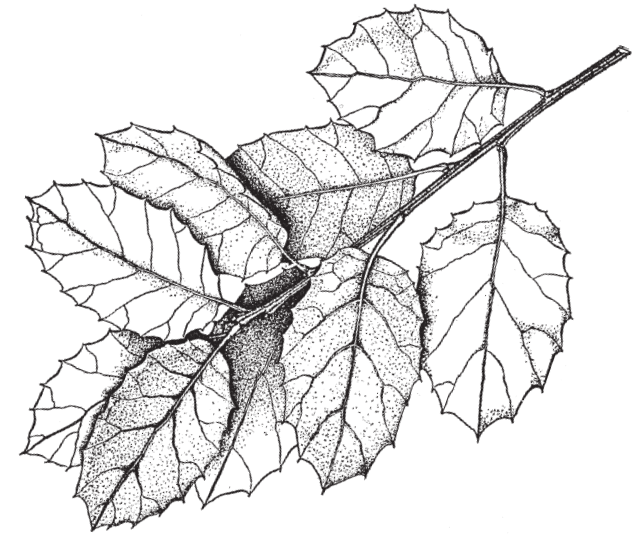




# Placerita Canyon Nature Center Interpretive Master Plan



## **Interpretive Master Plan May 2010**

### **Prepared by**

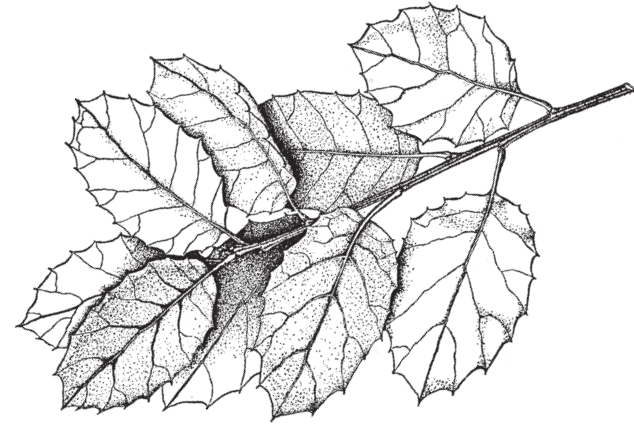
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The Acorn Group in association with  
General Graphics Exhibits  
May 2010

[www.acorngroup.com](http://www.acorngroup.com)  
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## Table of Contents

- Executive summary, 7
- Introduction, 8
- About the site, 9
- Resources for interpretation, 10-11
- Interpretive planning, 12
- Guiding principles, 13
- Target audiences, 14
- Interpretive goals and objectives, 15-18
- Goal matrix, 19
- Interpretive theme, 20
- Interpretive matrix, 21
- Exhibit storyline, 22
- Exhibit narrative, 23-27
- Interpretation in the classroom, 28
- Interpretation in the courtyard, 29-30
- Interpretation on the trails, 31-35
- Universal design guidelines, 36
- Recommended direction for programs, 37-38
- Evaluation methods, 39
- Phasing, 40
- Appendix, 41-56





In 2009, The Acorn Group began development of the interpretive master plan for Placerita Canyon Natural Area. Working directly with the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates, the consultants focused their attention on converting the now-empty nature center exhibit room into a gallery designed to showcase the canyon's remarkable natural and human history. Additional attention was directed at the courtyard, classroom, and trails as venues that further support the gallery's messages and illustrate the interpretive theme and subthemes.

In November 2009, external stakeholders and members of the planning team convened for an interpretive planning session. Exercises that day led to the establishment of an interpretive framework that would guide development of exhibits. One unifying theme, supported by subthemes and corresponding key messages, served to define the exhibit focus. Following review and revision of this framework, The Acorn Group began defining storylines and developing an exhibit narrative for the gallery. By organizing the exhibit media around five "exhibit pods" and creating a unidirectional traffic flow pattern, a sequence was created that illustrates the theme and subthemes chronologically. Additionally, the media were designed to offer layers of information and multiple "access points" that accommodate the varying interest levels and knowledge levels of diverse target audiences. In the next phase of work, conceptual drawings and plan views of proposed treatments of the gallery, classroom, and courtyard will be prepared.

Development of the interpretive master plan took place over the course of six months. Guiding documents relevant to this plan include the 2005 Placerita Canyon Nature Center Strategic Plan; mission statements of both the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates and County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation; the Docent Naturalist Training Manual; Newhall Ranch Environmental Impact Report; website, *Santa Clarita Valley History in Pictures*; biological data supplied by the Associates and staff (e.g., mammal list, bird list, etc.); and references from the library of The Acorn Group.

### Interpretive Planning Timetable

**October 2009**—The Acorn Group met with Nature Center staff and the planning committee, began preparing for the interpretive planning session, and conducted a site visit.

**November**—Members of the planning committee and external stakeholders participated in the interpretive planning session. Work began developing themes and subthemes, and identifying key topics.

**February 2010**—Based on stakeholder feedback, The Acorn Group refined the interpretive matrix and summary, developed the exhibit storyline, and wrote the draft narrative for interior exhibits.

**March**—The planning committee reviewed the exhibit storyline and exhibit narrative. The Acorn Group began preparing the interpretive master plan.

**April**—Following review of the draft document by the planning committee, the final interpretive master plan was prepared.



## Introduction

The scope of this project encompasses interpretive planning and conceptual design of media for the museum gallery and classroom, courtyard, and trails of Placerita Canyon. The Acorn Group took the lead on these phases of work, while maintaining close communication with General Graphics Exhibits who served as the contractor. The Acorn Group staff consisted of Jennifer Rigby, interpretive planner, and James Freed, designer and illustrator. These individuals worked closely the Placerita Canyon exhibit planning committee consisting of 10 members of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates. Acting Superintendent of Placerita Canyon Natural Area, Frank Hoffman, was copied on correspondence.

External and internal stakeholders who participated in the interpretive planning session included Mozaffar Baurami, Roger Basham, Reg Fear, Jill Goodard, Frank Hoffman, Jon Hutson, Ron Kraus, Janet Kubler, Larry McLaughlin, Ruth Anne Murthy, Dave Perry, Jo Ellen Rismanchi, Pat Saletore, Diane Southwell, Jim Southwell, Gordon Uppman, and Leon Worden. These individuals helped define the vision for the project, establish the overarching theme and messages for a wide range of interpretive media, and identify existing opportunities and constraints. Their participation during this formative stage is greatly appreciated.

Throughout the planning and design effort, we have kept the purpose of interpretation in focus. Interpretation is driven by an institution's mission, crafted to reveal new understanding, and measured by its ability to convey a stewardship message. Interpretation is not built on the delivery of factual information; rather, it is built on its capacity to awaken emotions. It strives to cultivate new insight, spark curiosity, and forge connections with the visitor's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

At the same time, interpretation respects the needs and interests of diverse audiences. Exhibits in the museum gallery, for example, offer multiple "access points." While interpretive panels introduce the significance of each exhibit, reading them in their entirety is not essential for grasping the message. Young visitors likely will gravitate first to the simple interactives and displays of live animals; adults likely will spend more time reading the panel copy, studying subtle exhibit components, and pondering the questions that are raised. By integrating layers of interpretation, plentiful opportunities exist to forge connections with the visitor.



This interpretive master plan focuses on non-personal media—the museum exhibits and displays, outdoor displays, and wayside exhibits for the trails. However, another equally important realm is personal interpretation. The value of having a docent or staff member personally deliver an interpretive program or message to visitors cannot be underestimated.



Placerita Canyon is situated at the western end of the San Gabriel Mountains, southeast of the City of Santa Clarita and not far from the Santa Clara River. The Placerita Canyon Natural Area Park is owned by the State of California and operated by the County of Los Angeles in partnership with the non-profit Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates. This 350-acre park encompasses several plant communities, including southern oak woodland, chaparral, sycamore woodland, and to a lesser extent, coastal sage scrub and bigcone spruce. The seasonal Placerita Creek runs through the park, creating a riparian community of mulefat, willow, and western sycamore.

Several trails wind through the park. Shorter loop trails, the Ecology Trail, Botany Trail and Heritage Trail, begin near the nature center. Noteworthy historical features are highlighted on these trails; these are discussed in the next section. Longer trails begin across the streambed and climb into the hills. Waterfall Trail leads to a 25' vernal waterfall in Los Pinetos Canyon. The more rigorous Manzanita Mountain and Los Pinetos Trails reward hikers with views of the valleys, Santa Catalina Island, and the Sierra Nevada foothills. Picnic facilities are also located across the streambed.

The Placerita Canyon Nature Center consists of an outdoor courtyard with two raptor exhibits and a large building that features a museum gallery, classroom, small gift shop, administrative area, kitchen, work room with animal holding facilities, and public restrooms. The museum gallery and adjacent classroom each are 1,248 sq. ft. Constructed in 1971, the building recently was renovated according to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards and is the first of its kind in the County Parks system. Improvements include new energy-efficient display lighting; energy efficient air conditioning and cooling systems; exterior building wall insulation and roofs; and water-conserving restroom facilities.



## Resources for Interpretation

Placerita Canyon is remarkably rich in terms of resources available to interpret. These resources in turn inform the stories that are told. Human use of the canyon dates back thousands of years; artifacts of the material culture of the Tataviam have been recorded on site. Evidence of more recent use during the past 175 years is also showcased, making the canyon's human history come alive for visitors.

Placerita Canyon also is rich in natural resources. The presence of oil and gold fueled the local economy beginning in the 19th century. More recently, the canyon's rugged scenery and proximity to Hollywood have made it a prime location for many movies and television shows. The canyon's scenery continues to sustain this industry today.

Last, the sheer beauty of the canyon also serves as a resource. While the landscape sustains the canyon's wildlife, it also rejuvenates the human spirit and helps people connect with nature.

### **Biophysical Features**

Rare, threatened, and endangered species, including Hammond's two-striped garter snake, yellow warbler, and spotted owl

Five plant communities: southern oak woodland, riparian woodland, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and montane (bigcone spruce)

Canyon bottomlands and south- and north-facing slopes

Placerita Creek and Los Pinetos Waterfall

Placerita schist, gold, and other minerals

Oil (white oil)



**Cultural Heritage Features**

- Tataviam ki exhibit
- Tataviam artifacts, including McCoy Pyle's 1884 discovery
- Underpass mural

**Historical Features**

- Walker Cabin
- Antique oil equipment: Gould's pressure pump, rock bit, and production packer
- Antique oil tools: rod elevators, tubing tongs, rod wrenches, pipe threaders
- Oak of the Golden Dream (California Historical Landmark)
- Hollywood movie locations (specific sites)



## Interpretive Planning

The purpose of an interpretive master plan is to analyze a site's interpretive needs and determine those media, facilities, and programs that efficiently and effectively communicate the site's purpose, significance, and theme. Because an interpretive plan addresses both the needs of visitors and directives of the governing agencies and organizations, it requires a thoughtful analysis of multiple components, including management, markets, mechanics of the site, messages, and media.

**Management**—Foundational documents define the project and project site. The mission and vision statements of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates and County of Los Angeles' Department of Parks and Recreation, the docent manual, and other documents have all informed the interpretive planning process.

**Market**—effective planning moves beyond promotion to include the factors that define demand. Background research through such means as the visitor survey, stakeholder interviews, outreach sessions, and advisory committee meetings have yielded important information that has grounded our assumptions and made us aware of the needs and interests of sectors of the target audience.

**Message**—the framing of content is based on three factors: 1. Placerita Canyon's most significant natural and cultural heritage stories, 2. The things visitors are most interested in, and 3. The information management needs to communicate. Finding the right mix of appropriate techniques to convey the message is key to interpretive planning.

**Mechanics**—effective planning results in a design balance between the site, the trails and nature center, and interpretation. The visitor's experience is considered in its entirety, from arrival through departure. Such variables as ingrained traffic flow patterns, special needs, and multiple use of trails are carefully analyzed to ensure high quality, safe experiences for everyone.

**Media**—the media include anything that helps communicate the message. As the last component of the planning process, it is the mix of methods and technologies (techniques) to deliver the messages to the markets within the constraints of management and mechanics. It is comprised of wayside and courtyard exhibits, wayfinding tools, and interior exhibits.

### **Mission Statement Placerita Canyon Nature Center Association**

To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment, and to preserve and protect for future generations the history and ecosystem of Placerita Canyon.

### **Mission Statement County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation**

The Department provides the residents and visitors of Los Angeles County with quality recreational opportunities that promote a healthy lifestyle and strengthen the community through diverse physical, educational, and cultural programming, and enhances the community environment by acquiring, developing, and maintaining County Parks, gardens, golf courses, trails, and open space areas.



Interpretation is a form of communication that strives to provoke, relate, and reveal. It moves beyond factual information to offer new insights into what makes a place, person, or object special. In order to be effective, interpretation demands triangulation on three sphere of influence: the visitor's personal (social) context, the physical site and features, and the overall mission of the institution(s).

We recognize that visitors have choices—they can attend to interpretive media or not. And whatever is attended to is filtered through the personal (social) context, influenced by the physical site, and embedded within the interpretive mission. Throughout the interpretive planning process, these three spheres are kept in focus. The ultimate aim is to effectively attend to visitor needs and interests while addressing the resource considerations and needs of management. This is accomplished by creating experiences that reveal new insights, provoke new thought, and relate to concepts easily grasped by the audience.

Effective interpretation will enable the audience to feel an immediate connection to Placerita Canyon. It strives to inform, entertain, and enlighten. It strives to be meaningful and personal by finding linkages to concepts the visitor already understands and cares about. At the same time, it is organized, enabling the visitor to follow the material easily and build upon it intellectually. Last, it links tangible objects, such as oak woodlands, raptors, the creek and the cabin with intangible meanings in order to create emotional and intellectual connections. In this way, Placerita's stories are revealed in ways that are personally and universally meaningful.

### **Principle of interpretation**

Freeman Tilden, an early champion of interpretation, described six core principles of interpretation. While they have been modified and expanded over the years, they remain a seminal work in the field.

### **Principle of interpretation (1)**

Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

### **Principle of interpretation (2)**

Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

### **Principle of interpretation (3)**

Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

### **Principle of interpretation (4)**

The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

### **Principle of interpretation (5)**

Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole person rather than any phase.

### **Principle of interpretation (6)**

Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program.

## Target Audiences

Participants of the interpretive planning session identified several target audiences for interpretive services at Placerita Canyon. They are categorized below:

### **Formal audiences:**

Formal audiences are comprised of teachers and their students who plan field trip-based experiences that augment learning in the classroom. They seek opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills. Ranging from kindergarten – 12th grade, but clustered primarily as grades 2-6, these groups typically come from schools in Santa Clarita Valley, Antelope Valley, and San Fernando Valley (as well as other communities within the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area). These audiences (the student portion) are “captive” because they do not have a choice to visit. College students comprise another important sector of formal audiences.

### **Nonformal audiences:**

Nonformal audiences are comprised of all other likely visitors to Placerita Canyon. They include: people, most notably family units, who seek outdoor recreational opportunities such as picnics and other casual outdoor activities; people who seek physical recreational opportunities such as hiking and mountain cycling; people who seek other outdoor experiences such as wildlife watching (e.g., bird watcher) and art (e.g., plein air painters and photographers); and people with special needs who can enjoy the handicapped-accessible Heritage Trail.

These audiences are not “captive” because they have a choice to visit or not. Their decision to view exhibits, attend a program, hike, or engage in other activities is entirely voluntary. Further, these groups are more heterogeneous than formal groups in terms of age, interests, existing knowledge base, levels of awareness, motivations, and language preferences. While most visitors speak English as their primary language, some visitors speak Spanish and others speak Korean. It should be noted there is a growing contingency of Pacific Asians in the community.

Because of all these variables, it is important to design a rich variety of interpretive media, including interior exhibits and displays, and wayside exhibits along the trails and pathways. Multiple “portals” of experiences through visual, tactile, and auditory means, and multiple readability levels in panel copy, will help ensure that all visitors receive and understand the interpretive messages.

Goals are statements of desired outcomes that guide programs and management or operations functions. They articulate what interpretation is meant to do for Placerita Canyon, its visitors, and its management. They guide the formation of interpretive media and services during the planning process and, together with specific and measurable objectives, permit accurate and meaningful evaluation of interpretive programming before, during, and after development.

Educational directives related to Placerita Canyon focus on a desire to impart knowledge and cultivate an appreciative audience. To do this, interpretation must address both the cognitive and affective realms—the logical as well as the emotional aspects of the mind. People will not make behavioral changes if they only understand an issue; they must also feel that the topic has some relevance to their lives and that a behavioral change will bring one or more valued benefits.

Every interpretive experience should be designed, therefore, to have an emotional component as well as an intellectual or cognitive component, leading ultimately to a desired behavioral change. However, unlike visitor knowledge and visitor behavior, visitor feelings and attitudes are difficult to measure with accuracy and certainty that a specified variable is having an effect. Even so, progress toward attainment of affective goals often can be measured indirectly inferred from measurement of visitor behavior, since behavioral changes are typically preceded by changes in attitude or affect. Combined, these affective, cognitive, and behavioral goals will ensure interpretation is aimed at helping visitors feel connected to the canyon's human heritage and natural history, while understanding and helping protect it.

### **Emotional Goals**

- 1.a Visitors will have a satisfying and enjoyable time at Placerita Canyon.
  - 90% of visitors will indicate they had a satisfying and enjoyable time.
  - 90% of visitors will express appreciation for the experiences offered.
  
- 1.b Visitors will appreciate the canyon's biological diversity.
  - 90% of visitors will express appreciation for the canyon's diverse life forms—its plants and wildlife, and rare and threatened species.

**Goal:** A statement regarding a desired outcome that guides programs and management or operations functions. A goal articulates in general terms what interpretation is meant to do for Placerita Canyon, its visitors, and its management.

**Objective:** A statement that is specific and measurable that corresponds to a particular goal.



## Interpretive Goals and Objectives

1.c Visitors will appreciate the efforts invested in renovating the building to be a LEED-certified building and maintaining that designation through best management practices.

90% of visitors will express appreciation for the County's commitment to sustainable design, as well as the efforts of staff and volunteers to reduce the "ecological footprint" of human activities at Placerita Canyon.

1.d Visitors will feel they have an important role to play as stewards of Placerita Canyon.

90% of visitors will acknowledge their personal responsibility to not damage or degrade canyon resources.

1.e Visitors will recognize that appropriate behaviors are expected of them during their visit.

90% of visitors will indicate they are aware of the rules and regulations in place at Placerita Canyon.

90% of visitors will acknowledge the reasons these rules and regulations exist.

### **Cognitive Goals**

2.a Visitors will gain an understanding of the Tataviam culture and the interaction of the Tataviam with neighboring people, including the Kitanemuk, Serrano, Tongva, and Chumash.

70% of visitors will be able to identify the Tataviam as the California Indian tribe associated with Placerita Canyon.

70% of visitors will be able to describe how the Tataviam interacted with neighboring tribes.

70% of visitors will be able to identify three canyon resources that sustained the Tataviam.

2.b Visitors will gain an understanding of the lives and activities of Francisco Lopez, Milford Yant, and Frank Walker.

70% of visitors will be able to describe how Francisco Lopez is associated with the Oak of the Golden Dream.

70% of visitors to the Walker cabin will be able to describe the relationship of Frank Walker and his family to Placerita Canyon.

2.c Visitors will recognize plants and animals associated with Placerita Canyon's plant communities, including southern oak woodland, riparian woodland, and chaparral.

70% of visitors will be able to name at least two plants and animals associated with one of Placerita Canyon's plant communities.

2.d Visitors will gain an understanding how the canyon's plants and animals interact with and depend upon each other.

70% of visitors to the nature center will be able to list at least "four links" on one of the canyon's food chains.

- 2.e Visitors will gain an understanding that Placerita Canyon is home to sensitive, rare, and endangered species.  
70% of nature center visitors will be able to name at least one threatened or endangered species of Placerita Canyon.
- 2.f Visitors will gain an understanding of the natural cycles that govern life in the canyon, including the cycling of matter and flow of energy.  
70% of adult visitors will be able to describe how matter cycles, but is not lost, in natural systems.  
70% of adult visitors will be able to describe how energy flows through natural systems and is lost at each trophic level.  
90% of adult visitors will acknowledge that humans are a part of natural systems.
- 2.g Visitors will gain an understanding that we depend on, and can influence those processes and cycles that govern life in the canyon.  
70% of adult visitors will be able to describe how human life is entirely dependent on the cycling of matter and flow of energy.  
70% of adult visitors will be able to describe two steps they can take at home to conserve resources, including water and energy resources.
- 2.h Visitors will learn of ways humans continue to benefit from Placerita Canyon.  
80% of adults visitors will be describe three distinct ways (e.g., setting for films; destination for hiking; wildlife habitat that enhances wildlife-watching opportunities; setting for student field work; intervention for “nature deficit disorder;” rejuvenation of the human spirit; location for research; reserve for rare species.

### **Behavioral Goals**

- 3.a Visitors will stop by the nature center’s museum and courtyard.  
80% of visitors will spend at least 45 minutes exploring the interpretive media and animal displays in the museum and courtyard.
- 3.b Visitors will spend time outdoors at Placerita Canyon.  
80% of visitors will spend at least 60 minutes walking on trails and exploring the interpretive media.
- 3.c Visitors will demonstrate heightened awareness of, understanding of, and support for Placerita Canyon through their adherence to rules and regulations.  
95% of visitors will adhere to posted rules and regulations.

## Interpretive Goals and Objectives

**3.d Visitors will engage in activities that are appropriate in the building, courtyard, and trails.**

**90% of visitors will exhibit appropriate “stewardship” behaviors on the trails.**

**90% of visitors will exhibit appropriate “museum etiquette” in the gallery, classroom, and courtyard.**

**3.e Visitors will demonstrate their interest in and support of Placerita Canyon.**

**80% of visitors will express a strong desire to return to Placerita Canyon within a six month period.**

**80% of visitors will express a strong desire to return to Placerita Canyon to participate in a program.**

**30% of visitors will support the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates by purchasing material in the gift shop, becoming a member, or making a donation.**

Measurement of attainment of objectives will require use of assessment tools such as written surveys, exit interviews, and dialogue within focus groups.

The term “visitor” refers to the full array of audiences for Placerita Canyon, from students who participate in a school field trip to adults who choose to visit on a weekend. Accordingly, certain goals are particularly relevant to certain audience segments. Because students form a core segment, creating experiences that are meaningful, stewardship-focused, and appropriate for them is key. At the same time, hikers were also identified by the planning committee as a target audience for imparting knowledge and cultivating stewardship values.

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Generalized Implications</b>	<b>Target Goals</b>
K-college classes	Seek relevant learning experiences that reinforce classroom learning, as well as facilities (e.g., picnic areas and restrooms)	1a-b, 2a-e, 3d-e
Families with children	Seek child-friendly experiences, programs, and facilities (e.g., picnic areas)	1a, 1e, 2c, 2d, 3a-e
Hikers and outdoor enthusiasts	Seek information related to trails and trail use and interpretive opportunities	1a-e, 2a-h, 3b, 3d-e
Fitness enthusiasts	Seek information related to trails and trail use	3b-e
People with disabilities	Seek information related to trail and building accessibility and interpretive opportunities	1a-c, 3a, 3d-e
Special interest groups (e.g., birdwatchers, artists, photographers)	Seek information on notable sightings, specific information (e.g., bird lists), and scenic areas	1a-e, 2a-h, 3c

These goals are identified as targets for particular audience segments. Calling them out specifically does not preclude attainment of other goals identified in this report.

## Interpretive Theme

The theme is a powerful tool of interpretation. It is the principle message, or story, about Placerita Canyon that connects various topics and concepts together as a unifying whole. The theme allows for a linkage of important ideas, making it easier to comprehend and recall at a later point. It serves as an “advance organizer,” giving the visitor a sense of where the exhibit media are going and making it easier to connect their content to other information.

Several topics were identified as baseline subject matter for interpretation. They include natural processes, cycles, and forces that shape the canyon, as well as the canyon’s remarkable wildlife, the region’s rich human history, including Tataviam heritage, Spanish and Mexican influence, and the mark of individuals such as Francisco Lopez and Frank Walker. The topics also make reference to the rich natural resources of the region and the lure of oil and gold in particular.

From these topics, the Placerita Canyon story is built “up,” rather than just “across.” In order to help visitors connect to meanings emotionally as well as intellectually (meaning, care enough about Placerita Canyon to become a steward of Placerita Canyon) tangible resources, such as the canyon’s sycamores and oaks, spotted owls and placer gold, become linked with intangible meanings. Intangible meanings go beyond topics to embrace universally recognized values such as human heritage, the conservation of nature and wild places, and role of people as members of an ecosystem. Ultimately, we strive to have visitors experience Placerita Canyon in a very personal, relevant, and emotional way.

Although the central theme may or may not be articulated verbatim in media or programs, it is the conclusion that we hope visitors will reach on their own after experiencing the exhibits and the impression that will linger long after the details of the visit have been forgotten. Placerita Canyon’s theme reads:

**The richness of Placerita Canyon is defined by its biological diversity and natural resources, as well as by the experiences it provides visitors.**

### Interpretive terms

**Interpretation:** a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource (National Association for Interpretation, 2000).

**Theme:** the principle message or story about the topics. A theme is the “big idea” that connects a presentation’s facts and concepts into a meaningful whole. Expressed as a complete sentence, a theme is the one “take-home message” you want your visitors to grasp and remember. Effective themes link a tangible with an intangible. They are specific, interesting, and relevant, and not necessarily stated verbatim.

**Subtheme:** a subordinate message that supports and illustrates the theme. Subthemes form the body of the presentation. Like themes, they are stated in complete sentences.

*The richness of Placerita Canyon is defined by its biological diversity and natural resources, as well as by the experiences it provides visitors.*

**Subtheme 1**

*Over time, natural forces and events have shaped the canyon, as well as its natural resources, vegetation, and wildlife.*

**Messages:**

Placerita Canyon is situated where the Castaic and Santa Susana Mountains meet the San Gabriel Mountains. Cut by fault lines and seismically active, the mountains are still moving northward today.

During the Pliocene Epoch, this region was a shallow marine basin. As marine organisms died, they accumulated on the ocean floor as a nutrient-rich mud that eventually became oil. As the mountains rose later, anticlines (folds) in the land caused the oil to rise near to the surface.

Supported by soils and water, five plant communities are present in Placerita Canyon: southern oak woodland, riparian woodland, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and bigcone spruce. Each supports its own array of wildlife—from tiny invertebrates to large carnivores. Together they create a place rich in biological diversity.

Fire and flood can change the canyon dramatically, and sometimes only temporarily. It is probable that long-term climatic change will have a profound influence on life in the canyon and the rest of California.

**Subtheme 2**

*The canyon's resources have sustained people for thousands of years. They continue to attract people today, namely those who seek experiences in nature.*

**Messages:**

Placerita Canyon was home to the Tataviam for thousands of years. These hunters and gatherers took advantage of the canyon's resources, including its acorns and game, and interacted with neighboring people, including the Kitanemuk, Serrano, Tongva, and Chumash.

In 1842, Juan José Francisco de Gracia ("Chico") Lopez discovered gold in Placerita Canyon. This discovery, marked at the Oak of the Golden Dream, predates James Marshall's discovery by six years.

Oil was discovered in the region in the 1850s. Milford Yant held oil leases in Placerita Canyon in the 1930s and struck oil.

Though the yield was limited, Placerita Canyon oil was evident in seeps.

Frank Walker homesteaded the canyon in the 1900s, taking advantage of wild game, gold, Placerita schist, oil, grazing land, and the canyon's beauty itself to support his family.

As early as 1915, Hollywood was drawn to Placerita Canyon to film movies. Visitors as well as film directors continue to be drawn to this spot.

**Subtheme 3**

*People are a part of nature. We are governed by the same cycles and processes that govern nature.*

**Messages:**

People depend on and are a part of nature.

Life in Placerita Canyon, like all life, depends on natural cycles such as carbon, nitrogen, and water.

Life in Placerita Canyon, like all life, depends on natural processes such as photosynthesis, reproduction, and decomposition.

Life also depends on the flow of energy. While producers derive their energy from the Sun, consumers and decomposers derive theirs from matter they consume.

Our activities can influence cycles, processes, and energy flow. They can alter nature's capacity to support a diversity of life in Placerita Canyon.

Sustainable practices (e.g., the center's LEED standards and personal behaviors) can reduce the impact of our actions. When we reduce our "ecological footprint," we increase the capacity of nature to fully function.

Experiences in nature rejuvenate the human spirit. While Placerita Canyon is important on its own terms, it is equally important for the benefits visitors derive from it.

## Exhibit Storyline

Within the museum’s 1,248 square foot “gallery,” the proposed exhibits and displays reflect the overarching interpretive theme<sup>1</sup> and subthemes. Predominantly, they celebrate the nature of Placerita Canyon on its own terms; to a lesser extent, they celebrate the role nature has played in the canyon’s human history.

Visitors view and interact with media arranged in four clusters. Three of these clusters each focus on a specific plant community, the plants and animals that are found there, and some of the processes, cycles, and events that govern their lives and interactions. To a smaller degree, the exhibits and displays also showcase those resources within the plant communities that have been particularly significant to human lives and cultures over time.

These exhibit clusters are arranged in such a way to encourage “free choice” among visitors. With an optimal mix of media—tactile material, audiovisual media, interactive displays, and interpretive panels, to name a few—and attention paid toward addressing the needs of varying ages and interest levels, the gallery’s exhibits and displays should work in ways that accommodate diverse audiences and allow visitors to decide how and in what order they attend to the exhibits. The plan view and conceptual drawings developed in the next phase of work will enable us to fully analyze traffic flow patterns, in particular, arrival and departure through three doorways—the front door, rear door, and stairway and door to the classroom—as well as circulation in the room.

The messages conveyed through the media ultimately should reinforce the interpretive theme and remind visitors that Placerita Canyon is valued for its biological diversity, its natural resources, and the experiences it offers visitors. A secondary set of messages remind visitors that, because of Placerita’s human history, there is a continuum of values placed on the canyon’s resources. For example, the “wealth” derived from Placerita Canyon can be defined as tangible historic units such as ounces of gold or gallons of oil; yet, it can also be defined in intangible ways, such as the pleasure derived from watching a red-tailed hawk soar on a thermal or sharing the canyon’s beauty with a child. Visitors discover that the worth of nature is expressed in countless ways. Visitors come to realize how fundamentally important nature is. At the most basic level, visitors are reminded how much we depend on nature. At a more advanced level, they realize we are governed by the same cycles and processes that govern life in the canyon and life on the planet. The exhibits speak to this human-nature interplay, subtly reminding visitors that they are *a part of* nature, rather than *apart from* nature. As they move through the gallery, visitors learn more about the interconnectedness of humans and nature, the inherent worth of nature, and the role nature continues to play in our own lives and communities.

It is important to note that while adult visitors process the more advanced messages conveyed through the media, younger visitors are able to explore the media in simpler ways. Realistic specimens, live animals, captivating “immersion” exhibits, and hands-on demonstrations invite exploration and discovery, ensuring that the gallery experience is equally meaningful to children.

<sup>1</sup>The richness of Placerita Canyon is defined by its biological diversity and natural resources, as well as by the experiences it provides visitors.



This interpretive master plan presents general ideas for exhibit treatments. These ideas are preliminary and subject to change based on estimated cost and spatial considerations. Once design development is undertaken, the specific function and dimensions of individual exhibit components will be defined.

## Foyer

As visitors enter the museum gallery, they encounter a vestibule that displays a visually stunning large-format photograph of the canyon mounted on a curved partition. The image and accompanying quote (to be determined) cause them to pause and think about the remarkable richness of life found in the canyon. Subtle audio recordings of animals—the scream of a hawk, yip of a coyote, and trill of a treefrog—add a different dimension, reminding visitors we share the canyon with its resident wildlife.

### 1. Life among the Oaks

One exhibit pod celebrates the southern oak woodland community. Shaded by the canopy of a fabricated coast live oak, visitors are challenged to search for all of the layers of life within this single oak. From a salamander model partially hidden in the duff, to fungus and lichen clinging to the bark, to the sound of an acorn woodpecker drilling into the wood in search of insects, the organisms that live in oak woodlands form an intricate and complex food web. Repositioned, some of the taxidermy raptors could be suspended from the ceiling in this area. Other birds, such as western scrub jay and acorn woodpecker, could be mounted on the tree. Their noisy calls are heard by pushing buttons on an interpretive panel that provides an overview of the ecology of southern oak woodlands. Preserved plants that compose the understory, such as posio oak, toyon, and holly-leaved cherry, are encountered here as well.

Adjacent to the oak is a large glass terrarium housing a wood rat and its nest. Infrared lighting simulates night for this nocturnal animal, ensuring that visitors can witness the animal during its active hours. An interpretive panel showcases crepuscular and nocturnal life in the canyon—bats, owls, wood rats, coyotes, and other denizens of twilight and night. Younger visitors use oak woodland building blocks to create a food chain and discover where a wood rat fits into it. Even younger visitors can touch a series of oak woodland-based nature objects, such as bark from a coast live oak, acorns, woodpecker feather, and other specimens.

A portion of this exhibit cluster celebrates the life and culture of the Tataviam, *dwellers of the sunny slope*. Interpretive panels present a regional map of Southern California's Indian tribes. They also explain the material culture of the Tataviam, their resourcefulness and ability to live within their means, and their trading networks and interactions with neighboring people—the Kitanemuk, Serrano, Tongva, and Chumash. Mention is made of McCoy Pyle's 1884 discovery of Tataviam artifacts in a cave above the Chiquita Canyon landfill. The exhibit showcases an acorn preparation area with fabricated bedrock mortar, baskets, and tools. A demonstration area invites visitors to touch a bedrock mortar and securely fastened implements, as well to learn about the labor-intensive process of preparing acorn, a dietary staple of many of Southern California's Indian tribes. Mention is made that descendants of the original Tataviam still carry on their traditions today.

## Exhibit Narrative

### 2. On the Banks of the Stream

This cluster celebrates the canyon's riparian woodlands and stream. Fabricated sycamore branches hang overhead. A fabricated trunk of a western sycamore stands next to a small fabricated canyon wall that houses a stream-based aquarium. Visitors can study its "stream floor" life, including California newts and benthic macroinvertebrates. A portion of the exhibit floor appears as wet mud in which raccoon tracks appear. The raccoon taxidermy specimen could be positioned nearby. Interpretive panels focus on the significance of California's streams in providing critical habitat for numerous plants and animals. Although it is ephemeral, Placerita Creek is a significant feature at Placerita Canyon, and one of the feeder streams that flows into Santa Clara River, Los Angeles County's last *wild* river. Visitors are reminded that the quality of water in Placerita Creek ultimately influences the quality of water in the river and the coastal waters in which it drains. Interpretive panels showcase this connection, as well as the ecology of riparian woodlands and streams in general.

Another interpretive panel introduces rare, threatened, and endangered species of Placerita Canyon, the reasons for their decline, and restoration efforts underway in the state. Rare plants, including Peirson's morning glory, Davidson's bushmallow, slender horned spineflower, and Nevin's bricklebrush, occur within or close to park boundaries. It is possible, though unfortunately not probable, that Hammond's two-striped garter snake and yellow warbler could be sighted in the canyon's riparian woodland environment.

This exhibit pod also introduces a second ecological concept: energy transfer. Building upon the concept of food chains introduced in the *Life among the Oaks* cluster, young visitors are challenged to play a card game based on energy gains and loss rates at various trophic levels (e.g., *Wild rose absorbs energy from the Sun. Collect 1,000 energy points* or *Mule deer browses on wild rose. Collect 100 energy points*). They learn that matter cycles, but energy does not.

A small portion of this exhibit cluster showcases the role gold and oil played in shaping Placerita Canyon's history. The Oak of the Golden Dream is celebrated as lore and legend, although it cannot be disputed that Juan Francisco de Garcia Lopez discovered gold here six years prior to James W. Marshall's discovery in Coloma, 1848. Interpretive panels tell the story of California's gold and the significance of Placerita Canyon in the quest for wealth.

A gold panning display invites visitors to try their skill identifying placer deposits in stream material. With a large flat magnifying lens that slides on a rail, visitors study gravel and sand debris spiked with small gold nuggets and pyrite (fools' gold) in a miner's pan that is protected in an acrylic case. After reading a placard that offers tips on distinguishing gold from pyrite, visitors move the lens to an optimal position that allows for close-up observation of specimens, including mica. An interpretive panel celebrates the role gold historically played in Placerita's history, as its namesake and resource that brought a range of placer technology into the canyon—from panning to hydraulic mining. Historic photographs capture the human story—the primitive mining camps and the 6,000 miners that at one point, descended on the canyon. Mention is made of the historical context of these activities and that gold panning and other prospecting activities are now illegal and all park resources are protected.

A sepia-toned photograph of the New Century Oil Well (or other suitable image) provides a separate backdrop and focal point to briefly interpret Placerita's 19<sup>th</sup> century "white oil" exploration and production. An interpretive panel makes reference to the antique equipment displayed on the trail, Frank Walker's use of the oil as fuel for the family car, and Milford Yant's oil leases in the canyon. An interpretive panel encourages visitors to visit the Walker cabin along the Heritage Trail and learn more about Frank Walker and his family.

An interactive display illustrates the geological forces associated with the formation and movement of oil. As visitors mechanically operate the display, they observe the creation of hills and formation of an anticline. They discover why oil rises in these folds and how oil seeps occur.

### **3. Of Slopes and Chaparral**

Another exhibit pod focus on chaparral ecology. A photographic wall mural of a chaparral-covered hillside, an exhibit base of decomposing granite and scattered duff, preserved plant specimens, such as yucca, yerba santa, and chamise, and the center's roadrunner, California quail, and coyote taxidermy specimens form the setting. Interpretive panels introduce the climatic conditions that influence chaparral growth, including mild wet winters; long, dry summers; and occasionally, autumn fires. They also introduce the adaptations chaparral plants exhibit, as well as the birds, reptiles (including rare coast whiptail lizard), mammals, and other chaparral animals including insects. Audio clips of typical chaparral bird calls and songs, including those of wrenit, California quail, California towhee, and other common residents are push button-activated on a reading rail. Younger visitors are challenged to identify strategies a roadrunner, quail, and coyote exhibit to survive and thrive in the chaparral.

A terrarium, made to look as though it is part of the backdrop, houses a California kingsnake. Its role in the wild is showcased, as is its unique relationship to rattlesnakes, whose venom kingsnakes are immune to. Large field identification cards help visitors recognize the canyon's reptiles, including gopher snake, rattlesnake and kingsnake species, alligator lizard, western fence lizard, and side-blotched lizard, to name a few.

A series of small flip lids challenges visitors to determine the remarkable relationships between organisms, such as cynipid wasp and oak, western fence lizard and Lyme's Disease-infected ticks, and Pronuba moth and yucca.

This exhibit also provides an opportunity to discuss the role of fire in California's chaparral, its benefits and costs, and the increasingly high frequency of destructive firestorms. A series of photographs demonstrates the changing landscape of Placerita Canyon following multiple fires: the 2008 Sayre Fire, 2006 Walker Fire and Cross Fire, and 2004 Foothill Fire. A second reading rail displays various structural adaptations of chaparral plants to fire. Root burl sprouting, crown sprouting, and germination of plants with heat- or smoke-dependent seed coats are highlighted through push-button activation.

## Exhibit Narrative

A small portion of this exhibit cluster celebrates Hollywood's relationship to Placerita Canyon. Hollywood producers were looking for backdrops that spoke to the "western landscapes" of Wichita and Dodge City, and the chaparral-studded hillsides of Placerita Canyon fit the bill. During the first half of the twentieth century, they shot several notable films in Placerita Canyon, including *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Phantom Empire*, *The Cisco Kid*, *The Hard Hombre*, *Seven Chances*, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, and *Rough Riders*, and later, television episodes of *Gunsmoke*, *The Virginian*, *CSI*, and other shows. Visitors can sample brief film footage of such notable actors as William S. Hart, John Wayne, Harry Carey, Hopalong Cassidy, Buck Jones, and Gene Autry, as well as learn about the history of (and current plans for) the neighboring Golden Oak Ranch.

Toward the end of this cluster, the focus begins to shift to the visitor as questions about the urban-wildlands interface are posed. The placement of housing tracts adjacent to chaparral are a case in point. Are we willing to adjust our actions and policies when we live this close to the wild edge? What risks do we take and what consequences do we bring about?

### **4. Bringing It Home**

Stewardship of the canyon is demonstrated in many ways. An interpretive panel highlights the purpose of the County's Natural Areas, including Placerita Canyon. It also showcases the nature center's remodeling program in 2008-2009 and its designation as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, the first of its kind in the County Parks system. Its noteworthy architectural features, such as energy-efficient display lighting, energy efficient air conditioning and cooling systems, exterior building wall insulation and roofs, and water-conserving restroom facilities, are highlighted for the visitor. Estimated annual savings in terms of water, electricity and natural gas are calculated.

A second panel showcases the practices staff, docents, and other volunteers embrace on a daily basis, including recycling, composting, and rearing native plants on site to support habitat restoration efforts. Visitors are challenged to think about the ways they can reduce their "footprint" on the canyon that day. The reasons why adhering to rules, packing out trash, and leaving plants (including wildflowers) and animals alone are carefully explained. Other behaviors and activities that have broader implications are also discussed. Even though visitors will leave the canyon, the choices they make at home will affect it indirectly. Those choices also will affect other realms of nature as well as their own lives.

Part of this exhibit cluster also celebrates the positive ways visitors can interact with the canyon. A daypack brimming with appropriate supplies and equipment is displayed out of reach. An inexpensive camera, binoculars, hand lens, sketch book, colored pencils, field guide, watercolor paints, and a nature journal serve as reminders that nature can be captured on film and paper. We can enjoy it without exploiting it and damaging the very things we covet.

“Nature notes” identify points of interest visitors may not want to miss, from the Walker cabin to trails that transverse the canyon from low reaches along the streambed to the higher elevations where Los Pinetos Waterfall careens down the hill and bigcone spruce grow. An exit quote, such as one by Terry Tempest Williams (or other writer) sets the tone for experiences ahead on the trail: “To be whole. To be complete. Wildness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”

## Interpretation in the Classroom

### Discovery Lab

During weekends and when docents are available to staff it, the classroom could convert to a Discovery Lab. Comparable to the discovery rooms seen in museums and zoos, this conversion would provide an informal experience for families to explore and learn about Placerita's wildlife and ecosystems, as well as the processes and cycles that govern them.

We recommend rearranging the taxidermied specimens displayed on the east counter and adding placards next to certain animals that pose questions or offer "scavenger hunt" clues. Families could engage in activities that solve an ecological mystery and work together in the process. It is well documented that these types of activities stimulate parent/child interactions and enrich their conversations.

Some of the specimens also could be integrated into a diorama built into the south wall of the classroom. This will be explored during the next phase of work.

We also recommend moving the taxidermied specimens off the counter located on the west wall to create space for four to six self-contained discovery boxes. The discovery boxes could be similar to what the National Zoo and other institutions have created. Each discovery box could be a topic-specific collection of specimens (e.g., resin animal skull replicas, animal track castings, tree rings, vinyl scat replicas), viewing equipment (e.g., hand lenses, tripod magnifiers), laminated cue cards with illustrations, and activity cards that guide parent-child interactions.

An animal track discover box, for example, could include eight track casts or vinyl track replicas, eight corresponding cards showing track prints, eight corresponding animal illustrations, the book, *Whose Tracks Are These?*, and a set of activity cards that challenge the user to match each track cast to a track print and an image of the animal.

An adult and child or children could select a box, move it to the floor or a table, and spend however much time they choose exploring the topic and studying the objects. A roving docent would be available to answer questions, guide the discovery learning if prompts were needed, and provide a level of supervision that would ensure the boxes and their contents were returned at the end of the session.

"Discovery learning" in a museum context is based on involvement by the visitor in an activity that refers to objects on display. Using text, cue cards, and other print media, the visitor discovers specific information about those objects that is predetermined by staff.

The depth and potential of the learning opportunity can be expanded by providing multiple avenues for learning—visual cues, models, basic readers, and simple tools assist members of any age group and capability in accessing information they are comfortable receiving.



### Courtyard

The courtyard serves as the official entrance to the nature center, an informal gathering spot, and a place to collect wayfinding information or rest. Because the entrance to the administration office is not well marked, we recommend prominent signage on the double doors, removal of the trash barrel, and placement of additional planters. As the plan view is developed, three additional features can be explored: 1. a kiosk with park map and “notes from the field” board (posting of recent animal sightings, plants in bloom, etc.), tactile three-dimensional map of the canyon, and 3. outdoor video/DVD projection area possibly to the left of the museum’s double doors. The player could be kept inside; wall-mounted monitor, benches, and overhang would be added to the outdoors. During peak attendance, the program could play on a continuous loop.

The courtyard is also an opportune spot for new exterior exhibits. Due to the popularity of the center’s live animals and their value as “ambassadors,” and the need to abide by certain zoological standards (e.g., security, animal welfare, educational aim) we recommend renovation and expansion of the live animal outdoor displays. Specifically, we suggest replacement of the flightless raptor enclosure, development of one newflighted raptor enclosure, development of two new animal displays, one for reptiles and the other for small mammals, and improvements to the tortoise enclosure. Each display could be accompanied by one low-profile interpretive panel that discusses the natural history of the animal(s) and provides an explanation of the reasons why the nature center keeps certain animals in captivity (e.g., education, long-term care of injured, non-releasable wildlife). Docents, with animals, such as the owls, would continue to add to the visitor’s experiences in the courtyard.

In addition to these displays, we recommend placement of interpretive media in the observation deck enclosure once final architectural plans for its interior are developed. Use of exterior-grade “bird field guide” panels on a reading rail and other media, such as one or two permanently mounted viewsopes should be considered. The committee has also



Nature center office



Sample viewscope by SeeCoast Manufacturing



## Interpretation in the Courtyard

suggested development of a diorama in this space. This too can be explored in the next phase of work; however, without a complete seal from the elements (e.g., walls and door) taxidermied specimens likely would degrade.

### **Non-releasable raptors**

We recommend replacing the current raptor enclosure with a slightly larger, more naturalistic enclosure, such as one defined by a flexible stainless cable mesh. Use of a material such as X-TEND by CarlStahl Decorcable reduces the need for a substantial support structure and provides unobstructed views for the visitor. This material could also be used for construction of the new flighted raptor enclosure.

### **Reptiles**

One or two compatible, non-venomous snakes or lizards could be placed on display in a secured, naturalistic enclosure at the observation deck. Provided the enclosure offers the means (e.g., including heat lamps) to control body temperature, this could be an optimal way to allow for close-up viewing of canyon wildlife, particularly when the museum gallery is not available to the public.

The desert tortoise enclosure would also remain in the courtyard, but would be renovated. Although not native to this region, these tortoises are part of Placerita Canyon Nature Center's non-releasable animal care program. The accompanying interpretive panel should speak to the threatened status of desert tortoises, the reason for their decline in the wild, and the prevalence of respiratory infections among tortoises taken out of their dry desert habitat.

### **Small mammals**

Since Virginia opossums are docile and remarkably easy to keep in captivity, they are another candidate for display in the courtyard. This exhibit could simulate a backyard—recycling bin or metal trash can, patio landscaping, and other artifacts of the suburban home would remind visitors of their position in the urban-wildland interface. The interpretive panel could speak to the opossum's marsupial life history, its nonnative status, and the role it plays as a scavenger in both the wilds and neighborhoods of Southern California. As with the raptors and reptiles, opossums on display would need to be moved into secured night quarters at close of day.

Conceptual drawings and plan views of the courtyard, as well as museum gallery and classroom, will be developed during the next phase of work. These will show how visitors move through each of these areas, how these areas connect to each other, and how visitors access trail from them.

While the gallery exhibits, “Discovery Lab,” and courtyard will serve visitors who choose to enter the nature center complex, other media are required to reach visitors who simply visit Placerita Canyon to hike or picnic, or who arrive when the building is closed or in use by school groups. Further, because we know that people vary in attention span, learning preferences, and learning styles, a multi-layered communication effort will be most effective tool to raise ecological and environmental awareness, impart a sense of history, guide behavior, and foster a sense of stewardship toward the canyon’s resources. We recommend expansion of the Placerita Canyon Audio Discovery (PCAD) podcast program, as well as placement of outdoor interpretive panels, or wayside exhibits, at key points along the Ecology Trail, Botany Trail, and Heritage Trail, and placement of improved orientation, wayfinding, and regulatory signs at strategic locations including trailheads and trail intersections.

As panels are developed, it will be important to keep certain points in mind. All signs need to reflect a cohesive and clear identity for the Placerita Canyon Natural Area trail system. There should be a unified “look and feel,” supported by both the design and the media. We recommend use of one of the following vandal-resistant sign products: phenolic resin (high pressure laminate), ArmorGrafix, or PorceLite. The latter two have the resilience of porcelain enamel at a fraction of the cost. Interpretive panels should be installed according to National Park Service guidelines for low-profile, angled wayside exhibits. Orientation and wayfinding panels should be positioned as upright installations.

The ultimate purpose of wayside exhibits is to enhance visitor understanding on any number of topics—places, people, flora and fauna, ecosystems, historical events, objects and artifacts. The use of wayside exhibits offers several advantages: 1. They are visitor-friendly; visitors have “free choice” in deciding which panels to read, 2. They are always accessible to the visitor as long as the trails are open; and 3. They are cost-effective over the long-term when vandal-resistant media are used.

As with all forms of interpretation, wayside exhibits should adhere to certain principles that guide design as well as development of text<sup>2</sup>.

**Interpretive media must make a personal connection with, or be relevant to, the intended audience.**

Visitors more readily integrate new learning by relating it to what they already know. There are several ways this is accomplished, including the use of humor, metaphors, stories, and analogies in the development of text. Testing readability during formative evaluation (before going to the expense of fabricating panels) is an important step in this process. It helps ensure the text will engage multiple audiences using easily accessible text.

<sup>2</sup>*Designing Interpretive Signs*, Moscardo, Ballantyne, Hughes, 2007.

## Interpretation on the Trails

### **Interpretive media should provide or encourage novel and varied experiences.**

Posing thought-provoking questions, creating several different styles of wayside media, and encouraging diverse activity (e.g., quiet meditation at certain points versus active dialogue at Walker's Cabin) will help capture and maintain visitor interests.

Interpretation is based first on recreation. Visitors are voluntary learners and all interpretive media fall within a leisure setting. Material that is perceived as fun is more likely read than that perceived as instruction.

### **Interpretive media should be organized with clear, easy-to-follow structures.**

Visitors tend to read panel titles first; therefore, it is important to create interesting and eye-catching headlines. Subtitles and callouts create a layered approach for the text and enable the reader to build their own "mental scaffold" of the interpretive material.

### **Interpretive media should be based on the theme.**

To some degree, all of the interpretive media identified for Placerita Canyon reflects the overarching theme and select subthemes. Focusing on the "take-home messages" helps visitors see the big picture and fold new information into an intellectual framework they personally understand.

### **Interpretive media should engage visitors in the learning experience and encourage them to take control of their own learning.**

Arranging material hierarchically on a panel enables visitors to decide on their own level of reading commitment. It is well documented that visitors generally spend three seconds, 30 seconds, or three minutes reading a panel, and that the attracting power of a panel is related to brevity of text, design appeal, and liberal use of images. When activities and challenging questions are added to the mix, panels become springboards for discussion and useful teaching aids for parents interested in fostering learning with their children.

### **Interpretive media should demonstrate an understanding of, and respect for, the audience.**

Based on staff and volunteer information, we know the Placerita Canyon audience is a recreationally diverse group of people who are likely to visit the site on foot, as well as by mountain bike. While cyclists are less likely to stop and read panels during a ride, hikers will. We also know it is highly likely that those who hike and those who are seeking an outdoor outing with their family will be bringing their children.

### **Orientation Signs**

The institutional signs positioned at the entrance to Placerita Canyon Natural Area and the Nature Center are new, well designed, and large enough to make a statement and announce the visitor's arrival.

As funds are secured, we suggest the placement of smaller orientation signs based on the existing template at the picnic area, amphitheater, and other key locations.



### **Wayfinding Signs**

To aid in wayfinding and planning for exercise regimes, new and enhanced wayfinding (directional) signs need to be positioned throughout the trails at access points and intersections. These signs should feature a “you are here” symbol, trail map, trail mileage, level of difficulty, and permissible use (e.g., hiking-only). They should also provide trail tips to ensure safe, enjoyable experiences and GPS receiver positions should an emergency need to be reported to local authorities.



### **Regulatory Signs**

We recommend the addition of new, redesigned regulatory signs at the park entrance, parking areas, trailheads, and picnic area. These signs should state rules and regulations and provide brief statements that explain why they are in place. The regulatory sign, together with a wayfinding sign, should appear at each trailhead.



## Interpretation on the Trails

### Wayside exhibits

Keeping in mind it is easy to “oversign” a trail and overwhelm the visitor, as well as blight the landscape, we recommend placement of a limited number of wayside exhibits along each trail where notable features need to be called out. The following inventory is a master list.

The interpretive panels depicted in the margin are representative samples that show the 3-30-3 rule at work.

### Ecology Trail

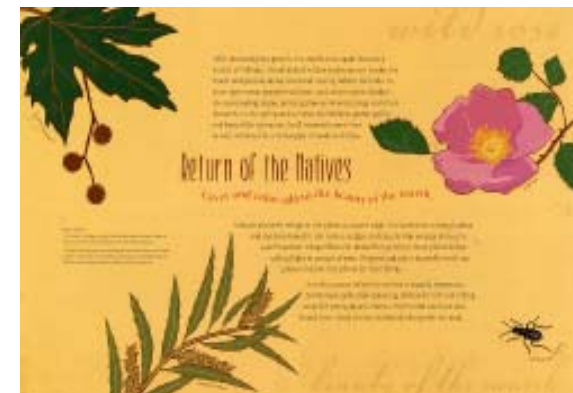
- Tataviam Ways (ki replica)
- Life in the Chaparral (ecological principles at work in the chaparral)
- Rising from the Ashes (fire ecology)
- Placerita Canyon wildlife (common wildlife and their role in the ecosystem)

### Botany Trail

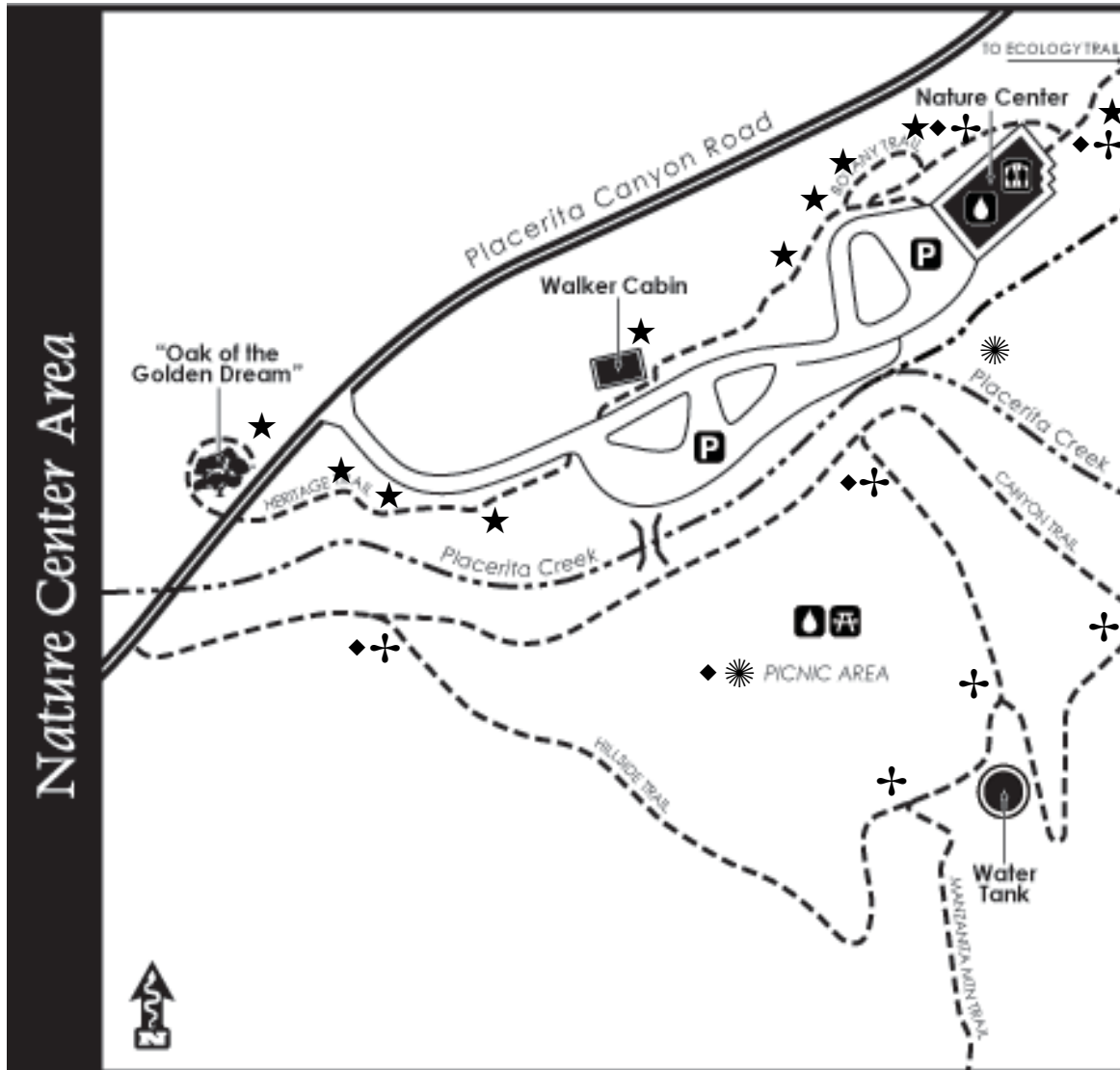
- The Life and Times of an Oak (oaks as keystone species)
- The Plants of Placerita Canyon (common plants, inc. poison oak, as well as other organisms such as the fungus, witch’s butter, are highlighted)
- The Banks of a Creek (riparian species)
- Of Sun and Shade (north- versus south-facing slopes)

### Heritage Trail

- “Sections” of our Natural Heritage (Lyon’s Oak)
- Homesteading the Canyon (Walker’s Cabin)
- The Glitter of Gold (legend of the Oak of the Golden Dream)
- The Quest for Oil (antique oil equipment)
- Canyon “Pay Dirt” (gold mining activity)
- Hollywood Legends (classic film locations)







(four interpretive panels on the Ecology Trail)

**Sign Legend**

- ☀ Small orientation sign
- ✚ Wayfinding Sign
- ◆ Regulatory Sign
- ★ Interpretive Panel

## Universal Design Guidelines

The realization that one in five Americans have one or more impairments has given rise to the concept of universal design and accompanying legal mandates for its use. Universal design takes into account the needs of a diverse general public through the development of accessible, barrier-free facilities and programs.

Three federal laws mandate the design of accessible environments. The Architectural Barriers Act regulates the construction of federal buildings by requiring physical access to facilities built or altered after 1968 or leased after 1977. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires barrier-free federal programming for physically disabled persons for the purpose of preventing discrimination of “qualified individuals with handicaps.” The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provides civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities. ADA sets forth equal opportunities for programs, services, and activities offered by public entities.

Equal opportunities must be provided through reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures; effective communication must be ensured through the provision of auxiliary aids and services; programs must be made accessible through nonstructural (programmatic) or architectural modifications; and nondiscriminatory employment practices are required, as presented in Title I of the ADA.

Discrimination is prohibited on the basis of disability by private entities in places of public accommodation, and all new places of public accommodation and commercial facilities are required to be designed and constructed so as to be readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities.

It is important to note that compliance benefits the entire visiting public and not just those with disabilities. Since a nature center’s audience consists of people of varying ages, physical stature, language capability, and preferred learning modality, incorporating universal design results in accessible, enjoyable experiences for the greatest number of people. In the context of interpretive planning, universal design suggests the use of multi-sensory exhibits, carefully positioned panels with text placed on high-contrast (but not white), non-glare background, orientation panels with pictographs, verbal (and tactile) presentations by docents, multilingual podcasts, and written, multilingual handouts to assist foreign visitors. It should be noted that less than 10 percent of the adult visually impaired population in the United States can read braille. Audio recordings and multi-sensory (tactile) displays are recommended in place of braille.



Audiences at Placerita Canyon can be categorized as formal or nonformal. A formal audience is comprised of teachers and students, generally from a particular grade level, who participate in a program to reinforce classroom-based learning. A nonformal audience is comprised of visitors who voluntarily attend a program either as an individual or member of a social group such as family or friends. In both cases, program success is determined largely by matching the needs, interests, and constraints of the audience with the content and presentation of the program.

### **Formal Audiences**

In terms of formal audiences, California classroom teachers face constraints that limit participation in programs that are considered “extraneous” or “supplemental” to the classroom curriculum. California State Board of Education Content Standards establish the basis of California Standards Tests and thus, the guidelines for academic performance. Teachers cannot afford to spend time on any program that is not academically relevant to their particular grade level. Budget cutbacks and legal restrictions create additional constraints. Transportation costs associated with school buses continue to rise, while teachers find themselves prohibited to use private cars driven by parents. Increasingly, program providers are asked to document how field trip programs reinforce standards-driven learning in order to justify the effort.

Therefore, staff and volunteers should review California’s Science Content Standards (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/sciencetnd.pdf>) and History-Social Science Content Standards (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/histsocscistnd.pdf>), the State’s Environmental Principles and Concepts (EP&Cs) based on the Education and the Environment Initiative (<http://www.calepa.ca.gov/education/eei/>), and the curriculum scope and sequences of local school districts. They also should review the *Windows into the Wild* program to determine if grade level-specific alignment of this program is called for. cursory review of the content standards and the EP&Cs reveals many opportunities for more focused elementary level program development. These opportunities include guided tours along the trail and in the museum’s gallery (once built) to glean knowledge about life and earth sciences (grades 2-5), earth science and resources (grade 6), characteristics of place (grade 1), historical and community resources (grade 3), and California Indian nations and California’s historical periods (grade 4). An informal survey among classroom teachers could yield useful data regarding direction for this effort.

### **Education and the Environment Initiative**

In addition to California’s Content Standards, recent legislation has also called for new approaches to environment-based education at the state level. The Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI) specifically calls for the development of environmental principles and concepts as essential learning for students; the incorporation of these principles and concepts into California’s curriculum frameworks and textbook adoption criteria for science, English/language arts, and history/social science, and their alignment to California’s academic content standards; and the development of a Model Curriculum designed to teach to mastery both the academic content standards and the principles and concepts.

## Recommended Direction for Programs

The environmental principles and concepts examine the interactions and interdependence of human societies and natural systems. The nature of these interactions is summarized in the environmental principles presented below.

**Principle I:** The continuation and health of individual human lives and of human communities and societies depend on the health of the natural systems that provide essential goods and ecosystem services.

**Principle II:** The long-term functioning and health of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems are influenced by their relationships with human societies.

**Principle III:** Natural systems proceed through cycles that humans depend upon, benefit from and can alter.

**Principle IV:** The exchange of matter between natural systems and human societies affects the long-term functioning of both.

**Principle V:** Decisions affecting resources and natural systems are based on a wide range of considerations and decision-making processes.

The principles and concepts are aligned to California content standards in science and history/social science. While the primary purpose of this alignment is to ensure that teaching these principles and concepts will help students achieve mastery of the content standards, a secondary purpose is to provide a meaningful context in which students perceive the significance of the standards to their daily lives. Program development at Placerita Canyon should align to and reflect the EP&Cs, if not the actual content presented in the state's new EEI curriculum units.

### **Nonformal Audience**

According to formal definitions, a nature center is a facility that serves the local community by restoring and conserving a sample of the native landscape. Nature centers help nearby residents develop a "sense of place." At Placerita Canyon, a variety of programs cater to the needs and interests of those audiences who participate "nonformally" on a voluntary basis and seek recreational and interpretive experiences to share with their families and friends. Each Saturday, for example, visitors routinely can enjoy a family nature hike and native animal presentation. Junior Ranger Programs and specialty classes, such as beginner birding, are also offered on specific Saturdays. Once developed, the museum gallery and courtyard will offer additional venues for programs and impromptu interaction with staff and volunteers.

It is beneficial to address evaluation during various phases of developing media and programs. Conducted internally by staff or externally by consultants, evaluation informs the interpretive planning process and generates specific information that helps improve the outcome of a final product or experience. Evaluation typically occurs at three stages: front-end, formative, and summative. Front-end evaluation, such as a visitor survey, allows for substantiated knowledge about the audience. This information in turn is used to identify and design appropriate media and nonformal programs. Other tools, such as an educator needs assessment, solicit input from a particular target audience, such as faculty of neighboring school districts and colleges. This information helps guide the development of education programs that are grounded in content standards and district scopes and sequences.

Formative evaluation occurs as programs and media are developed so that “mid-course” corrections can be made easily. It allows for an assessment of readability (e.g., Flesch Readability Test) and legibility of print media; attraction and holding power of interpretive panels and exhibits; and optimal placement of media. It relies on the use of draft materials and models that are inexpensively produced, allowing for the media to be adjusted prior to fabrication or permanent installation.

Summative evaluation occurs after a program is conducted or the media are in place. Summative evaluation measures attainment of objectives, and thus, require statements that are specific and measurable. Objectives can focus on outputs (what Placerita Canyon does, such as increase program offerings), outcomes (what visitors do, such as demonstrate increased awareness and knowledge), or impacts (what occurs with the resource, such as decreased incidence of vandalism). Summative evaluation is based on qualitative methods such as field observations and interviews or quantitative methods such as pre- and post-tests. Its ultimate purpose is to yield information about how a program or interpretive element is producing results.

Exhibit development is organized according to five phases. With the submittal of this report, the first phase, conceptual planning, has been completed for Placerita Canyon Nature Center. The goals, objectives, and themes are established; exhibit concepts are described in narrative form; and recommendations for enhanced visitor experiences in the building and on the grounds are provided.

In the second phase, conceptual design, the narrative descriptions of exhibits are translated into bubble diagrams and preliminary sketches, and then into plan views and conceptual drawings. These drawings refine the overall exhibit concept and individual clusters in the gallery, as well as treatments for the courtyard and classroom.

The third exhibit development phase is design development. Finished detailed renderings, three-dimensional computer models, and section drawings are created. Preliminary specifications and written documents explicitly define the media in order to secure an accurate cost estimate. Artifacts and objects are identified; specific audio, visual, and lighting equipment is called out; and interpretive panel text for the gallery and courtyard is prepared.

Following design development, the project moves into the fourth phase: final design, specifications, and construction documents. These shop drawings serve as the “blueprints” for exhibit fabrication. Dimensional and material specifications, performance specifications, and details for hardware and special equipment are defined. Final pre-press production of interpretive panels, exhibit labels, and other signage is completed.

At the completion of the final design phase, the project moves into the final phase, fabrication and installation.

Implementation of each phase of work is entirely dependent upon the availability of funds. Once the second phase is completed, a “ballpark” cost estimate can be calculated. If it is determined that funding is not sufficient to accomplish everything defined in the master plan, we recommend addressing the museum gallery first, followed by the courtyard, classroom, and trails sign system in this order.

**Appendix**

### **Placerita Canyon Nature Center Interpretive Planning Meeting Report Submitted by The Acorn Group**

Stakeholders affiliated with Placerita Canyon Nature Center participated in an interpretive planning session facilitated by Jennifer Rigby (The Acorn Group) on November 14, 2009. Participants included Mozaffar Baurami, Roger Basham, Reg Fear, Jill Goodard, Frank Hoffman, Jon Hutson, Ron Kraus, Janet Kubler, Larry McLaughlin, Ruth Anne Murthy, Dave Perry, Jo Ellen Rismanchi, Pat Saletore, Diane Southwell, Jim Southwell, Gordon Uppman, and Leon Worden.

This session launched the development of the interpretive master plan—the document that identifies and defines opportunities for visitor engagement with exhibit media and displays in the museum, classroom, courtyard, and adjacent trails. The specific purpose of the session was to identify topics for interpretation and develop the organization of messages, as well as establish goals for interpretation and possible themes. A copy of the agenda is provided in the first appendix; group input is summarized in subsequent appendices.

#### **Interpretive principles**

To recap, an interpretive master plan identifies strategies to create the optimal visitor experience in order to cultivate an informed public. While it takes into account all other plans—resource management plans, trail master plans, and architectural plan packages—and considers the site, the architecture, and the resources in their entirety, the focus remains on the visitor. The aim of an interpretive plan is to identify those strategies that will help the visitor become aware of, understand, and embrace a unifying message (theme) conveyed through the media. In the greater context of planning for Placerita Canyon, it is the interpretive planning effort that addresses resource management issues while remaining responsive to the needs and interests of visitors. Specifically, it aims to accomplish the following:

Help people connect with the canyon's resources;

Accomplish the missions of the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates<sup>1</sup> and Los Angeles County/Department of Parks and Recreation<sup>2</sup>;

Inspire and enlighten in order to open minds and promote stewardship.

<sup>1</sup> To inspire a passion, awareness and respect for the environment, and to preserve and protect for future generations the history and ecosystem of Placerita Canyon.

<sup>2</sup> The Department provides the residents and visitors of Los Angeles County with quality recreational opportunities that promote a healthy lifestyle and strengthen the community through diverse physical, educational, and cultural programming, and enhances the community environment by acquiring, developing, and maintaining County Parks, gardens, golf courses, trails, and open space areas.

It is important to note that interpretation is not the presentation of facts, but rather the presentation of material that piques curiosity and relates to the audience's experiences. Freeman Tilden, an early champion of interpretation, suggested that the primary interests of visitors to sites of natural beauty and cultural significance are in whatever touches their personalities, experiences, or ideals. However it is defined, it's all about communication and the effectiveness of provoking feelings and thoughts, and guiding behavior.

Interpretation has five essential qualities. It is **purposeful**—it serves the visitor as well as the missions of both the Placerita Canyon Nature Center Associates and Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. It is **enjoyable**—it is entertaining, stimulating, interactive, and multi-sensory. It is **relevant** in ways that are meaningful and personal. Meaningful content links to something the visitor already knows; it becomes personal when linked to something the visitor already cares about. Interpretation is also **organized**. The media are well planned, sequential, and easy to follow. Last, it is **thematic**. It focuses on a central message about the subject matter that serves to connect facts and concepts together as a unifying whole. A theme organizes the media, allowing the visitor to know where the presentation is going, making it easier to connect it to other information.

### **Topics, Tangibles, and Intangibles**

The committee then came up with a number of suggested topics for interpretation. These are summarized in the second appendix. Topics serve as the potential subject matter for the interpretive media. For Placerita Canyon, they range from the natural processes, cycles, and forces that shape the canyon, as well as the canyon's remarkable wildlife, to the region's rich human history, including Tataviam heritage, Spanish and Mexican influence, and mark of individuals such as Francisco Lopez and Frank Walker. The topics also make reference to the rich natural resources of the region and the lure of oil and gold in particular.

The committee clustered (and re-clustered) the topics into categories which would later help inform development of the theme.

In interpretation, it is important to build the story “up,” rather than just “across.” In order to help visitors connect to meanings emotionally as well as intellectually (meaning, care enough about Placerita Canyon to help care **for** Placerita Canyon) it is important to link its tangible resources, such as its placer gold, creek, wildlife, and oaks with intangible meanings, such as entrepreneurship, resilience, and historic and natural value. These intangible meanings go beyond the topics to embrace universally recognized values such as human heritage and the protection of nature and wild places. When this is accomplished, visitors experience the canyon's “spirit of place” in a very personal and emotional way.

The committee then identified target audiences (Appendix 3), as well as opportunities and constraints (Appendix 4) within the visitors' experiences. All of these factors help inform the selection and placement of media. For example, we understand there is a wide range of ages among visitors and panel copy therefore will need to accommodate readers of differing abilities. There likely are language barriers as well, that can be addressed creatively and effectively.



## Appendix

### Interpretive goals

The committee also began to think about goals<sup>3</sup>. Goals are statements of desired outcomes that guide programs and management or operations functions. They articulate what interpretation is meant to do for Placerita Canyon, its visitors, and its management. They guide the formation of interpretive media and services during the planning process and, together with specific and measurable objectives, permit accurate and meaningful evaluation of interpretive programming before, during, and after development.

Educational directives related to Placerita Canyon focus on a desire to impart knowledge and cultivate an appreciative audience. To do this, interpretation must address both the cognitive and affective realms—the logical as well as the emotional aspects of the mind. People will not make behavioral changes if they only *understand* an issue; they must also feel that the topic has some relevance to their lives and that a behavioral change will bring one or more valued benefits.

Every interpretive experience should be designed, therefore, to have an emotional or affective component as well as an intellectual or cognitive component, leading ultimately to a desired behavioral change. However, unlike visitor knowledge and visitor behavior, visitor feelings and attitudes are difficult to measure with accuracy and certainty that a specified variable is having an effect. Even so, progress toward attainment of affective goals often can be measured indirectly—inferred from measurement of visitor behavior, since behavioral changes are typically preceded by changes in attitude or affect.

The following goals represent a blending of input received during the November 14 planning session and subsequent work by The Acorn Group. Goal statements received during the meeting are recorded in Appendix 5. Combined, these affective, cognitive, and behavioral goals will ensure interpretation is aimed at helping visitors feel connected to the canyon's rich human heritage and natural history, while understanding and helping protect it.

### Emotional Goals

Visitors will have a satisfying and enjoyable time at the Placerita Canyon Nature Center.

Visitors will appreciate the rich human heritage of the canyon.

Visitors will appreciate the canyon's biological diversity.

Visitors will recognize that the canyon has been shaped over the millennia by faulting, erosion, flood, fire, and other natural processes, forces, and events.

<sup>3</sup>The term “visitor” refers to the full array of target audiences for Placerita Canyon's interpretive media. Some goals are particularly relevant to certain audience segments. Accordingly, actual interpretive messages and methods of delivery will be shaped to fit each target audience.

Visitors will appreciate the efforts invested in renovating the building to be a LEED- certified building and maintaining that designation through best management practices.

Visitors will feel they have an important role to play as stewards of Placerita Canyon.

Visitors will recognize that appropriate behaviors are expected of them during their visit.

### **Cognitive Goals**

Visitors will gain an understanding of the Tataviam culture and the interaction of the Tataviam with neighboring people, including the Kitanemuk, Serrano, Tongva, and Chumash.

Visitors will gain an understanding of the lives and activities of Francisco Lopez, Milford Yant, and Frank Walker, three pioneering individuals associated with Placerita Canyon.

Visitors will recognize plants and animals associated with Placerita Canyon's habitats, including southern oak woodland, riparian woodland, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and bigcone spruce.

Visitors will gain an understanding how the canyon's plants and animal interact with and depend upon each other.

Visitors will gain an understanding that Placerita Canyon is home to sensitive, rare, and endangered species.

Visitors will gain an understanding of how natural processes, forces, and events, including faulting, erosion, flood, and fire, have shaped the canyon over the millennia.

Visitors will gain an understanding of the natural cycles that govern life in the canyon, including the cycling of matter and flow of energy.

Visitors will gain an understanding that we depend on, and can influence those processes and cycles that govern life in the canyon.

## Appendix

### **Behavioral Goals**

Visitors will stop by the nature center's museum and courtyard and actively engage themselves with the interpretive media.

Visitors will demonstrate heightened awareness of, understanding of, and support for Placerita Canyon through their adherence to rules and regulations.

Visitors will engage in activities that are appropriate in the building, courtyard, and trails.

Visitors will express a strong desire to return to Placerita Canyon.

### **Interpretive themes and sub-themes**

The committee explored and drafted themes for the project. They worked in small groups and reported back to the larger committee. Their ideas are summarized in the sixth appendix.

A theme is the principle message, or story, about the subject matter which serves to connect topics and concepts together as a unifying whole. A theme allows for a linkage of important ideas concerning the topic(s) the committee identified. It is well documented that theme-based interpretation is easier to comprehend and recall at a later point. It serves as an "advance organizer," giving the visitor a sense of where the exhibit media are going and making it easier to connect their content to other information.

Although the central theme may or may not be articulated verbatim in media or programs, it is the conclusion that we hope visitors will reach on their own after reading the panels and the impression that will linger long after the details of the visit have been forgotten.

Sub-themes further develop the central theme, allowing for a logical progression into storylines. Typically a well-planned experience conveys three to five sub-themes, all of which are subordinate, but directly related, to the central theme.

The following represents a synthesis of ideas proposed by the committee during the interpretive planning session. It is important to keep in mind the theme and sub-themes do not appear in print. Rather, these statements focus the media and offer a thread that weaves the stories together.

**Proposed overarching theme**

*The richness of Placerita Canyon is defined by its biological diversity and natural resources, as well as by the experiences it provides visitors.*

**Sub-themes**

*Over time, natural forces and processes have shaped the canyon, as well as its natural resources, vegetation, and wildlife.*

*The canyon's natural resources have sustained people for thousands of years. They continue to attract people today, namely those who seek experiences in nature.*

*People are a part of nature. We are governed by the same cycles and processes that govern nature.*

The interpretive matrix, attached as a PDF document, displays this information hierarchically. The theme is supported by the sub-themes. The sub-themes in turn are supported by key messages. Key messages keep information “in check,” ensuring that we cover important material, keep the interpretive goals in mind, and avoid straying from the theme and sub-themes. Not all key messages are equally weighted. As draft storylines are developed, that “weight distribution” will become evident. We will keep in mind the core target audience: children and their accompanying adults.

**Action steps:**

Please review this report and the interpretive matrix. Feel free to electronically track any changes and/or add comments, and send them to Jennifer Rigby ([emailacom@aol.com](mailto:emailacom@aol.com)) and copy both Jim Southwell ([jimndian@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jimndian@sbcglobal.net)) and Frank Hoffman ([fhoffman@parks.lacounty.gov](mailto:fhoffman@parks.lacounty.gov)). If you do not have access to email, please feel free to fax your comments to Jenny's attention at (714) 838-5309. We would appreciate hearing from you by February 19, 2010. At that time, we will make any final changes, and then proceed to developing exhibit storylines.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Meeting agenda

Placerita Canyon Interpretive Planning Workshop  
November 14, 2009  
Agenda

Group introductions

Introduction to the interpretive master plan—what it will accomplish and how it differs from other types of plans

Overview of the 5M approach to interpretive planning—understanding how the mission statement, target markets, mechanics of the site, messages, and selected media work together

All-group work

Identifying topics for interpretation

Clustering topics into a coherent structure

Break

Sub-group work

Developing draft interpretive goals and the theme, the principle message or story about the topics

All-group reporting

Next steps and adjournment

**Appendix 2: Suggested topics**

- Fauna:** California toad, Pacific tree frog, amphibians, reptiles<sup>5</sup>, poisonous animals of Placerita, migratory animals, bird songs, birds of prey<sup>2</sup>, native birds<sup>3</sup>, use of camouflage, mammals, animal diets, native animals<sup>3</sup>, insects<sup>2</sup>, animal babies, animal fact and fiction, scrub jay, acorn woodpeckers, crows, ravens, bird's eye view, mammal eye's view, insect's and reptile's eye view,
- Flora:** stream algae (as basis of food chain), plants<sup>5</sup>, wildflowers, acorns (and all they imply), native plants (uses and importance), fungi, present day plant uses, toxic plants of Placerita, invasive and nonnative species, what plants are edible and for whom, plant adaptations, chamise, sage, manzanita, sugar bush, drought tolerance
- Ethnobotany:** [American] Indian use of plants<sup>2</sup>
- Ecology:** what did the valley look like before people?, resilience of ecosystems, life under the soil surface, interrelationships of nature, symbiotic relationships within Placerita<sup>2</sup>, burrows as habitat, habitats, holes in trees as habitat, riparian ecosystems, riparian habitat, wildlife corridors<sup>3</sup>, animal capacity, chaparral community, oak woodland community, [biomes], biotic communities of Placerita, food chains<sup>2</sup> (predator/prey relationships), human influences on Placerita, human-wildlife interface, O<sub>2</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub> exchange and air quality, human impact, adaptation (fitting into local conditions), ecosystems include humans, ecology<sup>2</sup>, coexistence, human footprint at Placerita, dependence of built environment on natural environment,
- Geology:** stream erosion, wind erosion, erosion/deposition, soils and soil formation<sup>2</sup> canyon formation<sup>3</sup>, earthquakes and faults<sup>2</sup>, rock types<sup>2</sup> and ages, seismic activity, plate tectonics, geology<sup>3</sup>, shaping of the land<sup>2</sup> (fire, wind, rain, earthquakes), fossils (marine geology), paleohistory<sup>2</sup>
- Hydrology:** stream systems, watershed management (aquifer), water flow, water<sup>2</sup>, watershed and erosion control, ephemeral streams (where do they go?), Placerita Creek
- Astronomy:** stars at night
- Natural processes,**  
**events, cycles:** energy flow, Santa Ana winds, weather and climate<sup>4</sup>, seasons and seasonal change<sup>2</sup> (migratory birds, hibernation, sunlight [exposure]), climate change<sup>3</sup>, photosynthesis, decomposition, plant life cycle, plant reproduction cycle, animal reproduction cycle, biotic relationships, why nature is important to people, fire ecology<sup>4</sup>, fire safety and prevention, succession, sustainable cycles of life

Superscript numbers denote frequency of response. Brackets identify words added by editor.



## Appendix

Natural resources:	oil <sup>5</sup> , white oil, use of natural resources by humans over time, oil seep on canyon trail, Kerosene Creek, gold <sup>5</sup>
Human history:	agricultural history (what did the Walkers grow?), Placerita myths and legends, discovery of gold <sup>2</sup> , gold rush, gold mining, gold pioneers, Mexican influences, Spanish exploration, Spanish missions, Walker family <sup>4</sup> , pioneer life, Placerita history, connection to the rest of Santa Clarita Valley, oil pump and equipment, 1930 dedication event, history of establishment of Placerita Canyon Park, history of nature center building, early radio and music, movie and television history, movies made in Placerita Canyon, Walker “tourist resort” story, oil exploration and drilling, Francisco Lopez family history, Oak of Golden Dream <sup>3</sup> , Alex Mentry, canyon ruins <sup>2</sup> (water tank, pipe on Ecology Trail, retaining walls on the canyon trail, Tataviam American Indians <sup>2</sup> , first inhabitants, Native American history <sup>3</sup>
Present-day:	Disney Rancho Film Studio, movie industry, connection to others areas in Santa Clarita Valley, art history [Rudy’s tunnel art], current use for scouts, docent-led student groups, and research, roads through Placerita Canyon
Stewardship:	softening the urban edge, understanding consequences of living at the urban edge, LEED-EB designation <sup>3</sup> , sustainability, environmental protection, preservation, harmony <sup>2</sup> : nature, people, development, Placerita as an oasis from urban sprawl, recycling
Education:	[encouraging visitors to] sign up to help, awareness, biophilia (people are healthier with nature), children interacting, nature as a source of ideas

### **Appendix 3: Target audiences:**

School-age children (mostly non-local from Los Angeles Unified School District: Los Angeles and Antelope Valley)  
People who picnic  
Outdoor enthusiasts  
Community groups (bird watchers, Sierra Club members)  
Artist groups  
Photographers  
Parents and toddlers  
People who can enjoy the handicapped-accessible Heritage Trail  
Visitors whose primary language is English (some speak Spanish, others Korean)

Of particular note: Increasingly, there is a growing contingency of Pacific Asians in the community. Also, it appears the West Side (Valencia) looks down upon the East Side (Canyon Country), so Placerita consequently receives little visitation from residents of Valencia.

#### **Appendix 4: Reasons to visit Placerita Canyon**

Constraints: Mountain cyclists move too fast and do not yield to pedestrians. People often let their dogs walk off-leash; do not pick up after them. Some people litter the trails and mark rocks and trees with graffiti. Others engage in “mining” activities. Minerals, tadpoles, branches are taken out of the park, while discarded pets are dropped off at the park. Loud radios generate noise pollution. The noise and large-scale filming detract from the natural experiences of Placerita Canyon.

Opportunities: People seek solitude or places to hike and get exercise (e.g., jog). They come to get away from paved surfaces. They are curious about Placerita. There is a certain “wow factor” here. The creek is a draw, as is the presence of gold. Some come because their college coursework requires a visit (e.g., Janet and Larry); others come because they are part of an elementary class field trip (e.g., Ruth Ann). Still others come to undertake Eagle Scout projects (400 to date). Some attend lectures, animal shows, and other park programs and special events. Others come to enjoy a picnic or to see the animals (e.g., snakes and lizards in the previously displayed courtyard enclosure). People know Placerita Canyon is close-by and free—a treasure in their neighborhood.

In terms of education and interpretation, stakeholders identified hiking and stewardship-focused programs (e.g., rewards program for kids, adopt-an-animal programs, anti-littering campaigns) as avenues for developing stewardship values.

#### **Appendix 5: Draft goals**

##### **Group One**

Create return customers and multigenerational visitors.

Help guests discover the history and environment of Placerita.

##### **Group Two**

Visitors will discover the treasure that Placerita Canyon truly is.

Visitors will gain an awareness and appreciation of Placerita Canyon’s natural environment.

Visitors will have fun at Placerita Canyon.

##### **Group Three**

Inspire a loving, memorable connection to this park.

## Appendix

To learn something new.

Have an alternative to commercial experiences, or a way to contribute back to the park.

### **Group Four**

Feeling of environmental stewardship and better stewardship of self.

Desire to learn more. Learn to live.

### **Individual**

Wholeness of the Earth—water, atmosphere, soil/rocks, biology.

Human impact on the environment.

Human enjoyment and activities.

### **Individual**

Explore the park trails to discover the sites of the biological and geological themes presented in the interpretive center.

### **Individual**

Learning about nature changes human behavior.

People have impact and influence over all parts of nature.

The park is a place to enjoy and appreciate nature.

## **Appendix 6: suggested interpretive themes and sub-themes**

### **Group One**

Placerita Canyon is a special place where kids of all ages can experience Southern California's natural wonders and discover its golden dreams

The natural world of Placerita Canyon

Birthplace of California's Gold Story

### **Group Two**

Placerita Park visitors' life experience will be enriched by visiting the canyon and developing an awareness and appreciation of Placerita's natural environment will bring about a change in behavior for the better.

Placerita Canyon has several plant and animal communities that are representational of Southern California's natural habitat.

Placerita Canyon has a rich cultural history that is representative of the area (gold mining, oil, movies, Indians, ranching, agriculture).

Through a diverse range of innovative learning experiences (live animal shows, nature walks, docent programs, hands-on activities, performance art, LEED), visitors will have fun!

### **Group Three**

First set: Placerita Canyon inspires discovery of the history, nature, and ecosystem you live in.

A workshop for learning how you live in nature and human history

What will you do when you get home?

The intersection of human and natural history is here to discover in Placerita Canyon.

Second set: Whether it is stars, prehistoric culture, or natural ecosystems, Placerita Canyon Park has something special for everyone!

Placerita Canyon has the oldest [mollusk] history in the Santa Clarita Valley.

## Appendix

Science

History

Third set: Discover the wonders of nature; let Placerita's wonders inspire you.

Placerita: Nature's Own Workshop

### **Group Four**

First set:                      Sustainable Cycle of Life  
Fire story      Oil story      Plant life      Wildlife Geology

Second set:

Place of people in nature (how we fit in)

Cycles (fire recovery of the environment; transpiration, food chains)

Life forms (forms of animals and plants; night versus day)

Physical forms (how animals, plants, people use landforms [gold, oil])

### **Individual**

The Earth must be viewed as an integrated whole, made up of air, water, soil/rocks, and life. A change in one part affects all other parts. Each part is interdependent and related.

Climate/weather/atmosphere/water/stream system; geology/rock/soil formation

Biology—plants/animal relationships/cycles

Human history and impact

**Individual:** theme not provided

### **Individual:**

The wholeness of nature reflects the relationships among air, water, soil, plants, and animals.

Climate and weather

Geology—soil, rocks, plate tectonics, water cycle, watershed

Biology—plants and animals

History—Prehistory, Tataviam, Spanish, Mexican, pioneers, industry (movies, oil, ranching)

Ecology—fire, recycling

Activities—hiking, art appreciation, classes, shows (leads to outdoors)