



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

Thursday, April 2, 2026
Via Linda Senior Center
10440 E. Via Linda
Scottsdale, AZ 85258

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking, Commissioners Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirshman (arrived at 5:25), Pruitt Layton, Ryan Rybarczyk, and Cynthia Wenstrom

ABSENT: None

STAFF: Jenna Kohl, Director; Kevin Burke, Senior Director of Economic Development & Tourism

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. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW COMMISSIONER

Chair Coluccio welcomed Commissioner Wenstrom, a former Chair of the Commission, who provided a brief history of her participation in various boards and commissions as well as a brief professional history.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting Minutes of March 5, 2026.

Commissioner Wenstrom pointed out that Assistant Police Chief Slavin's name was incorrectly noted in Item 5.

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 5, 2026, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER LAYTON SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, AND COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN NOT PRESENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

6. ARIZONA GAME AND FISH UPDATE

Jeff Gagnon, Wildlife Connectivity Specialist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), conducted a slideshow presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Presentation Objectives; Who is Arizona Game and Fish Department; AZGFD Commission Executed Resolution...; Arizona helped “write the book”...; Arizona’s Potential for Growth; Arizona is a Major Gateway...; Direct Mortality; Habitat Fragmentation; Highway Impacts to Wildlife; Statewide, Wildlife Populations are Already Being Fragmented; Hwy 87 Desert Tortoise Study (2 slides); US Highway 89 Pronghorn; and Hwy 89 Pronghorn Study Area (2 slides).

Mr. Gagnon reviewed the results of the pronghorn study, pointing out that Highway 89 was mainly a two-lane road which, at the time, saw an average of 8,000 vehicles per day. Citing a prior mule deer collar study that was conducted, Chair Coluccio noted it produced similar results as it pertained to animals not crossing major roads.

Mr. Gagnon continued the presentation by reviewing slides with the following titles or descriptions: Proportion of Crossing Pronghorn...; GPS Data; Now that we know some of the impacts...; Roads: Wildlife Crossings and Fencing; Attributes of a Successful Wildlife Crossing...; Bringing it All Together; Placing Wildlife Crossings With GPS; Attributes of a Successful Wildlife Crossing...; Design; SR 68 – Sheep Underpasses; US 93 Overpasses – Design; video; >6000 Sheep Crossings!!!; SU 93 Structure Use; The more open the better; What’s at the other End? Why Engineers Need Biologists; Why Biologists Need Engineers; Attributes of a Successful Wildlife Crossing...; Funnel Concept; photo; Full Funnel; SR 260; and PDF at a Smaller Scale...

Mr. Gagnon opined that sheep are more likely to use overpasses than underpasses to keep away from predators. The design and location of crossings can sometimes be a challenge because of things like topography, but fencing can make them work well. The underpasses on State Route (SR) 260 resulted in a more than 90 percent reduction in collisions with wildlife.

Mr. Gagnon concluded the presentation by reviewing the following slides: Urban Desert Case Studies; State Route 77 Project; Arizona’s Wildlife Linkages; photo; Similar Habitat and Species as Scottsdale; SR 77 Crossing Monitoring; SR77 – Crossing Structure Utilization; Morning Jog; photo; video; photos (5 slides); Crossing by Structure Since Camera Install; SR 77 Take Home Message; Habitat Blocks; Need All 3 for Success; McDowell Sonoran Preserve; Conservation Goals; Prior Preserve Studies; 2024 Survey Results; 2 populations separated by Rio Verde Drive; Monitoring of Surface Water Features...; Mule Deer Collar Deployments; 2016-2018; Russo 2025 – Journal of Wildlife Management; Roadkill and Track Surveys 2011-2012; McDowell Sonoran Preserve; and Isolation of Habitat (2 slides). He explained that wildlife linkage #81 was identified using corridor modeling, not a collar study.

Responding to Commissioner questions, he confirmed that crossings can take place in more urban areas as long as there is an opportunity to use them and the animals feel safe. Statistics of different species that used crossings were gathered over a ten-year period. He spoke about some of the ways the AZGFD worked with the Preserve. He noted that animal populations are stable and there are no concerns about overpopulation. He remarked that the Phoenix Mountains became isolated over time, and now there are no deer there.

Chair Coluccio pointed out that vehicular traffic has likely doubled since the 2018 study, resulting in greater challenges in crossing. Mr. Gagnon replied that SR 77 experiences around 50,000 cars a day, and deer still cross there. If mule deer are not able to cross roads, he opined, something similar to the Phoenix Mountains could occur, particularly if drought issues arise. The fencing used is typically eight feet tall and consists of woven wire that is sometimes dipped in patina to make it rust-colored. A discussion ensued regarding the fencing used in other areas, how much fencing is used, and how the location of fencing is determined.

Preserve Director Jenna Kohl stated Kimley Horn is conducting the feasibility study to determine if there is a need for a wildlife corridor and preliminary cost estimates. The original design will only be used to establish a budget. In response to Commissioner questions, Ms. Kohl said she did not know when Dynamite Boulevard/Rio Verde Drive is expected to be widened, but the project team is working with transportation infrastructure to determine the final width of the road. Ms. Kohl believed that the ideal crossing solution will take all species into consideration, and the design will be data-driven. Though many species may benefit, the focus is on the larger animals because of potential impacts with vehicles.

Members of the public were allowed to ask questions. In response, Ms. Kohl indicated that any corridor is anticipated to remain fully on Preserve property. Currently, multiple underpasses are not being considered as a way of supplementing any overpasses. A brief discussion ensued regarding the proximity and involvement of the golf course, with Ms. Kohl saying there are existing game trails that would align well with the proposed location of the wildlife corridor.

A member of the public named Carla stated that culverts will likely be required on private land as part of the design because it is part of the natural area open space. She indicated that the AZGFD has worked on this Preserve effort since 1992, and the idea of an overpass was first introduced by them in 1997.

Ms. Kohl announced that someone from AZGFD will make a presentation at the Commission's May meeting on the big game flyover that was performed in January.

7. TOURISM UPDATE

Kevin Burke, Senior Director of Economic Development & Tourism, provided his professional and personal history. He conducted a slideshow presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Scottsdale's Economic Engine; Department Focus; Scottsdale at a Glance; Scottsdale Ecosystem; Target Industries; Corporate Headquarters; IT Services and Software; Financial & Insurance Services & Technology; Healthcare Services and Innovation; Tourism; Top 10 Employers; Key Developments; Future Developments; Opportunity Starts Here; Tourism and Events; Tourism by the Numbers; Community Partnerships; Experience Scottsdale; Tourism Development Commission; Special Events; Signature Events; Old Town; and Collaborative Strategic Planning.

Mr. Burke explained that when giving reasons to attract businesses to Scottsdale, his department highlights open space and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. He described healthcare services as the fastest growing segment of the regional economy other than direct investment.

Responding to Commissioner questions, Mr. Burke indicated that ASM is presently doing manufacturing at the local facility, though it is primarily meant for research and development. He discussed the challenges associated nationally with office development, which are not being seen as much in Scottsdale. He noted Scottsdale generated \$33 million in hotel occupancy tax revenue this fiscal year, much of which was reinvested in the city. He said Experience Scottsdale is a nonprofit organization. He encouraged people to visit the Museum of the West's new gallery exhibition space. While there will be separate strategic plans for tourism and economic development, he expected they would be created in tandem and presented to the City Council for approval by the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Burke remarked that he does not measure qualitative data about people's experience in the Preserve, though the Preserve Conservancy might. Preserve Director Jenna Kohl explained the City utilizes Placer.ai to gather data with the goal of creating a dashboard to evaluate where people are visiting. It provides information about the number of visitors at each trailhead, where visitors come from, and where they go after they leave the Preserve. She spoke about surveys conducted by the City to get qualitative data, adding that they could be expanded in the future. Discussion ensued regarding the popularity of Scottsdale as a destination for bridal parties.

Mr. Burke explained how cellphone data, including demographic data, were used to track visitors' locations, though children's data were not collected. Discussion ensued regarding Experience Scottsdale's marketing. He believed there should be a direct line between the locations of corporate headquarters and philanthropic contributions to the community.

8. STAFF REPORT

Preserve Director Jenna Kohl conducted a slideshow presentation and reviewed slides with the following titles: Personnel Updates; Invasive Species Management; Heat Safety Awareness; Fuel Fire Mitigation (3 slides). She noted it was Kelsey Lamper's last day as Preserve Manager, and she will return to her role in adaptive recreation. A new recruitment for the position will be posted soon. Additionally, a natural resource supervisor will be out of the office for a month. She mentioned that someone has accepted the newly created project coordinator role, though she could not make a formal announcement yet. She described some of the responsibilities that new role will oversee, including the initiation of certain projects.

Regarding boot brushes, she said that as part of a communication campaign, signs will be posted explaining their purpose. A brief discussion ensued about the possibility of doing something similar for dogs. She announced that the name of the heat awareness mascot is Trek. She discussed additional areas of focus that will be highlighted in future campaigns. Ultimately, it is up to each individual to be informed about heat safety. Part of the campaign will be creating materials for hotels. She offered to provide a PDF for inclusion in the newsletter. She discussed her plan to update the website to make it more robust. Discussion ensued regarding the choice not to include a specific temperature threshold in the heat awareness materials. A suggestion was made to put warnings on trailhead maps.

Ms. Kohl indicated the goals of the Dove Valley Trail project were to strengthen wildfire resilience, improve emergency access, and protect the critical Preserve habitat. The five-mile corridor now serves as a primary wildfire control feature and emergency access route. She spoke about how the project was funded and what was done to achieve its goals. The City wanted to preserve the Preserve and was very intentional about the locations of fire breaks. She discussed other initiatives being undertaken by the City, the development of a summer Sonoran Desert education program, and a fire study.

9. FRAMEWORK FOR CAPITAL PLANNING

On the call for public comment, Preserve Pioneer Carla expressed opposition to placing two new trails in the Preserve as she felt there were already enough. The Preserve was intended to protect the natural asset, and each new trail resulted in fractured habitats.

Preserve Director Jenna Kohl reviewed the staff report included in the agenda packet for this item. She noted that much of the work on this framework have already been done by the Commission, staff, and stakeholder groups. She anticipated updating the Commission regularly on the progress of this initiative, which she thought would tie in well with a larger comprehensive plan for the Preserve.

In response to Commissioner queries, Ms. Kohl spoke about the possibility of including a Commissioner in the study group, which she said might lengthen the timeline. She expected the final product of this initiative would be a dynamic report addressing capital needs and how they would be budgeted for moving forward. She felt it would be up to the Commission whether to make a recommendation about what funding would be needed. A brief discussion ensued about realigning an existing trail as part of the wildlife crossing project and the Commission's potential authority in that matter.

CHAIR COLUCCIO MOVED TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LONG-TERM PRESERVE CAPITAL NEEDS AND PLANNING, AND TO REQUEST REGULAR UPDATES FROM THE PRESERVE DIRECTOR. VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSCHMAN, LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no initial Commissioner comments, but the item was reopened later in the meeting. Vice-Chair Engelking wondered whether the Commission should make a recommendation to the City Council about connectivity with respect to developments happening near the Preserve. A brief discussion about the suggestion took place. Preserve Director Jenna Kohl indicated she would discuss the matter with Planning staff to see if it be appropriate to agendize that topic for a future meeting.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

Regular Meetings: May 7 (Granite Reef Senior Center) | June 4

Commissioner Wenstrom stated she would not be able to attend the May 7 meeting, and Commissioners Layton and Hirschman would not be present at the June 4 meeting.

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Agenda Item 10 was reopened at this time. See that item for details.

It was decided that the June Commission meeting would be held at Via Linda Senior Center if it was available.

12. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER WENSTROM MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HALLAGAN, HIRSCHMAN, LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

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