



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

Thursday, May 7, 2026
Granite Reef Senior Center - Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-Chair Savannah Engelking, Commissioners, Susan Hirschmann, Pruitt Layton, Ryan Rybarczyk, and Cynthia Wenstrom

ABSENT: Commissioner Robert Hallagan

STAFF: Director Jenna Kohl; Senior Director Nick Molinari; Natural Resources Supervisor Madison Barasha-Tang; City Treasurer Sonia Andrews; Scott Selin, Budget Director; Stephany Sheekey, Project Coordinator

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as listed above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

Chair Coluccio noted that written comments were included in the Commissioner packets.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of Regular Meeting minutes of April 2, 2026

COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE APRIL 2, 2026 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED. COMMISSIONER WENSTROM SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO

ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HIRSHMAN, LAYTON, RYBARCZYK, AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGET UPDATE

Sonia Andrews, City Treasurer, presented updates on the Preserve's Operating and Capital Budgets. Her presentation included an overview of the Budget and five-year CIP adoption timeline. She noted that the Budget Review Commission submitted their recommendations to City Council on May 5th and that final budget adoption is on City Council's June 9th agenda. She reviewed the City Council Ordinance 0.15 percent Park and Preserve tax allocations for Park Improvements, Preserve maintenance, park maintenance, fire mitigation and technical rescue, and police Park Rangers, including the dollar amounts allocated and breakdown of expenses for each area. She noted that the allocation for Preserve maintenance 18 percent is slightly higher because there was less WestWorld debt and higher sales tax than anticipated.

Ms. Andrews reviewed the 2004 0.15 percent preservation fund proposed FY 2026/27 budget, noting that the .02 percent tax has expired. She anticipates that the remaining debt will be paid off after FY 2027/28, but that could change based on needs identified by City Council. She acknowledged that the Preserve Commission is working on creating a list of needs for City Council's consideration.

Ms. Andrews reviewed the Budget Review Commission's (BRC) recommendations, which included the following:

- Sales Tax structure review that would evaluate alignment of sales tax rates to city needs.
- 2004 Preserve Tax repurpose that would include evaluation of the possibility of repurposing the 2004 0.15 percent Preserve tax for other city needs.

Discussion ensued regarding the BRC's recommendations. Ms. Andrews explained that the BRC wants to look at the gap between what is being collected versus what is needed and if any realignment is needed to meet the community's priorities. She noted that any reallocation of voter approved items outlined in City ordinance would require a voter referendum. Reallocation of the 490 funds percentages would require a super majority vote of City Council. The second BRC recommendation to reevaluate paying off remaining det and repurposing the 0.15 sales tax that expires in 2034 to major road/water/drainage maintenance programs as the City's needs may require. Before making any changes they would coordinate with the Preserve Commission to discuss additional land acquisition and other projects that could be identified. The Preserve Commission staff has identified May of 2027 as their deadline to identify projects and bring to City Council.

6. AZGFD BIG GAME COUNT UPDATE

Officer Debra Groves, Arizona Game and Fish Department Wildlife Manager, provided 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 in 2017, which was recently renewed through 2028. She explained the process of collecting raw data, and reviewed the 2025 population estimates for each species. She mentioned that the fawn population was approximately 100, indicating that almost every doe produced a fawn. She said the overall health of both the mule deer and javelina herds is good. The deer population is down slightly and will continue to be monitored. If the decreasing mule deer population continues to trend down, habitat projects such as providing water sources, could be put in place.

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 explained that there is a process in place to close hunting if the buck ratio gets close to the harvest limits. Ms. Groves indicated that the increasing urban development surrounding the Preserve is having an impact on the deer population. She opined that the collaring study would be a better indicator of how development is affecting wildlife travel patterns.

7. STAFF REPORT

- Personnel Updates

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, introduced Project Coordinator Stephany Sheeky and reviewed her background. She noted that the Preserve manager recruitment is underway. Applications are due May 13th. She anticipates that the position will be filled by mid-summer.

- Emergency response planning and training

Ms. Kohl highlighted the emergency response planning and training. Training includes many areas of response, including the procedure for shutting down the Preserve and supporting fire search and rescue efforts

- Heat Smart/Hike Safe

Ms. Kohl said that the Heat Smart/Hike Safe campaign is ongoing. She recognized Ms. Barasha-Tang for her work on the campaign's social media.

- Installation of 8 swinging arm gates

Madison Barasha-Tang, Natural Resources Supervisor, said that swinging arm gates are being installed at eight access points. Gates will be helpful in keeping the public out during emergency situations.

- Evaluation of reroute of Bootlegger Trail

Ms. Barasha-Tang explained that Bootlegger Trail is being rerouted in part for the safety of users; avoiding collisions on the winding trail. The second reason for the realignment is because the contracted archeologist has identified a cultural site to the right of the trail.

- Repairing erosion of the Sunrise Bypass Trail

Ms. Barasha-Tang explained that the lower parking lot where it meets the trail, is washed out, which has created a hazard. The area is closed until decomposed granite can be installed to bring the elevation up to the level of the concrete. Staff is unsure if water was the cause of the collapse.

- Outreach to educate users about appropriate Preserve access

Ms. Barasha-Tang said that efforts are being made to educate users about appropriate Preserve access.

- Fine Fuels Grant project update

The second round of fine fuel treatments are scheduled for June and early July.

- Mine Safety project update

Ms. Barasha-Tang said that the mine safety project will mitigate trespassing, damage to the area, and protect the sensitive bat habitats. She gave an overview of the process, noting that the City is partnering with Arizona Game and Fish and Maricopa County Regional Park for portions of the project.

- Fire Restoration Study

Ms. Kohl gave an overview of the Fire Restoration Study purpose and goals, the timeline, and collaborative steps planned for the study. She anticipates that the study will continue for approximately a year before moving into the restoration process. The Commission will receive ongoing updates as the team moves through the various phases.

- Browns Ranch Trailhead Improvements

Ms. Barasha-Tang gave an update on the Brown's Ranch Trailhead improvements. Her presentation included an overview of the anticipated timeline, shared aerial views of existing conditions, proposed improvements, and planned rerouting of trails. Discussion ensued regarding the parking lot paving and staff addressed Commissioner concerns about using asphalt for the parking stalls. Further discussion and possible action will be agendized for the June meeting.

Ms. Barasha-Tang noted that Brown's Ranch is part of a pilot program for Starlink and staff will be officing at this location. Consideration is being given to providing public Wi-Fi at some point in the future.

- Sonoran Desert Education program

Ms. Kohl gave an overview of the proposed project framework for the Sonoran Desert Education program. Staff's recommendation is to establish a formal, intentional Sonoran Education Program aligned with management goals. She said that the program will be

coordinated by Preserve staff with input from the Commission. Focus will include ecology, history of the Preserve, preservation goals, the role of McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and responsible use of the desert. She reviewed the mission and vision, intended audiences, and the anticipated steps leading to implementation of the program. Discussion ensued and Commissioners expressed interest in seeing a speaker series, safety education for out-of-town visitors, and educational guidelines to be given to resorts.

Chair Coluccio asked for clarification about whether the program is intended to focus on the Sonoran Desert or the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Ms. Kohl said that the focus would be on both, noting that the language in the presentation came from Chapter 21 management objectives, which says "Provide opportunities for education and research on the Sonoran Desert and mountains." She anticipates that the working group will discuss and define the focus further. Commissioners stressed the importance of continuing to involve elementary and high school students in education programs.

In response to a question from Commissioners, Carla said that there is one children's book available that focuses broadly on the Sonoran Desert. She noted that the first fourth grade education program was started in 1982.

8. COMMISSIONER COMMENT

There were no additional Commissioner comments.

9. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Scottsdale Fire Report
- Mountain Climbing Plan (tentative)
- ESL Text Amendment and Development Planning Update

The next meeting will be held on June 4, 2026 at Via Linda Senior Center.

10. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER RYBARCZYK MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMAN SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, VICE-CHAIR ENGELKING, COMMISSIONERS HIRSHMAN, 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 6:47 p.m.

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