

# RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT

## CHARACTER

As its name implies, the identity of the Rio Grande Agricultural District is derived from its agricultural heritage. Just south of San Elizario, scattered neighborhoods give way to uninterrupted vistas of farm fields and orchards. This picturesque agrarian landscape will make for an inviting trail experience as it passes through groves of pecan trees and past fields of cotton, hay, and alfalfa. With climate and fertility levels that have led some to compare the area with Egypt's Nile Valley, El Paso's Rio Grande Agricultural Valley offers the allure of potential co-development of an agritourism industry alongside its agricultural mainstays. As with the Mission Valley District, the PDN Trail will run primarily along the drains and canals connecting several small towns and terminating at County Line Lakes in the southeast corner of El Paso County.



*Agricultural irrigation ditches and canals provide abundant trail connection options.*





Source: Google Maps



*Fruit and nut tree orchards are a large component of the valley landscape.*



*Agricultural fields flank the trail's alignment.*



*Some segments of the trail will be closely connected with the roadway.*







KEY MAP

POINTS OF INTEREST

- County Line Lakes
- Agricultural Towns  
Clint, Fabens, Tornillo

LEGEND

- PDN Spine Alignment  
(Existing or Funded)
- PDN Spine Alignment  
(Proposed)
- PDN Spur Trail
- Historic Camino Real
- Transportation Transfer Center
- Point of Interest
- School
- Trail Head (Proposed)
- El Paso City Limits
- Parks
- Rio Grande

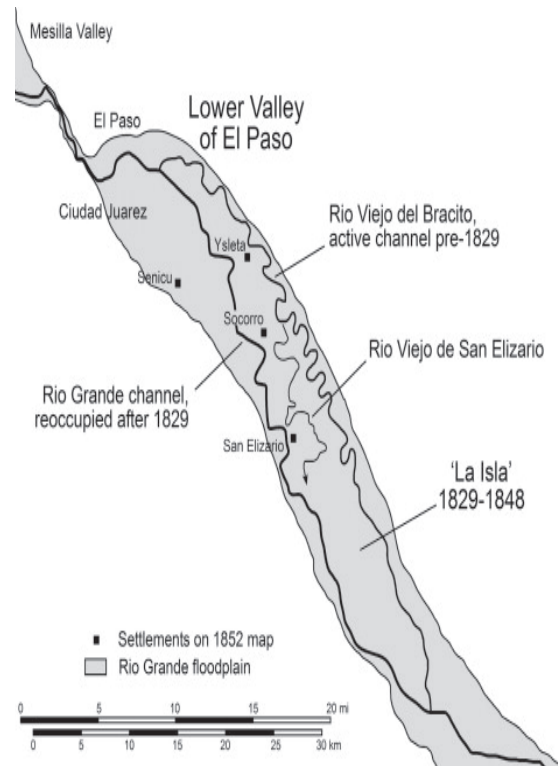


MAP 30. RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT OVERVIEW

## POINTS OF INTEREST

### SAN ELIZARIO ISLAND

More of a curious historical fact than current geographic point of interest, maps still identify San Elizario Island (right) as the area of agricultural fields west of the communities of Fabens and Tornillo. This moniker dates from the time before the US–Mexico border was established in 1848, when the Rio Grande used to flow along the eastern edge of this floodplain, and the three mission villages upriver were actually situated along the southern banks of the river. However, flooding and natural meanders of the river channel created a second channel to the south of the three missions, leaving them on an island for a number of years. Eventually the northern channel stopped flowing, leaving the communities on the north side of the new river alignment, and effectively bringing them into the United States when the boundary was formalized. The only apparent reminder of this historic geographic shift is a series of island-themed roads that zigzag from Fabens down to the Tornillo border crossing: Island Road, Middle Island Road, Island Guadalupe Road, and Lower Island Road.



### FABENS



Aside from the nearly endless agricultural scenery, the primary noteworthy features are the two towns that support the surrounding agriculture. The first and largest of these is Fabens, located approximately 15 miles southeast of the Loop 375 highway in El Paso. With a population of about 8,000, the town could provide a stopping point for trail users, offering several stores and restaurants for refreshments.

### COUNTY LINE LAKES



(Left) This 100-acre reservoir located six miles southeast of Tornillo is comprised of a single body of water that is somewhat confusingly named "County Line Lakes." Topography maps indicate that at one time it may have been bisected by the Hudspeth Feeder Canal that appears to have been re-routed along its western edge. Wedged between Alameda Avenue and the international border, the lake itself reportedly is devoid of fish and offers no recreational opportunities, so water storage appears to be its only function.

(Right) Less than three miles southwest of Tornillo, a new border crossing was completed in 2014—although it does not appear to be open for business yet.

### TORNILLO/MARCELINO SERNA PORT OF ENTRY





See Map 30 for overall region alignments and legend.



**MAP 31. RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT KEY MAP 1**



## TRAIL CONNECTIVITY

### PRIMARY ALIGNMENTS

#### **5.0 Franklin/Riverside/Tornillo Canals (Proposed Shared-Use Trail)**

Continuing south approximately seven miles from the Mission Valley District along the Franklin Canal, the trail turns onto the Riverside Canal at the town of Fabens. South of Fabens, the trail merges onto the Tornillo Canal where it continues until terminating at the County Line Lakes.

### LOOP ALIGNMENTS

No loop alignments have been identified within this district; however, the area is laced with ditches and canals that interconnect, making informal loops of all sizes possible for trail users who wish to explore the area further.

### TRAILHEADS AND PUBLIC TRANSIT

#### **Fabens Trailhead (Proposed)**

A vacant, one-acre tract of land along Alameda Avenue between the Mesa Drain and the Salitral Lateral, just north of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, could be developed as a trailhead to provide access from Fabens to the PDN Trail. This would require approval of the ditch authority, and wayfinding signage would be important to help trail users negotiate the maze of canals that crisscross the surrounding area.

#### **Tornillo – Aguilera Trailhead (Proposed)**

Although no potential trailhead locations are readily apparent within the town of Tornillo because all of the land surrounding the ditch alignment are privately owned, it may be possible to secure approval to develop a trailhead within the excess right-of-way alongside M.F. Aguilera Road, which connects Alameda Avenue to the new border crossing. There appears to be an approximately six-acre tract of land that sits vacant just southeast of the new road bridge that crosses the primary alignment along the Tornillo Canal. It could be accessed from Alameda Avenue along the southeast side of Aguilera Road.

#### **County Line Lakes Trailhead (Proposed)**

A trailhead at the southern terminus of the trail is highly recommended as a final stopping point, and pick-up location for those wishing to make the trek as a one-way trip. Amenities such as shade structures, picnic tables, and portable restrooms could make it a more desirable destination.

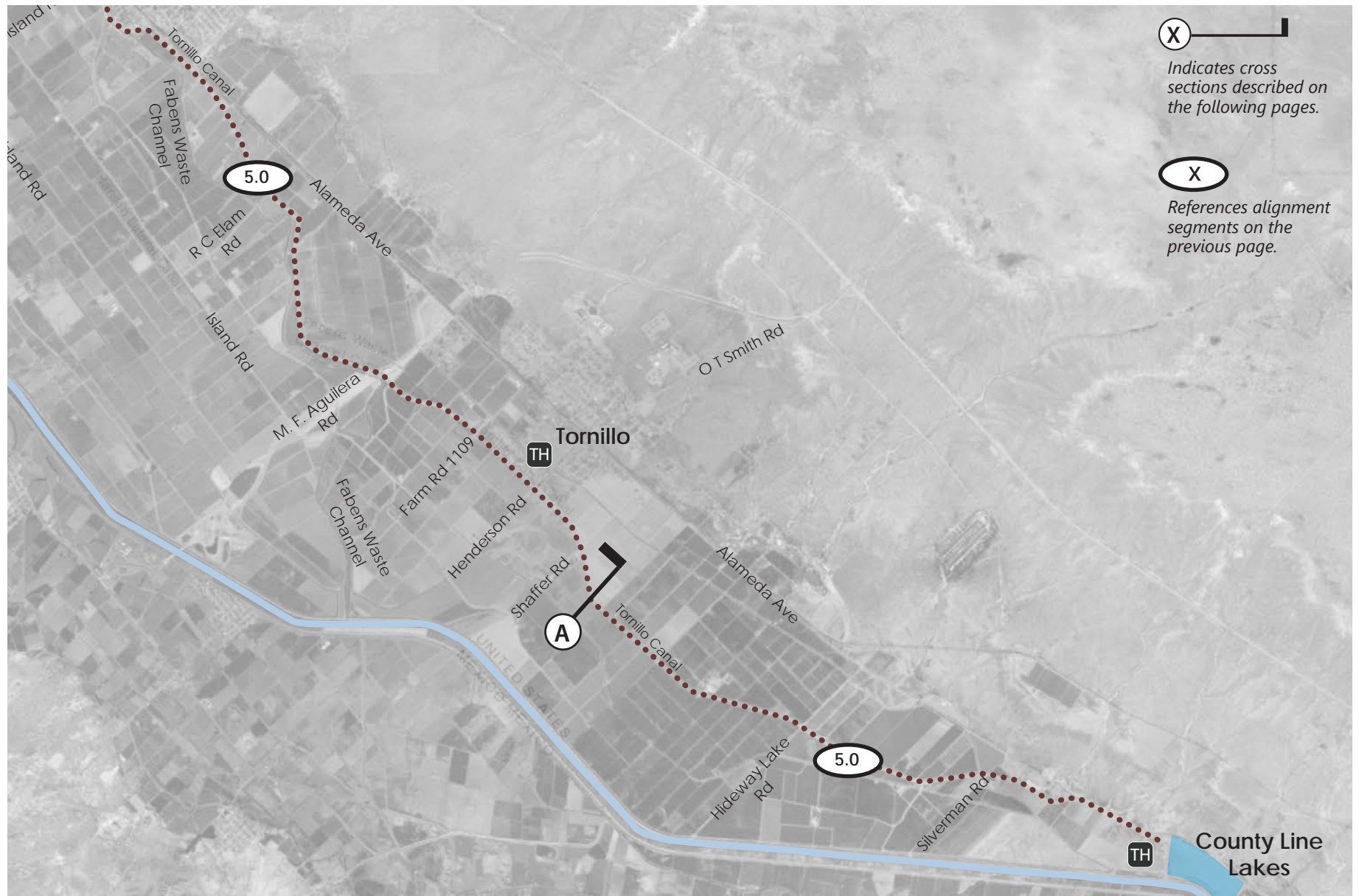
#### **Bus Stops**

Unfortunately, the nearest bus stop from the southern terminus of the trail is almost 19 miles NW at San Elizario Road. No bus stops are located within the Rio Grande Agricultural District, so trail users who wish to travel one-way on the route will need to arrange for pick-up by private parties or ride-sharing services.





See Map 30 for overall region alignments and legend.



**MAP 32. RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICT KEY MAP 2**

## NEARBY SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS

Schools in walking distance include:

- Clint High School
- San Elizario High School
- Excell Adult Learning Center – San Elizario
- Josefa L. Sambrano Elementary School
- Lorenzo G. Loya Primary School
- O'Donnell Elementary School
- David Sublasky Head Start
- Cotton Valley Early College High School
- Fabens High School
- Fabens Middle School
- Tornillo High School
- Tornillo Junior High School
- Tornillo Elementary School

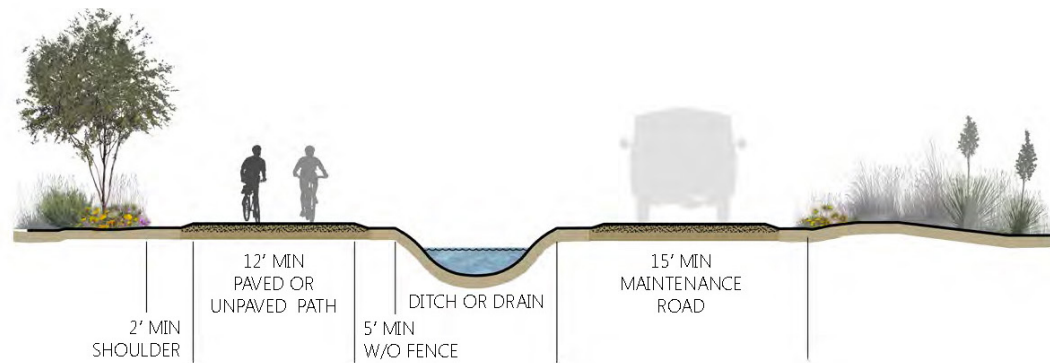




## TYPOLOGIES

**Shared-Use Path along Canal:** A ten- to twelve-foot wide trail can accommodate multiple uses comfortably. Paved trails are generally preferred for shared-use facilities, but in more rural areas such as this, paved trails may not be cost effective, or necessary. Many long-distance trails (e.g. rail trails) have successfully used materials such as chat, screenings, decomposed granite, compacted crusher fines, brick or rock dust, or stabilized natural ground to provide a relatively stable and weather-resistant surface. Since the ditch banks are also used by maintenance vehicles, such materials may be able to support trail traffic and withstand heavier maintenance vehicular traffic without damage to the trail surface.

Typical cross section indicated by letter on previous maps.



**A** SHARED-USE PATH ALONG RURAL CANALS WITH SEPARATE MAINTENANCE ACCESS

**FIGURE 19. TYPICAL CROSS SECTION A – RIO GRANDE AGRICULTURAL**



A canal running along an orchard is typical in the Rio Grande Agricultural District.



## TRAIL ENHANCEMENTS



*The trail alignment provides opportunities for agritourism.*



*Interpretive signage can explain the significance of the area's historical and natural resources.*



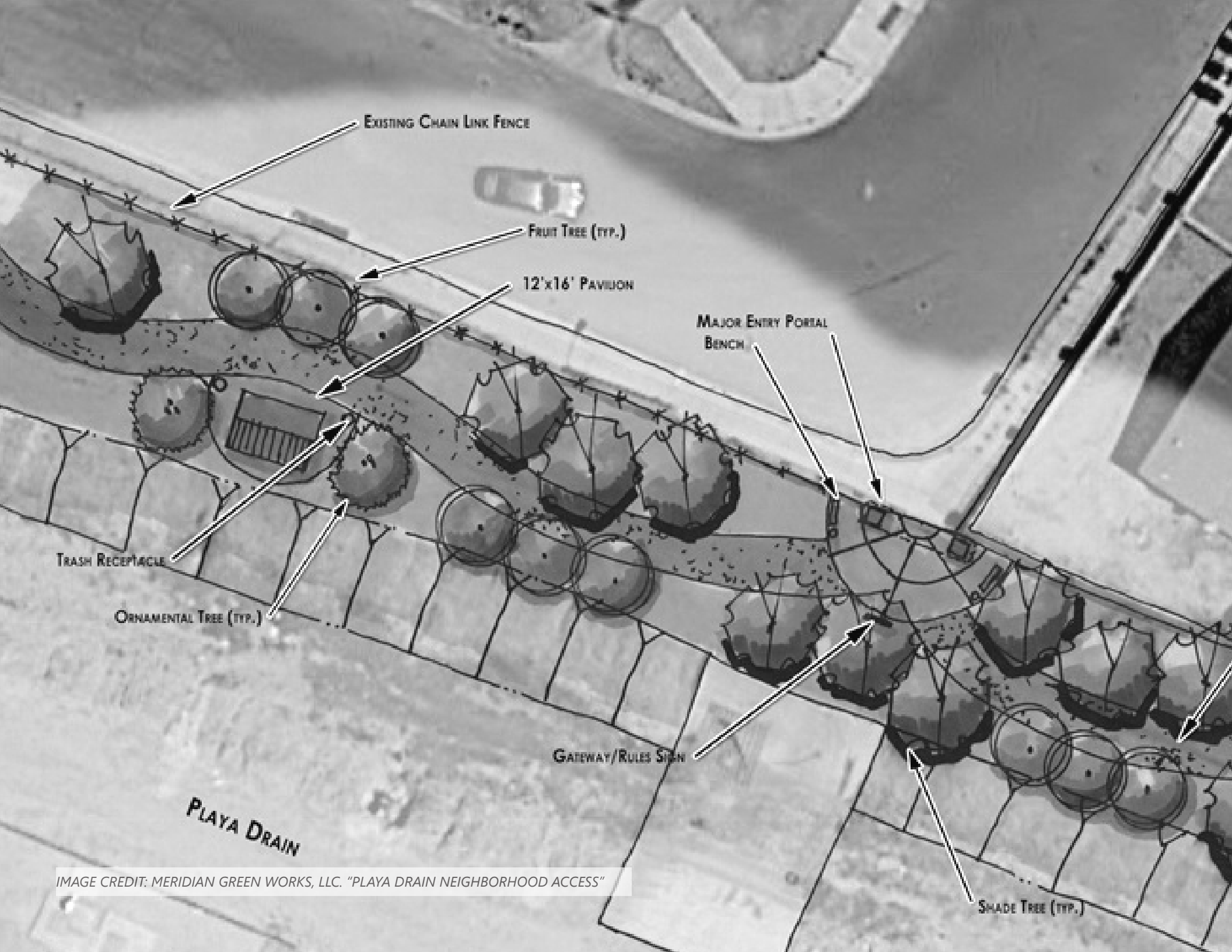
*Shaded rest stops can be attractive trailside amenities.*



*Overlooks can offer views and wildlife sighting opportunities.*







EXISTING CHAIN LINK FENCE

FRUIT TREE (TYP.)

12'x16' PAVILION

MAJOR ENTRY PORTAL  
BENCH

TRASH RECEPTACLE

ORNAMENTAL TREE (TYP.)

GATEWAY/RULES SIGN

PLAYA DRAIN

SHADE TREE (TYP.)

IMAGE CREDIT: MERIDIAN GREEN WORKS, LLC. "PLAYA DRAIN NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS"