



Home Education MCC at Red Mountain celebrates completion of final phase of cienega

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Those interested in desert preservation are encouraged to join in the celebration of the completion of the final phase of the cienega at [Mesa Community College at Red Mountain](#), 7110 E. McKellips Road. Brief remarks will be made at 3 p.m., Nov. 18 in the Cienega Circle, followed by light refreshments and guided tours of the cienega and life science laboratories in an adjacent building.

The fourth and final phase of the MCC cienega was the installation of educational signage. The signs were funded through a \$54,736 Heritage Grant from Arizona Game and Fish Department to educate and alert visitors of the sensitive nature of the cienega and provide information on the importance and natural history of desert wetlands and the species that live within this unique habitat.

"These signs represent not only the completion of a six-year journey to providing our students and public with a top-notch exhibit and reserve, but also the commitment of the Red Mountain team to MCC's mission," Andrew Holecross, MCC biology faculty, said in a press release.

Andy Baldwin, MCC Life Science Department chair, said, "Finding a cienega while hiking in nature is truly like finding a gem in the desert. This reconstructed oasis at MCC Red Mountain has been years in the works and just recently has it all finally come together into one most impressive outdoor display. Red Mountain's cienega has native plants and animals, including several endangered species, some of which are already reproducing. The new signage explains the importance and functions of cienegas, all of which can and will be incorporated into classroom curricula. I encourage everyone to go check it out. Once people realize the beauty of the campus, they often never look anywhere else for classes."

The first phase of the cienega project was the installation of a wetland surrounded by native vegetation in the campus' central courtyard. This phase was complete in April 2010 with the introduction of longfin dace fish to the pond. The cienega uses reclaimed water from rooftops and is supplemented by City water. A large underground reservoir moderates daily and seasonal temperature fluctuations. Water is cleansed using an advanced biofiltering system.

Phase two, completed in 2012, involved the installation of a gated three-foot barrier fence to protect cienega wildlife. Tortoises were introduced in October of the same year.

Phase three involved the introduction of populations of endangered wildlife in cooperation with Arizona Game and Fish Department; the United States Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Phoenix Zoo.

Endangered desert pupfish were introduced in November 2014 and are thriving, according to the release. (See a story and video from the Mesa Independent newspaper at <http://mesaindependent.com/news/endangered-pupfish-find-new-home-in-mcc-refuge-pond/>.)

MCC at Red Mountain received a 2014 Founders Conservation Award from the North American Native Plant Society, recognizing its extraordinary contributions to the conservation, protection or restoration of the natural heritage/native flora of North America.

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