

# RIO SALADO

COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE  
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

•  
VALLEY FORWARD ASSOCIATION

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MARICOPA ASSOCIATION  
OF GOVERNMENTS

When crossing the Salt River on South Central Avenue or on the Tempe Bridge or on Country Club Drive in Mesa, we tend to think of the dry wasteland as an unfortunate necessity—if we think of it at all. Along its ill-defined banks we find slums, industries, an airport, fine homes, a golf course, a sewage treatment plant, a freeway, a large park and a major university. Some of these strain toward and encroach upon the flood channel itself. At times, as we know from recent history, the river returns with a power capable of destroying man's work and causing suffering and death. And so the river bed remains undeveloped and unplanned—a major reservoir of open space unique to the heart of a great city.

In the fall of 1966, the Fifth Year Design Studio of the College of Architecture at Arizona State University accepted the challenge of combining flood control with environmental design to convert the Salt River from a scar to a major asset of the metropolitan area. The project proposals, extending over 40 miles from Granite Reef to the Gila River, were illustrated by a series of drawings and renderings with accompanying text. Finding the Salt River identified as the "Rio Salado" on old maps, the students gave that name to the project.

One of the most attractive possibilities of the 1966 proposal was that of restoring life to the river by rerouting water into a flood control channel in the river bottom. The channel could have varying widths and profiles and be provided with a system of dams and gates to regulate the water's flow along its course in normal times or flood. Since both the northern and southern canal systems sweep back

very near the river at about mid-course, it would be possible, the students saw, to terminate the canals at these points and charge their continuations westward with water flowing in the flood control channel. Beyond these points, a minimum volume could be permitted to move on to the terminus of the channel. The Rio Salado could again grace its valley!

With the river always in its bed and the adjoining land made secure through appropriate flood control, unique and challenging possibilities for development would appear. The river could come alive—no longer a barrier but now the metropolitan focus—uniting south Phoenix with north and vastly strengthening "downtown." It could be the "axis of activity" with organized and wise development, where appropriate, of:

- housing for all income levels
- industry as existing or planned
- new services and commercial ventures
- health, religious and educational institutions
- cultural, entertainment and leisure facilities

The whole length of this river development could be interspersed with parks and recreation facilities as basic elements of the contemplated canal park system which will reach out to relate all of the Phoenix area to its genesis, the river. The entire development could be linked by a scenic drive connecting it also with the lakes along the Salt and Verde rivers above their confluence.

Two things appeared certain to the students: that the river bottom will be developed, and that it will be done by the combined enterprise of public and private agencies. The flood control channel will be a public project as will the roads, parks, schools and other facilities that are public by nature in any part of the city. The public agencies also can and should provide the planning vision, the necessary controls and the organizational instrumentalities by which private enterprise can be inspired, encouraged and assisted in bringing successive parts of the whole concept to reality—for profit. Substantial economic benefits were implicit in all aspects of the proposal.

In the fall of 1968, a new group of fifth year students returned to the study of the Rio Salado with the purpose of illustrating in some detail what might be done in a limited segment of the river bed, namely that just north of the Arizona State University campus. Then, during the summer of 1969, a third phase of the study undertook to suggest possibilities in the four-mile segment from the Ho-Ho-Kam Freeway eastward to Hayden Road and to provide further characterization of engineering and economic feasibility. These studies led to the proposals embodied in the plan/map shown here for the limited area considered, and to certain other observations that are set forth in the paragraphs immediately following.