



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

Thursday, October 16, 2025
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking, Commissioners Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirshman, Pruitt Layton, Kerry Olsson, and Ryan Rybarczyk

STAFF: Director Jenna Kohl; Senior Director Nick Molinari; Acting Preserve Manager Madison Barasha-Tang

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 Regular Meeting Minutes – September 4, 2025

Commissioner Hallagan noted that on page 5, the address referred to as 126th Street should be 136th Street.

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE SEPTEMBER 4, 2025, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON,

OLSSON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. **STAFF REPORTS**

- Update on Wildlife Crossing Feasibility Study

Nick Molinari, Senior Director, gave an update on the Wildlife Crossing Feasibility Study. He said Kimley-Horn will serve as the lead consultant together with subconsultant Arizona Game and Fish Department. He anticipated the feasibility study will be completed prior to the start of the FY 2027/28 budget process.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Molinari said that Arizona Game and Fish Department will conduct a wildlife data collection process. The study is expected to result in a 30 percent design concept, which will help with accurately estimating the cost. Kimley-Horn will not consider cost parameters and will focus on how wide the crossing needs to be to promote wildlife activity. Arizona Game and Fish has indicated they have seen successful outcomes with smaller wildlife crossings than what was initially projected, so all parameters will be considered.

- Update on Preserve Projects

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, announced the Scottsdale City Council has officially proclaimed October as Preserve Month in celebration of the legacy of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and the City's partnership with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Commissioners accepted the proclamation and stood for a photo.

Madison Barasha-Tang, Acting Preserve Manager, gave an update on Preserve projects that have been completed or are underway, including Protect Our Desert Phase II, mechanical thinning, and invasive fire fuel breaks.

EnviroSystems is scheduled to begin spraying trails to create a fire fuel break November 5th through the 13th. The project is expected to take two years, with completion in spring or summer of 2027. Staff will continue working with Dave Ramirez from the Scottsdale Fire Department on a project to do mechanical thinning to create fire fuel breaks beginning with Tom's Thumb and Sunrise Trailhead and then moving on to the area of 136th Street. She said the fire fuel break project is being funded with approximately \$175,000 in matching grant funds and approximately \$13,000 in Prop 490 funds. Mechanical thinning will be funded entirely through Prop 490 funds.

Commissioners requested that an update on Prop 490 and enterprise resource planning (ERP) projects be agendaized for a future meeting.

Ms. Barasha-Tang announced that Pinnacle Peak Park will host EEK! at the Peak in a free public event on Saturday, October 25th from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

6. **"THE SCOTTSDALE WILDHORSE SANCTUARY" PROPOSAL SUMMARY AND COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

Mark Hackbarth spoke in opposition to the Scottsdale Wildhorse Sanctuary. He talked about the history of horses in North America and in the Sonoran Desert and highlighted the damage that hooved animals could cause in the Preserve. He encouraged Commissioners to vote against allowing any type of hooved animals in the Preserve.

Chair Coluccio gave an overview of the September 4, 2025, Commission discussion about the presentation made by a citizen's ad hoc committee regarding a plan to relocate horses from the Lower Salt River to an enclosure in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. He highlighted Article 8, Section 12 of the City Charter and Ordinances No. 3321, Section 21-2(b) and No. 2426, Section 21-17, prohibiting such a use. Additionally, he quoted statements from Arizona Game and Fish regarding feral horses and burros in North America and University of Arizona Department of Agriculture and Life Sciences' assessment of the Salt River Horse Management Area, as well as reviewing comments and concerns that were expressed by Commissioners. He stressed the importance of considering the restrictions contained within the conservation easement entered into by the City of Scottsdale December 12, 2012. Chair Coluccio presented a letter he drafted to the City Council on behalf of the Commission regarding the topic of a Scottsdale Wild Horse Sanctuary in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve for Commissioners to consider.

Discussion ensued regarding the draft letter to the City Council, and the recommended language was finalized.

COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO BE SENT TO THE CITY COUNCIL IN RESPONSE TO THE SEPTEMBER 4, 2025, WILDHORSE SANCTUARY PRESENTATION. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, OLSSON, AND RYBARCZYK VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

7. SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST

Acting Preserve Manager Madison Barasha-Tang gave an update on the special use permit request for the 14th Annual McDowell Mountain Frenzy Trail Run distance running event, which is scheduled for Saturday, December 6, 2025. Participants in the 50-mile route and the 50-kilometer route will come through the Preserve. A \$5 commercial rate will apply per person. She noted that the Conservancy is in support of the event. Past events have received no negative input from stewards or trail users.

Brief discussion ensued regarding the rates and fees policy. Ms. Barasha-Tang directed Commissioners to the event proposal to find information on the participation fee, which is in addition to the \$5 per-person fee.

Commissioners expressed support for approval of the special use permit request for the 14th Annual McDowell Mountain Frenzy Trail Run distance running event.

8. WILDFIRE RESTORATION STUDY AND PLAN

Carla spoke regarding why discussion about creating a wildlife restoration study and plan was agendaized. Concern about whether there would be enough funds in the Preserve budget should the Preserve experience a devastating fire like the ones that happened recently in California. The City Treasurer indicated that additional funding would have to come from the General Fund as part of the annual budget process. Carla opined that the 2004 tax that is being considered for early sunseting could be utilized to build a fund in preparation for emergency restoration in the event of a devastating fire in the Preserve.

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, presented a concept, objectives, and scope of work for undertaking a study and putting together a strategic plan, including funding mechanisms, to establish a wildfire restoration plan. The plan would support a swift, coordinated, and resilient recovery in the event of wildfire damage within the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Ms. Kohl said the proposed wildfire restoration plan would be developed with Scottsdale Fire, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, Preserve staff, and partners. She noted that Maricopa County maintains a community wildfire protection plan and has plans to develop a Scottsdale-specific version of that plan, and the proposed wildfire restoration plan would be a restoration-focused annex to the Maricopa County plan. Ms. Kohl acknowledged that the Conservancy, Scottsdale Fire, and Preserve staff are already engaged in restoration efforts due to recent fires. The initiative aims to consolidate and formalize efforts and establish a dedicated funding strategy for large-scale restoration.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, said that the Conservancy currently has a scope of work for the fire areas, and the City of Scottsdale determines funding. She said that the Diamond Fire was approximately 270 acres, and so far, approximately 60 acres have been restored. Mr. Molinari explained that the City is self-insured, and funding response is determined by the scale of a wildfire. In the event of a major catastrophe, options are available through federal funding. Ms. Kohl clarified that the proposed study would identify how much money would be needed to supplement the current funding available. Commissioners suggested that a member of the Commission be included in the study.

Commissioners expressed support for moving forward with the wildfire restoration study and plan development.

9. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

- a. Regular Meeting: November 6*
- b. Suggested items for November meeting:
 - i. Update from Dr. Jeri Young Ben-Horin, Seismic Network Operator from AGS/University of Arizona regarding a trench study
 - ii. Budget review

* Dates are tentative and subject to amendment.

There were no agenda item recommendations.

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Discussion ensued regarding Prop 490 and ERP projects. Mr. Molinari explained the sales tax collection process, noting that reporting is typically delayed by a month or two. He anticipates having a better understanding of the amount once the event season is over. He gave an overview of the process that is being followed while the judge considers Prop 490, along with possible scenarios depending on a favorable or unfavorable ruling. The judge has 60 days to decide, so a decision should come forward soon. An agenda item will be scheduled for future Commission meetings to start the discussion about the operating budget, Prop 490, and the 2004 Capital Plan.

Ms. Kohl said she anticipates being prepared for a presentation on the coming years' projects during the February meeting. If the information is available earlier, it will be forwarded to Commissioners.

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.
COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, 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 6:29 p.m.

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