



## 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.*



agricultural lands of statewide importance. Irrigation for the crops is provided by channels filled from the Colorado River.

### Colorado River



*Recreational boating on the Colorado River*

The Colorado River provides both a riparian and recreational resource for the region. It is a source of water for agriculture, a substantial recreational and tourist draw, and it can serve as a catalyst for future specialized development within this remarkable water dominated environment. Residents and tourists alike already enjoy a number of recreational pursuits, such as fishing, water sports, nature walks, bird watching, and other activities a river of this consequence affords. Its value is indicated by the location of five river-oriented County parks, as well as a number of recreational vehicle (RV) and camping facilities.

### Mountains

The Big Maria, McCoy, and Mule mountains surrounding Palo Verde are rugged visual landmarks that accent the Palo Verde environment. Their stark presence is accentuated by the fact that there are no foothills, just steep rock structures that jut out of the surrounding mesa. They form a backdrop that helps to create a natural boundary between the vegetation rich valley and the arid—but still very much alive—desert.

### Intaglios



*Some of the Intaglios in Palo Verde*

A unique part of Palo Verde's remarkable environmental setting has actually been created by the activities of early civilizations. The Blythe Intaglios or "Giant Figures," are geoglyphs located on a terrace above the Colorado River a few miles north of Blythe. These giant intaglios include human figures more than 60 feet long, a mountain lion, and a geometric pattern. Made by Yuman speaking tribes, geoglyphs such as these were used during ritual pilgrimages made along the Colorado River between the Land of the Dead, to the south, and the more northerly Place of Creation. Intaglios were created at the locations of mythic events, and were intended to portray the legendary beings whose actions occurred at these spots. Now these striking creations are a protected tourist attraction and a powerful cultural artifact.

### Blythe Airport



*The Blythe Airport Terminal*

Located in the center of Palo Verde adjacent to Interstate 10, Blythe Airport is the only public airport serving the eastern portion of Riverside County. The 3,094-acre facility is a general aviation airport that is owned by Riverside County, and has two runways situated in a north-south and east-west direction. This public facility is often used as a base for crop spraying operations, flight rental, and flight instruction.

As shown in Figure 4, Policy Areas, a policy area surrounds the airport. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Riverside County impose restrictions on the uses, concentrations of population, and height of proposed development within this airport influenced area. For more information on the