



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, March 2, 2023
Granite Reef Senior Center Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Savannah Engelking, Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson, and Jeffrey Smith

ABSENT: Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Dave Myers, Natural Resources Supervisor; Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director; Mike Murphy, Senior Management Analyst

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chair Lipps called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of November 3, 2022 and February 2, 2023

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 3, 2022 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND OLSSON VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONERS ENGLEKING AND SMITH ABSTAINED. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES

COMMISSIONER SMITH MOVED TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 2, 2023 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, ENGELKING, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director of Science and Education, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included updates on the Expedition Days, noting that Family Day will be on Saturday, March 4th from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.; Sonoran Sundays at Brown's Ranch, scheduled March 5, 2023, and will include a visit with raptor ambassadors from Liberty Wildlife from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Pathfinders library lecture on the oral history of the Preserve and the Conservancy; Steward and Trailhead Ambassador activities; the wildflower season; an update on invasive species mitigation; Living Labs pilot program with Saguaro High School; and the Community engagement outreach program, which is targeting the southern areas of Scottsdale.

Ms. Tluczek announced that the Conservancy's Invasive Species Plant Strike Team was awarded Weed Manager of the Year by the Southwest Vegetation Management Association for their tireless work in the Preserve. She said that Ability 360 is providing standardized training to stewards to help them work with people of varying disabilities and learn to rethink ways of engaging the public to keep the Preserve inclusive.

6. SUSTAINABILITY PLAN PROCESS UPDATE

Lisa McNeilly, Sustainability Director, gave an update on City of Scottsdale's Sustainability Plan process for the greater Scottsdale area. She started her presentation with a review of ways in which Scottsdale has been a leader in sustainability, including the Green Building Program, Scottsdale Water Campus, Indian Bend Wash, and the first fully automated residential trash collection truck. As part of the organizational strategic plan portion of the General Plan, in 2022 City Council made development of a Community Sustainability Plan a priority. The plan is intended to build on existing leadership and provide an overarching vision for environmental, social, and economic sustainability and will include open space and land management strategies and actions. The plan is a high-level document focused on supporting existing efforts, implementation, collaboration. It is not a policy document, does not override other decision making and will be updated regularly as needed. Ms. McNeilly talked about the structure and framework for the sustainability plan, which includes five pathways that encompass 31 strategies and over 150 actions. Types of topics that will be addressed include the following:

- Type 1 – Building on existing plans and leadership
- Type 2 - Other traditional sustainability topics
- Type 3 – Extreme heat and hazard preparedness and energy
- Type 4 – Adding sustainability connections to existing work

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. In depth discussion ensued regarding the sustainability plan; sustainable open space; community outreach; increasing awareness about the need for invasive plant mitigation in areas surrounding the Preserve; and the Ecological Resource Plan.

Mr. Ekblaw said that connectivity can be addressed as part of an agenda item discussing the Transportation Element in the General Plan. A representative from the Transportation Department can discuss challenges of transit access relating to the Preserve.

7. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

- Council and Task Force Process update

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on costs and programs to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. As part of his presentation, he reviewed the previous Commission forecasts shared with City Council in January of 2022. Staff is in the process of reviewing elements of the cost projections and updating the numbers based on current numbers.

- Daily Preserve Activities and Operations - Forecast updates

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, reviewed the Daily Preserve Activities and Operations updated cost projections. Staff is working to fine-tune the presentation before presenting to the Task Force in the coming months.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw stressed the projections are not intended to be exact; priorities and projections will fluctuate as needed for various projects. Some items being targeted could qualify for grants. The Commission will have a role in project priorities that will then roll into budget numbers presented to City Council and hopefully backed by a percentage of the Preserve sales tax. Mr. Hamilton said that details of the cost projections will not be included in any future ballot language; ballot language will be broad.

Mr. Ekblaw said that staff will address questions relative to the 2019 bond projects during a future meeting.

- Habitat Protection - Restoration Studies

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director of Science and Education, and Mary Fastiggi, Conservancy Restoration Manager, gave a presentation outlining restoration efforts being made in the Preserve by the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Ms. Tluczek said that in the past Conservancy staff and stewards worked with Dr. Helen Rowe to develop a method for mapping degraded lands. Using degraded lands mapping and GIS, approximately 70 acres within the Preserve have been identified as being in need of restoration. She presented before and after aerial photographs of positive impacts restoration can have over time.

Ms. Fastiggi reviewed various studies that have been initiated, including:

- Study #1 – Past Restoration Sites
The study focused on how to best restore areas. Outcomes showed that restoration as a whole is an art and a science that should be tailored to the specific environment.
- Study #2 - Closed Trail Restoration
The study lasted four years and focused on areas in the Preserve that had been ripped, seed bank soil moved, and seed mixes added. Outcomes showed that seed bank treatment increased plant diversity and there was natural regeneration of all plots, including areas that were closed and had no additional treatments.
- Study #3 - RestoreNet
A study begun in 2019 in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey, which is a project operating across the southwest including in the Mojave Desert, Chihuahuan Desert, Sonoran Desert, and the Great Basin Desert. The study looks at adding different types of treatments to help varying seed mixes establish. Because the McDowell Sonoran Preserve was successful in phase one of the project, they have been invited to move to phase two, where they will study the effects of seedballs.
- Study #4 - Biocrust Reintroduction
The Conservancy is working with NAU on reestablishing biocrust in areas that have been disturbed, using biocrust salvaged from a different location. They are seeing some

success and this is one of the first successful reintroduction of mature biocrust into the Sonoran Desert.

Ms. Fastiggi noted that what they have learned is that it is important to use multiple treatments; that soil modifications do help plants establish, but also include helping invasive plants; seed banks are a low-cost alternative to seeding; seeding works, but with limited success; that biocrust can be grown quickly; and that succulent transplants can be successful, but can alter the natural look. Ms. Tluczek said that moving forward, they plan to continue monitoring field projects, to start looking at new questions, continue working to educate the next generation, i.e., the Living Labs Project; evaluate whether collecting seed from the Preserve is a sustainable option; continue biocrust field trials; continue current research projects to improve seed establishment; and communicate the importance of restoration to the public.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that approximately 200 acres in total across the Preserve are in need of restoration. He anticipates there will be a five to ten-year restoration effort using contractors, volunteers, and staff, hopefully grant-funded, at a cost of anywhere from \$1,000 to \$50,000 per acre depending on location. Mr. Ekblaw explained that he anticipates that there will be a master plan that will be on a five-year cycle that will consistently be evaluated by staff and the Commission. Brief discussion ensued about impacts from cattle ranching. It was suggested that verbiage be included at the Brown's Ranch Homestead interpretive trail regarding the history and impacts of cattle ranching.

8. STAFF REPORTS

- Ecological Resource Plan Update

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the RFP that was put out for a consultant for the ERP. After several issuances, one application has been received and is currently in review. Once a vendor is chosen, the planning process will begin and a timeline for the project will be established. Components of the ERP included in the solicitation were a robust public input plan, clear purpose and value statement, review of the 2016 ERP and other relevant documents and studies, detailed analysis and establishment of key indicators, and recommendations for additional research and monitoring. Mr. Hamilton explained that the Preserve Commission will be a key stakeholder in the process of creating the ERP and will receive regular updates and opportunities to provide input.

- Trail Maintenance

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on trail maintenance activities.

- Invasive Plant Management

Mr. Hamilton said that efforts are moving to priority areas two, three, and four. He explained that the fountain grass in some areas has not turned green yet, so crews will be focusing on the lower part of area four, where fountain grass is green. Water tanks have been dropped in the area and crews will be out March 8th through the 15th to start that treatment. Ms. Tluczek explained that removing plants would cause a "disturbance." Spraying causes minimal disturbance, but it is always good to follow up with large-scale seeding.

- Wildland Fire Fuel Management - Gateway Area

Mr. Hamilton said that fuel mitigation treatment on Bell Road and Thompson Peak in the Gateway Trailhead has been completed since the last meeting. He showed before and after photographs, highlighting reduced wildfire threat and better visibility in the Gateway parking lot.

- APS Transmission Line Maintenance

Mr. Hamilton said that APS has not started the powerline maintenance project. He will provide another update once he receives an update from APS on the timeline.

9. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings - April 6, May 4, June 1
- Optional Additional dates – March 23, April 13 and 27

Mr. Ekblaw said that based on everyone's availability a special meeting will be held on March 23rd at a location yet to be determined. Possible topics for the agenda include the following items:

- Presentation by the City Treasurer's Office
- Marketing Education
- Protect the Preserve topics
- Follow-up to questions posed by Commissioners during tonight's' meeting

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hackbarth announced that Arizona State Legislature has authorized \$2.5 million in Arizona Heritage Funding Grants. Approximately, \$650,000 of those grants are earmarked for cultural purposes and the other funds could be used for trails and other things.

Commissioner Coluccio suggested that the Commission have a conversation about the possibility of installing a McDowell Sonoran Preserve monument sign someplace so that visitors have a landmark for taking photographs, which could help with social media marketing.

Mr. Ekblaw said he will add that topic to the marketing and awareness discussion.

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, ENGELKING, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

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