher desert mountains emerge to the north in the form of the Big Maria Mountains. Even the sparsely populated western desert area is punctuated by rugged peaks. A sharp accent to this sparseness is provided by the Chuckwalla and Ironwood Prisons, interestingly enough, located within a non-contiguous portion of the City of Blythe.

UNIQUE FEATURES

The Palo Verde Mesa and Valley

Palo Verde is shaped in part by an elevated mesa that roughly divides the terrain into two distinct halves. The western half consists of this elevated mesa, which is part of the rugged Sonoran Desert. The eastern half is a valley formed by the Colorado River. Flooding has left alluvial soil rich in nutrients and accessible to a supply of water for irrigation. The relatively slight change in elevation and natural conditions between mesa and valley account for considerably distinct environmental and development characteristics.

Agricultural Lands

The Palo Verde Valley is one of the richest agricultural regions in California. The soils, deposited over the eons by the Colorado River, are considered prime



Riparian habitats are water-dependent ecosystems

characterized by rich and diverse groups of plant and animal species. A valuable community resource, riparian ecosystems play a key role in reducing flood peaks, and enhancing water quality, soil stability, and groundwater replenishment.

Riparian areas also provide important open space and recreational opportunities.