

**Owens Lake
Lone Pine, California
2016 Award of Excellence, American Society
of Landscape Architects**

The birds found this hidden oasis, but would people? Owens Lake now is one of the West's top bird watching sites, but access and weather conditions pose challenges. Those who visit face searing heat and windstorms in the summer and fall.

Flanked by towering mountain ranges, Owens Lake lies at the eastern edge of California. Its story speaks to richness at the same time it speaks to a parched landscape. By 1926, water diversions had transformed this vast lake into a salt flat.

Once dry, the lakebed blew away in alkali dust storms. In fact, it generated enough dust to qualify as the largest single source of dust pollution in the United States. Dust mitigation soon took the form of shallow flooding and revegetation. The fact that this effort created valuable wildlife habitat is a fortuitous accident.

In 2015, The Acorn Group worked with NUVIS Landscape Architecture, CDM Smith, and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to transform the edges of Owens Lake into visitor-friendly wildlife-viewing stations.



We studied the human and natural history of the region, developed compelling messages, created a series of panels that tell the lake's story, and identified optimal "interpretive nodes."

Amenities at Owens Lake now include a plaza with shaded seating wall, boulder-defined overlooks, berm trails, and interpretive panels mounted on Paiute-inspired Cor-Ten steel. They serve to beckon visitors and prolong their stay.



Photo courtesy of Ray Ramirez

More than a "photo opp," this remarkable landscape now offers passive recreational activities including wildlife-watching and photography. The various amenities are designed to enhance the visitor's experience, welcome them, ensure their safety in this actively managed site, and encourage them to help protect wildlife and other resources.

