



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
McDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES**

Thursday, May 2, 2024
Granite Reef Senior Center – Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Kerry Olsson, Commissioners Savannah Engelking, Mark Hackbarth, Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirschmann (arrived at 5:15 p.m.), and Jeffrey Smith

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

Chair Coluccio thanked Commissioner Smith for his years of service on the Commission. City Council will be making Commissioner appointments before the next scheduled MSPC meeting.

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 April 3, 2024.

COMMISSIONER ENGELKING MOVED TO APPROVE THE APRIL 3, 2024, McDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, AND COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMANN WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. McDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Brian Whitehead, Conservancy Senior Program Manager, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. His presentation included updates on the Trailhead

Ambassadors summer schedule, end-of-season Guided Bike and Hike summary, construction and maintenance, the conclusion of the spring wildlife camera deployment, spring biodiversity surveys, and Diamond Fire restoration efforts. He mentioned that culvert areas along Rio Verde Drive are being scouted in hopes of using the spring wildlife cameras in those areas over the summer to study what types of wildlife are using them.

6. ARIZONA GAME AND FISH — YEARLY UPDATE

Officer Debra Groves, Wildlife Manager Region VI, provided the Commission with an update from the annual large mammal survey of the Preserve. She noted that the annual surveys of mule deer and javelina populations in the Preserve are conducted under an agreement between Arizona Game and Fish and the City of Scottsdale dating back to 2014, which has recently been renewed through 2028. She explained the process of collecting raw data and reviewed the 2023 population estimates for each species. She said that fewer mule deer were counted from the helicopter this year, and she explained that multiple factors go into observation rates. She opined that the poor weather conditions could be one reason fewer observations were made in the southern portion of the Preserve this year. Ms. Groves noted that a bobcat was sighted during the flight, which is unusual. The overall health of both the mule deer and javelina herds is good. She noted that urban development around the periphery of the Preserve is increasing and could begin to impact the movement of the animals across the landscape.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Groves explained that the survey data is based on a snapshot in time and decisions are based on multiple indicators showing a stable population. She said that the collaring study follows animals over a longer period of time than the flight survey and would be a better indicator of how development in the gooseneck area is affecting wildlife travel patterns. Discussion ensued regarding tracking the mule deer population, which is affected by weather, habitat conditions, and water sources. Ms. Groves said that management decisions are data driven, and public comments are accepted for the hunt recommendations. Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, commented that the annual flight surveys are intended to have a long-term benefit in determining the health of the wildlife compared to other areas. Ms. Groves said that mule deer populations have declined statewide, but as of now, there are no indicators as to why there is a decline. Commissioners continued discussion about the mule deer population and the availability of water. Mr. Hamilton commented that the northern area has four or five drinkers available, and the southern area has a water catchment. Those water sources typically dry up in June and July if there are no monsoons. The City has begun a process of hauling water on a limited basis to fill the catchments.

Discussion ensued regarding hunting regulations in the Preserve. County parks allow firearm hunting, and only archery is allowed in the Preserve. Ms. Groves said that the Game and Fish Department would be open to working with the Preserve to make language regarding reptile regulations clearer. She noted that a hunting license is required for all hunters and patrols work to educate hunters about wildlife laws. City staff is having regular discussions regarding how to handle shot gun shooting in the preserve and near developed areas. Ms. Groves encouraged the public to report game theft on the Operation Game Thief hotline, 1-800-352-0700.

7. FUTURE ONE-TIME PRESERVE COSTS FIVE-YEAR PLAN PRIORITIES

Mr. Ekblaw provided a review of costs for possible future improvements to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and the five-year plan priorities. He reviewed minor amendments that were made based on discussion during last month's Commission Meeting and project timelines for

Lost Dog and Gateway. He noted that the five-year plan is not dependent on the November election results. He reviewed the summary of the proposed five-year improvements projections, highlighting the wildlife crossing at Dynamite/Rio Verde Corridor, which is a big dollar item, the scope of which will depend on the type of grant funding that is available.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton explained that the City has a slate of job order contractors. There is a limit to each job order and an annual limit for each contractor, which is mandated by state law. Projects that are estimated to exceed the annual limit, for example, the land bridge, would require an RFP. Mr. Ekblaw emphasized that this is a five-year rolling plan that will be amended on an annual basis. Initial costs focus only on the first year of Lost Dog and Gateway projects.

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE RECOMMENDED FIVE-YEAR PLAN PRIORITIES. COMMISSIONER ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, AND COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, HIRSCHMANN, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

8. ERP PROCESS UPDATE

Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner, reviewed amendments made to the Ecological Resource Plan (ERP) working draft based on prior input received from Commissioners. He noted that clear statements about frequencies and thresholds were added to the document. The ERP will be a critical element in managing the Preserve and will be used to help the Commission prioritize recommendations to City Council on budgetary needs for the following year. He asked the Commission to provide any additional input they might have.

Extensive discussion ensued, and Commissioners asked clarifying questions and made additional recommendations. Feedback included comments on the following:

- Adding an appendix that lists species of greatest conservation need in the Preserve.
- Adding gastropods to section B5, Arthropods.
- Adding Woodhouse's toads to the list of amphibians in section B6.
- Adding the Sonoran Desert Tortoise to the section on previous and ongoing scientific studies.
- Targeting judgmental sampling transects along locations of known archeological sites.
- Periodically following up on issues relating to human impacts at archeological and cultural sites.
- Tracking Ecofacts to gain perspective on what has happened in the past.
- Clarifying the definition of "baseline."
- Monitoring inputs in areas, such as weather, air pollution, Preserve usage levels, urbanization density, trash and invasives, and social trails.
- Reviewing frequency of individual species monitoring.
- Identifying species for monitoring that are indicative of the health of the Preserve.
- Finding balance between what should be monitored and the method for monitoring.
- Including language in the ERP that references and connects this action plan with the 2016 ERP.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that the current set of priorities came from certain experts. The list of priorities could change as the process

moves forward and additional input is collected. Mr. Ekblaw indicated that there is a tentative three-to-five-year plan for wildfire mitigation, and staff have been provided with mechanical thinning polygons that will be used to monitor treatments and plan a rotation. He said that invasive plant management is listed as part of the Preserve Management Plan.

9. APRIL 25TH TOUR DISCUSSION

Item moved to a future agenda.

10. STAFF REPORTS

- Protect the Parks and Preserve Process Update

Mr. Ekblaw said that election information, including questions and answers about the proposed tax, is available on the City website. He stressed that Commissioners are welcome to advocate for the tax as private citizens. He suggested that Commissioners limit discussion and refer people to the website if they have questions.

- Browns Ranch Homestead Trail

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the progress of the Browns Ranch Homestead Trail. Staff plan to meet with the PastFinders in two weeks to review the artwork. He explained that the trail was not built with the intention of being ADA-accessible, but is highly accessible, primarily because they used a specific construction technique to separate the trail from the ground below because it is a cultural site. The trail cannot be dedicated as ADA because there are no ADA-accessible connections to the area.

- Conceptual Rock-Climbing Plan

Mr. Hamilton provided an update on the refinements to the conceptual Rock-Climbing Plan for the Cholla Mountain area. He said that staff consulted with members of the rock-climbing community to develop a plan based on what climbers' itineraries might look like. Mr. Hamilton gave an overview of options for partitioning the paths into areas that people might make a day of, with limited access points off of the main trail.

Commissioners requested that further discussion about the conceptual rock-climbing plan be agendaized for a future meeting.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings
 - June 6 (public safety updates, PPSTF)
- Fall Meetings — September 5th, October 3rd, and November 7th

Mr. Ekblaw said that, if necessary, a Special Meeting or Work Study could be scheduled during summer recess.

12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Olsson requested that staff provide documents in advance of meetings so that Commissioners have ample time to review the information. He requested that an item to discuss the unmapped areas in the northern part of the Preserve be agendaized for a future meeting.

Commissioner Hackbarth gave an update on the area with flagging tape that was mentioned during last month's meeting. He said that the flagging tape is gone and there is a lock on the toolbox. No one had any information about where it came from.

13. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMANN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON, AND COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, HIRSCHMANN, 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 7:54 p.m.

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