



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

Thursday, September 5, 2024
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio; Commissioners Savannah Engelking, Mark Hackbarth, Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirshman, and Ryan Rybarczyk

ABSENT: Vice-chair Kerry Olsson

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Bill Murphy, Assistant City Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed 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 June 6, 2024.

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE JUNE 6, 2024, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO; COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of August 22, 2024.

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 22, 2024, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO; COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. 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 a review of trailhead ambassadors; construction and maintenance; the guided hike program, noting that the hike schedule will be posted on their website; and ongoing science and research. He noted that restoration within the Diamond Fire burn scar is ongoing, primarily checking new plants and monthly watering of the saguaros. In response to questions about the Ricky Fire, there are no restoration projects currently in place. He noted that the wildlife camera project fall deployment has started.

6. SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, gave an update on the Special Use Permit request for the 13th Annual McDowell Mountain Frenzy Trail Run. The event is scheduled for Saturday, December 7, 2024. Only 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 noted that last year there was a concern about the portion of the route in the wildlife corridor, so 5.8 miles has been moved out of the narrow area of the Gooseneck Trail and, in exchange, 2.3 miles were added in the south area. In response to the mention of December 7 being the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Mr. Barber noted that Aravaipa is limited on dates due to a busy event schedule. It was further noted that no improvements would be made to the trails for the event.

COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST FOR THE 13TH ANNUAL MCDOWELL MOUNTAIN FRENZY TRAIL RUN. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO; COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

7. ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES PLAN PROCESS UPDATE

Dan Gruber spoke about the importance of including biomass monitoring in the Ecological Resource Plan (ERP). Mr. Gruber noted that biomass monitoring tracks primary productivity, which is the foundation of the ecosystem. He further explained that biomass is the total mass weight of all living material in a sample area and usually focuses mostly on vegetation rather than animals. By using a consistent method of biomass estimation gives the most reliable results over time. Mr. Gruber praised the increased timing and flexibility given to the contractors and urged the same flexibility be given to panels of experts in determining the frequency of data collection and evaluation, monitoring species to identify ranges and how

range changes reflect environmental changes, and the importance of identifying which data is needed for ecosystem monitoring as well as what is being collected for other purposes already, such as the trail cameras, when determining resource allocation.

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, and Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, presented the most recent update to the Ecological Resource Plan (ERP) and facilitated discussion regarding the updates. Mr. Hamilton noted that the goal of the discussion was to review the summary of the August 22nd ERP discussion for accuracy. Discussion ensued regarding clearly defining ecological health assessment timelines, T1 and T2 prioritization and frequency, biomass monitoring, opportunities for joining topics for evaluation, and using existing data for habitat connectivity and movement corridors evaluation. The updated draft document will be forwarded to Commissioners for review ten days prior to the October MSPC meeting and will be agendaized for possible recommendation.

8. UPCOMING 2025-26 BUDGET PROCESS UPDATE

Mr. Ekblaw provided an overview of the upcoming process for the Preserve 2025/26 Budget. As part of his presentation, he reviewed the history of the budget process over the past year. He noted that the Protect and Preserve Task Force forwarded the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission's recommended funding goals to City Council and recommended that the Preserve Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission be tasked with oversight of the funds. He highlighted the draft Commission updated November 2, 2023, projections and recommended funding amounts. In April 2024, City Council approved an ordinance, assigning an annual allocation of 18 percent to Preserve Maintenance and Protection and approved Commission oversight. With a successful vote in November, the Commission would have oversight, effective July 1, 2025. He explained that the first year of projections is low, because there is a financial policy requiring a 20 percent buffer be withheld in the first year.

Mr. Ekblaw reviewed projections for the following areas:

- Wildland habitat protection.
- Vegetation management/wildland fuel reduction.
- Restoration.
- Mapping and assessments.
- Studies and projects.
- Awareness/public education.
- Proposed allocation of estimated tax revenues.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions throughout the presentation.

9. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES OF SHADE AT TRAILHEADS

Mr. Ekblaw provided an overview of the previous Commission process evaluating shade at older trailheads. He reviewed the shaded amphitheater plan options for Gateway and Tom's Thumb that were presented to the Commission approximately four years ago, highlighting the designs that were preferred at that time. He noted that staff hopes to revisit the project analysis and public process after the November election.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that most of the formal uses of the amphitheater spaces at other trailheads has been with the McDowell

Sonoran Conservancy for lectures, school groups, and animal presentations. Design analysis will focus on evaluating shade structures at other trailheads and making the new structures more functional for how they are being used.

10. STAFF REPORTS

- Brown's Ranch Interpretive Trail: Mr. Hamilton gave an update on progress at Brown's Ranch Interpretive Trail. An opening ceremony will be held at the trailhead on October 18, 2024, starting at 10:00 a.m. Brown family members will be attending the event and will be offered an opportunity to visit the ranch prior to the ceremony. McDowell Sonoran Conservancy will offer guided hikes for the public on October 19th.
- Protect the Parks and Preserve Process Update: Mr. Ekblaw reminded Commissioners that they are able to advocate as individuals, but when doing so, they should be clear they are not advocating on behalf of the Commission.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are Tentative and subject to amendment:

- Fall Regular Meetings
 - October 3 and November 7

12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hallagan requested that Commissioners be provided with information regarding Story Rock's plans, highlighting how close they will be building to the Preserve boundary fence.

13. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

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