



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

Thursday, September 7, 2023
Granite Reef Senior Center – Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

PRESENT: Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson (arrived at 5:02 p.m.), Jeffrey Smith, and Savannah Engelking (telephonic; arrived at 5:13 p.m.)

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Dave Myers, Natural Resources Coordinator; Gina Kirklin, Enterprise and Finance Director; Bill Murphy, Assistant City Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chair Lipps called the meeting to order at 5:00 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 July 13, 2023

COMMISSIONER SMITH MOVED TO APPROVE THE JULY 13, 2023 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONERS OLSSON AND ENGELKING WERE NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included a review of the steward volunteer hours for the year, which result in over \$2 million in in-kind donations, higher than pre-pandemic levels; the Fourth of July fire watch; noting that this year's steward class is the 100th class and marks the 25th year of the program; ambassador activities; youth education; and community events. The Citizen Science Program Butterfly Count is scheduled for September 23, 2023; Steward Seminar is scheduled for November 6, 2023; Summit Society Breakfast will be on November 8, 2023.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Tluczek said that the in-class youth programs are in City of Scottsdale, Mesa, Gilbert, and Phoenix schools. She noted that moving forward, three other Conservancy staff will be rotating with her to give updates to the Commission.

6A. SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, gave an update on the 12th Annual McDowell Mountain Frenzy Trail Run special use permit request. The event is scheduled for Saturday, December 2, 2023. Participants in the 50-mile route and the 50-kilometer route will come through the Preserve. A \$5 commercial rate will apply per person. He noted that the Conservancy is in support of the event. Past events have received no negative input from stewards or trail users.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton gave an overview of the trails affected by the Diamond Fire, noting that event participants are required to stay on the trail and are spread out, so the impact would be negligible. Discussion ensued regarding the plans for the upcoming evaluation of the gooseneck area and the types of changes that might come through that evaluation.

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 2, 2023, 12TH ANNUAL MCDOWELL MOUNTAIN FRENZY TRAIL RUN SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST. COMMISSIONER OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, ENGELKING, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

6B. SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, presented the Equestrian Distance Ride event request. The event is an endurance horse ride sanctioned by the American Endurance Ride Conference, scheduled for November 11, 2023. The event will be staged within County Regional Park, with the exception of a watering station that will be located in the parking area at Tom's Thumb trailhead. Various distances will include 100-mile, 75-mile and 50-mile and they anticipate 30 riders will participate. A \$5 commercial rate will apply per person. He noted that the event is supported by the Conservancy and that an identical permit was issued in 2022.

COMMISSIONER SMITH MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 2023 EQUESTRIAN DISTANCE RIDE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST. COMMISSIONER OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO,

HACKBARTH, OLSSON, ENGELKING, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

7. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, said that the Task Force presented to Council on Tuesday, September 5, 2023. Council commented on the Commission updated projections and were particularly interested in high priority/critical priority items, including Preserve preservation, education, habitat protection, cultural history, and the importance of fire mitigation. Most importantly, Council was interested in exploring the idea of using a portion of the tax that is due to expire in 2034 to cover the Preserve care and protection. Mr. Ekblaw explained what would be involved in dedicating a portion of the tax to care and protection, and how projections would be calculated. He noted that the City Attorney and City Treasurer have started research to determine the viability of that idea, which has been explored in the past. Additional information will be available for the Commission's October meeting. Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation.

A recommendation was made that the special fund identified for care and protection, include an requirement that as money accumulates, the interest and dividends stay in that fund and are not transferred into the General Fund. Mr. Ekblaw said that there are opportunities for financial guidelines and ordinance restrictions. He explained that the anticipation is that two questions will go to voters, one question asking of the 0.15 tax should be used for care and protection of the Preserve and the other question about creating a new 0.02 tax once the existing tax expires, that would support parks, police, fire, and WestWorld. He anticipates that Council will be prepared to begin considering ballot language in February 2024.

8. ONE TIME PRESERVE COSTS UPDATE

Mr. Ekblaw provided a review of costs for possible future improvements to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The goal is to develop a detailed projection based on estimates based on inflation and current increases in construction costs. He reviewed the one-time costs, noting that the general consensus is that the resulting high-end projection would be in the \$40 million to \$70 million range. Mr. Ekblaw said that the City Treasurer is reviewing projections and additional information should be available for additional discussion in time for the October or November meeting.

9. ERP (ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE PLAN) UPDATE AND SCHEDULE

Mr. Hamilton provided an update for the upcoming process related to the ERP. As part of his presentation, he reviewed the Ecological Resource Plan draft outline details, highlighting each phase and the tasks associated with each phase. Staff will be soliciting stakeholder input through the fall, begin drafting the plan in the winter, and anticipates putting the plan out for public input in spring. It is anticipated that the plan will be finalized by late spring/early summer 2024.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton recalled that in preparation for the presentation to the Task Force, tentative cost projections have already been included in the ERP in the area of flora and fauna monitoring. The ERP process will become part of the annual budget process. It was suggested that the City follow in the steps of Phoenix

and conduct a cactus study, in particular Saguaro and Buckhorn, which have been under a lot of stress.

10. STAFF REPORTS

- The Diamond Fire and recovery plans

Dave Myers, Natural Resources Coordinator, and Mary Fastiggi, Conservancy Restoration Manager, gave an update on the Diamond Fire and recovery plans. Mr. Myers said that a forest service hotshot crew happened to be scouting for smoke at Tom's Thumb at the time the fire started and three City of Scottsdale brush trucks were on the scene within minutes. City of Scottsdale staff were quickly on scene to implement the City's emergency closure procedures. Fire Management, DFFM, took over Tuesday night and held twice-daily briefings. Fraesfield trailhead was used as incident command and fire camp. The end of 128th Street at Tom's Thumb gate was used for helicopter operations. Approximately 1960 acres were burned, including just over 300 acres in the Preserve and approximately 3.5 miles impacted in the gooseneck.

Mr. Myers talked about post-fire collaboration between City of Scottsdale, Maricopa County, and the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and efforts being made by City staff to assess affected trails and clear any hazards. Drone imaging is being used to assess the burn area. He noted that a burn area caution sign has been created and will be installed in the burn scar areas for the next couple of years. Transect monitoring is being conducted on saguaros and cacti in the area. Mr. Myers reviewed the statistics of what has been found and the level of impact on Saguaros in the area.

Staff and volunteers have started training for native seed collection and participating in volunteer workshops making seed balls. Collections will intensify in spring of 2024. Mr. Hamilton noted that stewards did collections through the WAFAs power line at Pima/Dynamite. Seed balls will be used in the burn scar area. Ms. Fastiggi mentioned that the county has held volunteer workshops, which is a great way to collaborate and learn from each other. She said that the recipe that is being used in the Diamond Fire area is a recipe from the University of Arizona extension office that is based on a recipe that did well in other areas. U of A researchers have been testing different seed ball mixtures, and this mixture is a test to see how long it will take the seed balls to germinate.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Myers explained that seed ball storage has to be in a dry and cool location and that they become less viable over time. Seed balls require rain to dissolve. He noted that there is an ongoing research project with USGS looking at seedballs for the Granite Mountain project that started in 2019. He will be meeting with the USGS group in October to talk about what they have seen in the 40-plus site network across all deserts in the United States. It was noted that no cameras were deployed in the area during the fire. The existing boxes were damaged but the cameras are okay. Staff has not found much wildlife mortality and has seen a lot of animals, including tortoise, in the area since the fire.

Next steps will be to pool resources as much as possible to help the desert recover.

- Rock Climbing Plan

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the Rock Climbing Plan, noting the cultural review is underway. Archeologists are currently conducting ground analysis and documentation of sites and past surveys. The result of their work will culminate in a report and recommendations to the City. City Staff will be working with the Conservancy to do an ecological review similar to the one done in phase 2c of the Phase 3 trails, focusing on areas that are overly sensitive, rare, or unique. Mr. Hamilton noted that as part of the rock-climbing analysis, Logan Simpson looked at Balance Rock and Cathedral Rock. Once studies have been completed, the Commission will be asked to make a recommendation to City Council.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings –
 - 2023 - October 5 and November 2
 - 2024 - February 1, March 7, and April 4

12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hackbarth said that there are sawhorse signs that have been knocked down.

13. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. VICE-CHAIR LIPPS SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, 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 6:49 p.m.

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