



CIENEGA

DESCRIPTION: The Cienega is a 7-acre, recreated desert wetland in the 25-acre, functioning Meadows detention flood basin on the 180-acre Springs Preserve (Preserve) site.

OBJECTIVE: A recreation of the original natural springs system that occupied the site until it dried up in the early 1960's. The Cienega was created to restore a functioning habitat for wildlife, to renew the beautiful landscapes that once were part of the site and to teach visitors about the importance of a desert wetland ecosystem in the Mojave Desert.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: The Springs Preserve is the site of the original springs that supplied water to ancient Native Americans, early explorers and later, the new community of Las Vegas. The water sustained meadows and thickets of mesquites and willows. When the springs dried up, much of the vegetation that relied on the water from the springs died; however many of the trees and shrubs that had roots tapped into shallow ground water survived.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Cienega has attracted more than 30 new species of wildlife to the site, primarily birds. The largest wild animals recorded on site are the coyote, bobcat, and gray fox. Rarely observed birds found at the Cienega include the peregrine falcon, belted kingfisher, black-crowned night heron, white-faced ibis, black-necked stilt, ruddy duck and snowy egret. Restored vegetation on site now includes thriving Mojave species such as cottonwood, willow, mesquite, and acacia trees, an abundance of shrubs and grasses, and aquatic species such as cattails and bulrushes.

CONSTRUCTION OVERVIEW: The Cienega restoration process began in 2003 with the construction of several ponds, a stream, and re-vegetation designed to recreate the original wetlands ecosystem that thrived on the site for thousands of years. Recreating the native landscape required design and reconstruction of a self-sustaining infrastructure, which included grading the land to form ponds and a stream to capture run-off water. Additional work included soil preparation and amendment, seeding, transplanting, plant salvaging, irrigation and monitoring. The Cienega is now sustained by diverting the flow of nuisance water from the Alta Flood Channel into a reconstructed cauldron pool and down a stream that meanders through the detention basin.

The Cienega is accessed by a trail (The Cienega Trail) that runs along the edge of the wetland and includes a place for hiking, walking, docent demonstrations and wildlife observation. Features include a stream channel, a viewing ramada and a cauldron pool.