

CLARK COUNTY WETLANDS PARK

A) THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM THAT THE PROGRAM WAS CREATED TO ADDRESS:

The Las Vegas Wash, located just minutes from the Las Vegas Strip, suffered from significant erosion and degradation over the past three decades. The erosion scoured sheer banks up to forty feet in height along the edges of the channel and as a result, the diverse vegetation that once grew along the Wash died. Illegal dumping, shooting, and off-road vehicles also severely impacted the wash. The result of this neglect was a decrease in habitat for existing endangered species and a decrease in the quality of water delivered to Lake Mead, the source of drinking water for over a million and a half Las Vegas Valley residents and the over 30 million tourists who visit Las Vegas annually.

B) THE MEASURABLE OUTCOME(S) / RESULT(S) OF THE PROGRAM:

The Clark County Wetlands Park is a 2900-acre wildlife viewing area, outdoor classroom, and passive recreation facility. Objectives for the park are: 1) conserving and restoring natural resources, 2) creating education and volunteer opportunities, and 3) developing recreation and tourism opportunities compatible with the conservation of the park. The Clark County Board of Commissioners adopted these objectives in 1995 as part of the Clark County Wetlands Park Master Plan. The master plan was developed with input from the general public, non-profit organizations, and federal and state regulatory agencies. Following development of the master plan a Program

Environmental Impact Statement, Programmatic Biological Assessment, and an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to meet future Clean Water Act requirements further cast in stone the goals and objectives first outlined in the Master Plan. A locally lead collaborative process evolving into federally mandated decision documents, created widespread support for the Wetlands Park.

Dreams for the Wetlands Park moved closer to reality with the passage of a voter-approved bond in 1991. This \$13.3 million bond funded Phase 1 of the Wetlands Park including planning and environmental compliance, construction of the first erosion control structure, construction of a 130-acre trail and habitat area known as the Nature Preserve, and the start of a land acquisition program. Following completion of Phase 1, future funding was uncertain. To help solve this and other funding needs throughout Southern Nevada the 1998 Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) was signed into law. To date SNPLMA, through the sale of federally managed lands in the Las Vegas Valley, has funded nearly \$60 million towards the development of the Wetlands Park. This enables the continuation of programs such as the land acquisition program, which has been successful in acquiring all but 140 acres of the original 835 acres of private lands within the park. Other SNPLMA projects include Phase 2 of the Nature Preserve and a variety of trails, trailheads, and wildlife habitat enhancement projects. Furthermore, the Wetlands Park Visitor and Education Center, funded by round 5 of the SNPLMA, will begin construction in 2006.

The Clark County Wetlands Mitigation Program also provides funding for the park. Clark County developed this program to assist local agencies in need of meeting federal wetland mitigation requirements. For instance this program helped Clark County Regional Flood Control District

avoid project delays for crucial flood control projects. Along with assisting project proponents the mitigation program will also create the highest quality waterfowl habitat in the Wetlands Park. The program has funded over \$3.7 million towards this important wildlife and wetland enhancement project. Another important funding source for the park is the 2002 Question 1 (2001 AB9) State bond, which is being used to fund important park projects not eligible under the SNPLMA program. These projects include the scenic drive, access roads, operation and maintenance needs, and long-term environmental monitoring. Southern Nevada Water Authority also obtained a voter approved sales tax increase, a small percentage of which commits funds to controlling erosion in the Wetlands Park and in-turn water quality in Lake Mead. To date the Water Authority has committed over \$27 million to controlling erosion in the park. Finally, fourteen different local public and private grants have contributed well over \$1 million to the project.

In addition to enhancing the park's natural resources and providing passive recreational opportunities, the park's master plan calls for establishment of volunteer and education programs. The park's volunteer and education program provides an outdoor environmental education curriculum to elementary school children and is run by volunteer education facilitators. Volunteer trailkeepers also provide valuable service as they walk trails and keep watch over the park's resources. Finally, volunteer hosts at the temporary visitor center greet visitors and distribute park information. The Southern Nevada Water Authority and University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) also conducts volunteer and education programs within the park. Clark County financially supports both organizations through interlocal agreements. The Water Authority provides staff support for the 27-member Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee, a committee formed to educate and inform all interested organizations on the ongoing activities in the park. UNLV's agreement

provides funding for creatively meeting the environmental monitoring requirements for the park. This creative approach to meeting federal and state mandates also encourages academic interest and provides seed money for obtaining additional grant funds for the park. The academic interest is reflected in the two Master's Theses (two additional Theses are currently underway), three Senior Theses, and nine class projects already produced at the Wetlands Park. The seed money has produced research and monitoring grants from Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and a Nevada Applied Research Initiative Grant.

C) THE LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM:

Success of the Wetlands Park can be attributed to the many outstanding partners who have stepped up to the plate to help solve problems in the park. This assistance in meeting the park's complex problems is a valuable lesson learned. As the Harvard University Graduate School of Landscape Architecture noted; "Through the strong emphasis on education and recreation, this project ensures continued success by first interesting, and then inspiring, locals to reconnect with their nearby environment. The Las Vegas Wash restoration project is a signature and evolving, success story." Finally, in selecting the Wetlands Park for a 2003 Environmental Achievement Award, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized Clark County for the "creative and effective use of both local volunteers and available funding in creating an invaluable, unique refuge in Las Vegas which provides valuable lessons on this area's natural resources." The Wetlands Park is a well-supported community based project, which inspires all those who seek its refuge.