

Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve and Border Field State Park Imperial Beach, California

A river flows across Mexico and Southern California and drains into the ocean. It sustains one of the largest coastal salt marsh wetlands left in southern California. It also pollutes it. A border wall bluntly defines the southwestern boundary of the park and the United States. It sets a mood that is hardly welcoming. How would we weave interpretive opportunities into this complex, challenging setting?



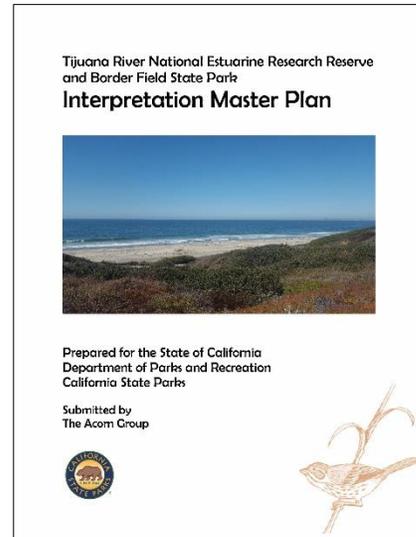
In 2019, The Acorn Group was hired to develop the interpretation master plan and interpretation action plan for Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve and Border Field State Park.

Our work included a visitor survey, observations at the border, stakeholder interviews, needs assessment of nearby school districts, and planning sessions with staff. Internal planning workshops and multiple site visits further informed the plan, as did the work of UCLA graduate student Sharon Sand, who explored design strategies to enhance Border Field's Monument Mesa as the focus of her thesis.

This particular master plan is made more complex by multi-agency management and bi-national nature of borderlands. The planning work involved addressing the mission and goals of California State Parks, US Fish and Wildlife Services, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as consulting with the Southwest Wetlands Interpretive Association (SWIA), United States Customs and Protection, County of San Diego, and Kumeyaay Nation.

We met with Border Patrol agents to better understand their policies and the challenges of their job. We studied the demographics of neighboring communities to better understand how people get

places. Since many households lack access to a car, we identified strategies to mitigate this, including improving signage to identify bike lanes, adding physical barriers on bike lanes to enhance cyclist safety, linking trails in nearby regional parks to connect more park poor areas to the Reserve, and building a "Transit to Trails" program to take people on subsidized outings to places like Border Field. While these programs could serve the entire region, they could be particularly useful for low-income families who are disproportionately people of color.



In addition, we identified new exhibits and programs, including panels with proximity beacons, invigorated community science projects, art installations at Border Field, and permanent interpretive stations both inside and outside the visitor center.

