

Alameda Creek Watershed Center Sunol, California

Rising from an unimpressive asphalt drive and largely ignored by the public, the Sunol Water Temple had seen better days by 2011. The Acorn Group was tasked with bringing this remarkable architectural icon back to life while celebrating the vastness of the Alameda Creek watershed whose waters flow past the temple.



From 2011-2015 The Acorn Group worked with staff of the Water Enterprise of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to develop an interpretive master plan for the Alameda Creek Watershed Center in Sunol. Because interpretive planning, architectural design, and landscape architectural design are integral to this effort, The Acorn Group staff worked closely with the Sunol Yard Improvements team to create a comprehensive plan that addresses all design aspects, including sustainability.

The Acorn Group's tasks included facilitating development of the project's mission and vision statements as well as interpretive messages; conducting an educator needs assessment; traveling to

other Bay Area museums to study comparable facilities; planning visitor experiences at the Center; identifying interpretive media; creating a conceptual design package and interpretive master plan; and writing all panel copy and designing all interpretive media, including exhibits, panels, flipbooks, and print media.



From the moment visitors arrive at the Watershed Center, they are immersed in the environment by way of a two-acre watershed discovery garden and tactile map of the entire 700-mile watershed. They watch schooling trout in a 50-stream profile, explore the human history of the region and long-standing connections to watershed lands, learn about the wildlife in the Alameda Creek watershed, and better understand how their own behavior affects the integrity of the land and water.



Watershed Discovery Garden



The grounds of the Alameda Creek Watershed Center serve as an informal botanical garden set within the context of the watershed. A trail meanders through this two-acre setting, taking visitors through various vignettes reflecting the middle and upper reaches of the Alameda Creek watershed. The intent is not to represent the real landscape. Rather, it is to create an informal garden whose plant collection is arranged thematically. There in the garden visitors become immersed in the landscape and more attuned to East Bay's remarkable botanical diversity.



Diablan Sage Scrub



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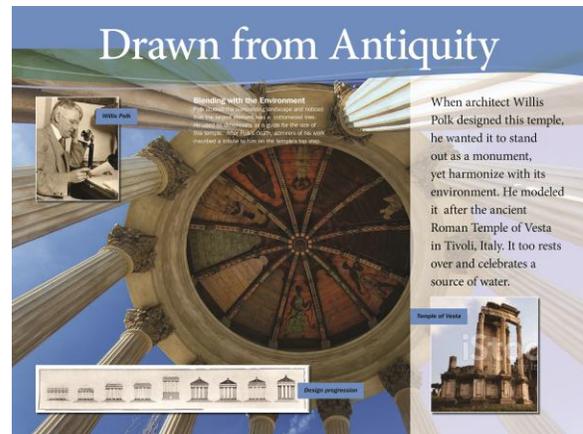
Sage scrub dots the watershed's south-facing slopes in a series of small patches. Unlike the woody stems of chaparral plants, sage stems are soft and pliable. Sage scrub includes California sagebrush, scrub oak, buckwheat, yerba santa, and several species of sage. These low-water plants

provide food and cover for many animals, including lizards, brush rabbits, birds, and snakes like the Alameda whipsnake.



The Watershed Discovery Garden takes visitors through vignettes of mixed evergreen forest, oak savannah, chaparral, Diablan sage scrub, valley grasslands, and riparian woodlands.

Low-profile interpretive panels call out each community's plants and wildlife, and reference the visitor's position within the actual watershed. By "walking a transect line across the watershed," visitors begin to grasp the watershed's enormity, as well as the rich mosaic of life forms found there.



Additional interpretive media for the Watershed Discovery Garden include: wayside exhibits that highlight the Sunol Water Temple, the passage of people, and the settlement of human communities; faux bronze resin sculptures of wildlife; and cue cards whose poems offers clues about these slightly hidden art pieces.



*Known for its fur and black-tipped tail,
This fox can jog quickly over hill and dale.
It can also climb trees, unlike coyote and dog.
And den high above or deep down in a log.
Do you see me?*