



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

Thursday, May 1, 2025
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking (MS Teams, arrived at 6:09 p.m.), Commissioners Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirschman, Kerry Olsson, and Ryan Rybarczyk

ABSENT: Commissioner Pruitt Layton

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Nick Molinari, Senior Director, Parks and Recreation and Preserve; Natural Resources Supervisor Madison Barasha; Scottsdale PD Sgt. Greg Mastin, and Park Ranger Adam Saylor

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:01 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 minutes of – Special Meeting April 10, 2025

Chair Coluccio pointed out a spelling error under staff reports, second paragraph. On-time costs should be one-time costs.

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE APRIL 10, 2025, SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, OLSSON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING WAS NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. McDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

There was no report from the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy.

6. ARIZONA GAME AND FISH – YEARLY UPDATE

Debra Groves, Arizona Game and Fish Wildlife Manager, provided the Commission with an update from the annual large mammal survey of the Preserve. She noted that the annual surveys dating back to 2014 and will run through 2028. She explained the process of collecting raw data and reviewed the 2024 population estimates for each species.

She mentioned that two whitetail does were observed this year, 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. Game and Fish will keep an eye on the fawn recruitment and will work to maintain water in the water catchments.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Groves explained that because of the partnership with Scottsdale, they are able to fund the helicopter surveys annually. Mr. Ekblaw reviewed the history behind the City of Scottsdale's partnership with Arizona Game and Fish and the wildlife surveys. He said that the recently approved ERP and Prop 490 funding will be a guideline for future survey parameters. Discussion ensued regarding hunting restrictions, public education, and signage pertaining to hunting boundaries.

Ms. Groves said that the Game and Fish department is willing to provide signage. She noted that information regarding boundaries could be included on the annual hunting fact sheet. She explained that in past years the department sent out voluntary questionnaires after hunting season, but since reporting is now required, they are confident in the number of animals that were taken off the landscape this season. Commissioners asked about hunting rules as they would relate to a possible future wildlife overpass. Ms. Groves explained that the only mechanism in the statute at this time is a quarter-mile occupied statute, which would not address hunting on the overpass. Currently a hunter can be within a quarter mile of a road but cannot be on the road or shoot across the road.

Chair Coluccio recalled discussion last year about hunting reptiles. It was noted that HERP regulations are being updated this year and will be active for five years once approved. Commissioners expressed an interest in agendizing discussion about making a recommendation to the Game and Fish Commission regarding HERP regulations.

7. PUBLIC SAFETY UPDATES

Sgt. Greg Maston and Park Ranger, Adam Saylor from the Scottsdale Police Department (SPD) Park Ranger Unit provided an update on public safety in the Preserve. Their presentation included an overview of year-to-date statistics and service highlights for the year since the unit's inception. They noted that the primary issues they address deal with enforcement of the leash laws, enforcement related to e-bikes and dirt bikes, Game and Fish code enforcement, warrant arrests, medical issues, and City Code violations. They said that the primary issues they have had in the Preserve are related to mountain biking and after-hours use. Overall, the Preserve has fewer problems in part due to the open area and the type of uses typical in the Preserve.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Sergeant Maston said that the unit

currently has three drones at their disposal. Officer Saylor further explained that the department worked with a company out of Canada to acquire software programming that enables special capabilities, including pixilation technology. The unit is currently borrowing a utility task vehicle from another unit within the SPD. It was noted that once a full team is in place, coverage in the Preserve will increase, but it will likely not be seven-day-a-week coverage.

8. RIO VERDE WILDLIFE AND TRAIL CROSSING

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, reviewed the proposal to prioritize a concept design and feasibility assessment in the 2025/26 budget to initiate and pursue this study for the Wildlife Crossing and Gooseneck Trail of Rio Verde Road. He noted that the Budget Review Commission identified \$250,000 and made a recommendation for the City Council to prioritize a wildlife feasibility study for the area. He gave a detailed overview of a draft recommendation for the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission to forward to the City Council supporting the feasibility study recommendation.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions and discussion ensued regarding the recommendation. The feasibility study would look at all options, including design parameters and location.

Nick Molinari, Senior Director Parks, Recreation and Preserve, said that the anticipation is that organizations such as Game and Fish would be involved in determining the impacts of not doing a wildlife crossing, the justification for doing a wildlife crossing, and decisions on timing. The study would also assess the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of using an underpass versus an overpass. Commissioners expressed a strong desire to be given an opportunity to review and comment on the study before it moves forward.

COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE RIO VERDE WILDLIFE AND TRAIL CROSSING PROPOSAL TO PRIORITIZE A CONCEPT DESIGN AND FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT IN THE 2025/26 BUDGET TO INITIATE AND PURSUE A STUDY FOR THE WILDLIFE CROSSING AND GOOSENECK TRAIL OF RIO VERDE ROAD AS FOLLOWS:
COMMISSION RECOMMENDS CITY COUNCIL APPROVE FOR 2025/2026:

- ADVANCE \$250,000 IN FUNDING FOR THE CONCEPT DESIGN FOR WILDLIFE CROSSING AND GOOSENECK TRAIL GRADE SEPARATED CROSSING OF RIO VERDE/DYNAMITE BOULEVARD IN THE GENERAL VICINITY OF THE 126TH STREET ALIGNMENT.
 - CONCEPT DESIGN TO ANALYZE WILDLIFE AND SAFETY BENEFITS OF GRADE SEPARATED CROSSING (OVERPASS/UNDERPASS) AND EVALUATE SIZING, LOCATION, USE OF NATURAL FEATURES/TOPOGRAPHY, DRAINAGE AND ABILITY TO UTILIZE DRAINAGE STRUCTURES FOR WILDLIFE AND/OR TRAIL, EXISTING/PLANNED UTILITY ALIGNMENTS, ROUGH AND FINAL GRADING, LANDSCAPE REVEGETATION/RESTORATION, REQUIRED CONTROL FENCING FOR WILDLIFE AND ABILITY TO SHARE OR NEED TO SEPARATE WILDLIFE AND TRAIL USES.
 - ADDITIONALLY EVALUATE SCOPING PARAMETERS AND CONSIDER POSSIBILITIES OF TIMING OF IMPROVEMENTS WITH FUTURE RIO VERDE ROAD IMPROVEMENTS AND CONSIDER ESCALATION COSTS IF THE PROJECT IS PROPOSED IN FUTURE YEARS.
 - PROPOSE HAVING THIS CONCEPT DESIGN COMPLETED AND FEASIBILITY AND RANGE OF ESTIMATES READY FOR THE MSPC TO REVIEW AND

RECOMMEND TO CITY COUNCIL FOR THE 2026/2027 BUDGET PROCESS.

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

9. STAFF REPORTS

- **Carefree Fault Research Project**

Madison Barasha, Natural Resources Supervisor, gave an update on the Carefree Fault Research Project. She presented photographs of the location of the trench and reviewed the current findings. The trench is scheduled to be filled and fencing removed on May 8th and 9th. As part of the project, the Old Corral Trail will be mitigated and replanted in an effort to deter hikers from using the trail.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Barasha explained that the purpose of the study is because the State of Arizona is hoping to raise Bartlett Dam. Mr. Ekblaw noted that Scottsdale is one of approximately 30 participating potential beneficiaries of storage of water. The study will help determine if additional safety features would be needed for the dam, and it offers educational benefits regarding soils and plants.

- **Canine Safety Day**

Madison Barasha, Natural Resources Supervisor, gave an overview of the Canine Safety Day event that was held at trailheads on April 5, 2025, from 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. She noted that the event was held in partnership with Maricopa County Animal Care and Control, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and the Scottsdale Fire Department. The next Canine Safety Day will be Saturday April 11, 2026.

- **Budget Process Update**

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, said there was no further information to present on the budget process.

Chair Coluccio commented that an agenda item should be scheduled to look at priorities for Prop 490 funds. Nick Molinari, Senior Director Parks, Recreation and Preserve, noted that one priority will be staffing. He said that recruitment for the Preserve Director position is currently open and will close on May 5. Following the appointment of the new Preserve Director, other positions will be open including Scott Hamilton's replacement and the project manager position.

9. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings –June 5th (Budget Review); Summer Break; September 4
October 9 (due to conflict with the 2nd); November 6

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no Commissioner comments.

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER OLSSON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, OLSSON, 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 6:46 p.m.

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