The Habitat Gardens at Sawmill Multicultural Art and Nature County Park

2020 Accomplishments and Plans for 2021



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2021 Summary

The 2021 gardening season (April 1 – October 30) was a great success! More visitors than ever appeared, and they stayed longer. The number of regular visitors and volunteers grew, enhancing our shared sense of community. American Conservation Experience (ACE) members worked alongside us throughout the growing season, always arriving at the gardens ready to work hard and have fun while doing it. Eagle Scout candidates initiated, completed, and maintained projects that would not have happened any other way. Volunteers contributed at least 1,432 hours, not counting those of long-time volunteer Norm Lowe and totals from some Scout projects. As always, The Arboretum at Flagstaff was a helpful partner, providing us with plants and advice, while the Coconino Master Gardeners Association included us in their activities and publicized our volunteer program on their blog. The Willow Bend Environmental Education Center Board of Directors honored us with a delightful reception featuring a string octet, which revealed the remarkably fine acoustics of the Ponderosa Ramada.

Although spring was typically dry and windy, we were able to sustain the gardens even before the reclaimed water was turned on this year, using rainwater captured in the tanks which Norm Lowe had restored to full functionality. To our relief, the summer rains were abundant and the gardens flourished. Volunteer Lynn Chandler kept the birds fed and the feeders clean.

This report will be briefer than in the past because most of the gardens are now thriving and require only ongoing maintenance. The exceptions are the Lizard Garden, the Pond, and the Seasonal Wetland.

Eagle Scout projects:

Made substantial improvements to the Garden Shed including a solar panel and shelving;

Tilled compost made on-site into the Native Heirloom Garden, together with organic soil amendments;

Amended the soil, repaired the rock borders, and planted the Kitchen and Herb gardens.

Coconino County: A dozen County employees volunteered on Earth Day, April 22. They weeded and spread wood chips between the parking lot and Sawmill Road as well as in the aspen area.

NAU: First Generations students and Blevins Scholars (graduates of foster care systems) began their semester with a volunteer day in the gardens. Such inspiring, hardworking young people!

Garden Volunteers:

Wrote and managed production of interpretive signs: two for the Orientation Kiosk, one for the Viewing Platform, one for the Outdoor Classroom, and 17 for each garden and feature.

Co-taught a workshop on "Gardening for Wildlife" with a representative of the National Wildlife Federation. NWF representative spoke indoors about general principles. We gave a tour of the gardens with specific advice on microclimates, plant selection, and use of plants by wildlife. We are scheduled to repeat this program on May 21, 2022. The NWF representative requested plant lists for local microclimates, which we will provide. Norm Lowe attempted to modify the irrigation system to provide reclaimed water to the western side of the gardens, mainly the Lizard Garden hill. This resulted in a bad leak from a break elsewhere in the system, which flooded the aspen area and parking lot. CCPR's Geoffrey Gross has offered to address the need for reclaimed water as he rebuilds the Pond and Seasonal Wetland. In the future, garden volunteers will not interfere with the old irrigation system.

Plans for Winter of 2021 and 2022 Gardening Season

1. Interpretation: Develop online content for the interpretive signs. Post wildlife observations from trail cameras (work with Geoffrey on where to put cameras and with Moran on interpretation). Continue working with Jeff Balmat to share weather station data with the National Weather Service and the public.

2. Volunteer Program: a) Our volunteer group needs a new name to indicate that the gardens are part of Sawmill/Archuleta County Park. We would like to consult with CCPR about this. b) We held our first, end-of-year potluck for volunteers. We hope to add special group projects and celebrations, community-wide volunteer days, and possibly, bandannas or t-shirts once we have a new name. c) Create a hard copy and virtual notebook on timing and methods of garden maintenance.

Wish List

1. People-counter to gather data which could be helpful in grant requests, volunteer recruitment, etc.

2. Access to a chipper to produce large quantities of chopped pine needles, which we used in 2021 and found they make great mulch which saves water, protects plants, and balances alkaline soils. Chopped needles are preferable to wood chips because they are finer, do not weigh down emerging plants, and present an attractive, even appearance. Our chipper is very small; chipping needles took forever. We have plenty of pine needles at our homes to use. Commercially available mulches are expensive and vary in quality. Using pine needles instead also keeps them out of the landfill.

3. Clear box similar to the boxes planned for the Kiosk to hold chalk for Outdoor Classroom chalkboard.

4. A "Pet Waste Station" would help keep the gardens pleasant for visitors and volunteers alike. Volunteers could maintain it and keep it supplied with bags from newspaper deliveries.



New Map of the Habitat Gardens (by Clair Baldwin)



2021 Report and Plans for 2022, Garden-by-Garden

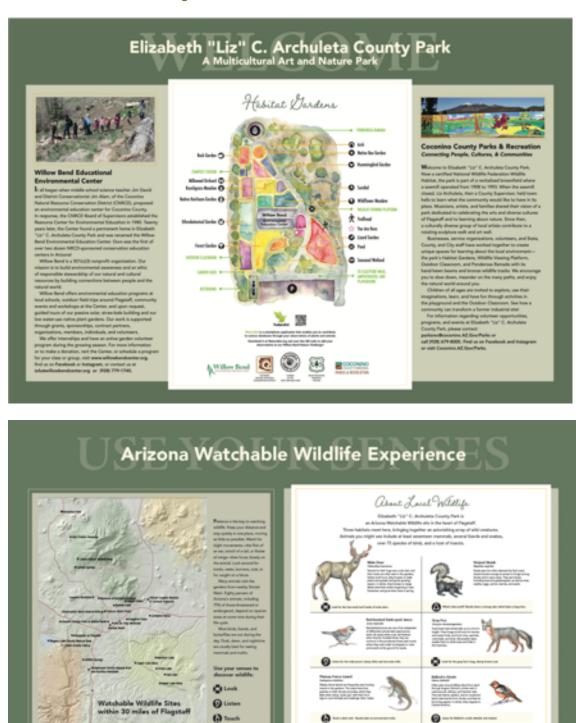
Orientation Kiosk and Wildlife Viewing Platform

2022: Coconino County officials will hold a community celebration to change the name of Sawmill County Park to Elizabeth "Liz" C. Archuleta County Park, in honor of former County Supervisor Liz Archuleta, who conceived the park and made it happen. Just before the rededication ceremony, CCPR will install signs designed by Julie Sullivan and illustrated by Claire Baldwin on the Orientation Kiosk and by the Viewing Platform. Signs for the Outdoor Classroom and individual gardens and features will also be installed. Installation of these signs is contingent on the weather being warm enough for the concrete to cure (concrete will hold each sign—except for the Kiosk and Outdoor Classroom signs—in place). Clear boxes to hold brochures will be installed on the Kiosk also.



Orientation Kiosk

Signs for Sides A and B, Orientation Kiosk



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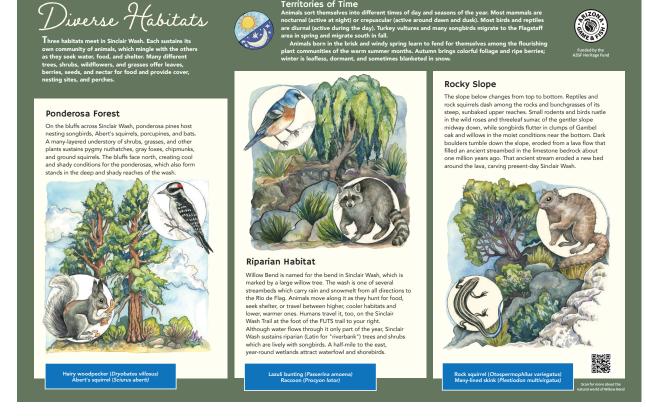
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Sign for Viewing Platform



Example of Sign for Individual Gardens and Features (such as the Compost Station)



Lizard Garden

Background: Rocks, long pieces of wood, soil, and gravel keep working their way down the hill. In some cases, yuccas and gravel create unsafe conditions on the trail. Weeds, grasses, and rogue rabbitbrush grow among the yuccas, agaves, cactus, and other desert plants, spoiling the appearance of the garden.

2020: CCPR determined the best course of action would be to stabilize the hill with large boulders and downed wood, arranged to create planting pockets for desert plants.

2021: Volunteers worked on it from time to time, but effectively stabilizing this steep, extensive slope is beyond our capabilities.

Compost System

2021: Eagle Scout Mason Takeuchi maintained the compost system throughout the winter of 2020 and the following year, mixing in vegetable trimmings from his volunteer work at the Flagstaff Family Food Center. In April of 2021, Mason led his fellow Scouts in digging the compost into the Native Heirloom Garden together with organic soil amendments, including gypsum for moisture retention. The results were spectacular! Native Heirloom crops flourished, creating a jungle of sunflowers and yielding gourds and squash, three varieties of corn, several varieties of beans, amaranth and quinoa, devil's claw, Zapotec tomatoes, and more—including several vegetables from seeds in Mason's compost. From now on, this garden will be managed according to "no till" best practices.



Native Heirloom Garden

The Native Heirloom Garden was featured on the August 2021 Master Gardeners Association's first "Flagstaff's Finest Vegetable Tour." We received lots of visitors, answered questions, and offered gardening advice about farming indigenous crops using the French intensive method :-).





Hopi Rattle Gourds

Zapotec Tomatoes

Kitchen and Herb Gardens

The Kitchen Garden is basically a teaching garden, intended to teach that food comes from plants and can be grown at home, even here in Flagstaff.

2021: In June, Eagle Scout candidate Colin McAvoy led a team who dug compost and soil amendments into the Kitchen Garden and the Herb Garden (the strip of dirt between the sidewalk and the Ethnobotanical Garden). They repaired the rock borders before planting seeds and starts of plants used for food and seasoning.

Note: The revised Step Up Program will not return to plant or maintain the Kitchen Garden. Volunteers will do it instead.







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Shed Improvements

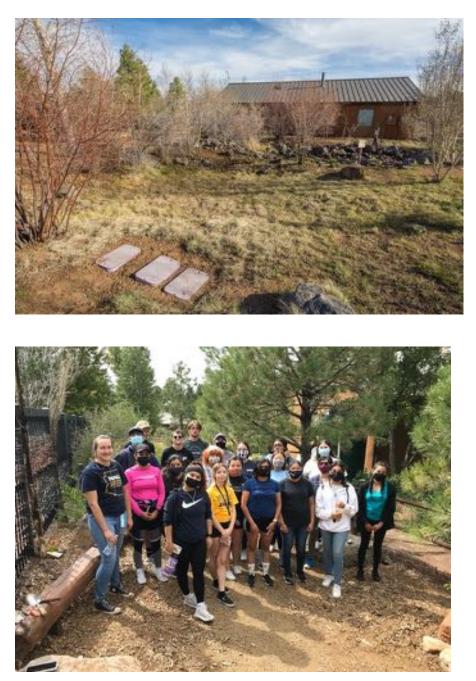
2021: In February, Eagle Scout candidate Jordan Shepard led a Scout team in making substantial improvements to the garden shed under the guidance of volunteer Norm Lowe. Outside, they installed a solar panel on the shed roof. Inside, they installed strip lights, an inverter for charging tools such as the weedwhacker, extensive shelving and pegs, and a small workbench with tools and supplies commonly needed for repairs and projects in the gardens (hammers, screwdrivers, nails, glue, drill, etc.).





Seasonal Wetland

2021: Disturbance will occur when the pond is rebuilt. We rescued plants from the path of that project and potted and buried them to replant after the Seasonal Wetland is reconstructed. Once we know the schedule for this project, we hope to obtain a Forest Service permit and collect more plants for the Seasonal Wetland from natural wetlands on Coconino National Forest.



Along with a range of other tasks, NAU First Generation Students and Blevins Scholars helped rescue plants from the Seasonal Wetland for future replanting.