



**City of Scottsdale**  
**McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission**  
**Regular Meeting – Minutes**

Thursday, September 3, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.  
Via Linda Senior Center | 10440 E. Via Linda Scottsdale, AZ 85258

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Steve Coluccio, Vice-chair Savannah Engelking, Commissioners Robert Hallagan, Susan Hirshman, Pruitt Layton, Ryan Rybarczyk, and Cynthia Wenstrom.

**STAFF:** Preserve Director Jenna Kohl; Preserve Manager Justin Eddinger; and Project Coordinator Stephany Sheekey

**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 on non-agendized items.

**4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of June 4, 2026.

Commissioner Wenstrom moved to approve the June 4, 2026, McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission regular meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Layton seconded the motion, which carried seven (7) to zero (0) by roll call vote. Chair Coluccio, Vice-Chair Engelking, Commissioners Hallagan, Hirshman, and Rybarczyk voted in the affirmative. There were no dissenting votes.

**5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY REPORT**

Angy Shearer, CEO McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, presented the FY27 Plan, highlighting Core Stewardship Programs. Patrol remains the largest program with an estimated 21,000 service hours and 26,000 engagements. Construction and maintenance activity is variable. Education and community engagement continue expanding, including youth programming beginning in January and steward seminars. Tour de Scottsdale anticipates 3,000 cyclists; timing and route changes were noted by Chair Coluccio.

The Science Program is being updated to strengthen monitoring efforts, including use of 80 cameras to track wildlife movement and restoration work supported by native seed reserves. Ten years of data are being consolidated into a new system developed with Desert Data Labs to support reporting, dashboards, real-time alerts, and baseline establishment.

Chair Coluccio made reference to the Ecologic Resource Plan (ERP) and asked whether the new data system will support baseline needs and monitor going forward; Angy confirmed it will. Commissioner Hallagan asked about data accessibility, system integration, and the role of a data scientist. Angy noted it will be efficient for the data to reside in one centralized platform, with the ability to import the data and the results analyzed quickly. A follow-up presentation was requested to be agendized.

## **6. STAFF REPORT & PROJECT UPDATES**

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, introduced Justin Eddinger as the new Preserve Manager and shared that Matt Vasquez, Maintenance Worker II, has earned his applicator's license.

Jenna provided an update on the Bootlegger Fire, identified as a lightning-caused, half-acre smoldering event. Wildfire response remains a priority, and the team will coordinate with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy on restoration and monitoring of the affected area. Staff continue vigilant heat safety messaging.

Chair Coluccio inquired about the effectiveness of the heat safety program. Jenna noted that Fire Department staff tracks the relevant data and can provide trend information to the Commission.

Stephany Sheekey, Project Coordinator, reported on project updates, including retrofitted bins, updated signage, and trail group meetings.

Jenna shared that October will be celebrated as Preserve Month, featuring guided hikes and rides, Eek at the Peak, lectures at the Mustang Library, and a new seasonal preserve newsletter. Commissioner Hirshman asked whether the events are part of the Conservancy's offerings; Jenna confirmed that information is available on the Conservancy's website.

Stephany noted the second round of fire fuel treatment was completed in July, and the third round is scheduled for this fall. Chair Coluccio asked about treated areas shown on the map, and Stephany provided an explanation. She discussed the progression of the Fire Restoration Study and the partnership with Scottsdale Fire. Chair Coluccio requested a timeline for when the Fire Restoration Study would be presented, and Stephany replied that the goal would be May prior to next fire season.

Stephany announced that Browns Ranch Trailhead improvements are scheduled for completion in October 2026. Trail rerouting work continues through contracted providers. She discussed evaluating the existing the Eco Plan and developing an action plan to

strengthen the scopes of work to make sure it includes all the work that can be done within the Eco Plan. Improved data tracking and reporting will create a replicable system that elevates ecological decision making for the Preserve.

Chair Coluccio asked whether the Commission would have a role in upcoming plan updates like they had in the most recent plan. Stephany confirmed the intent is to create an action plan and present it to the Commission for their feedback. Any future plan updates will involve the Commissioners.

Commissioner Hallagan encouraged staff to consider multiple organizations as stated in the Eco Plan for upcoming work to maintain competitiveness. Jenna explained that the process includes identifying current components, providers, and gaps, with some work remaining under Conservancy purview.

## **7. SPECIAL USE PERMIT GUIDELINES UPDATE**

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, reported that the photography fee has been removed per City Council direction. A permit is still required, but there will be no associated fee.

Jenna discussed current trends and practices related to permitting compliance and enforcement. She highlighted the need for on-going education to improve understanding and adherence to rules.

Chair Coluccio requested that consideration be made regarding some events: if they are truly passive or not and if they conflict with the ordinance that governs the Preserve.

## **8. LAND ACQUISITION GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

On the call for public comment, Jason Morris and Joe Spector (Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation) expressed interest in re-engaging with the city to understand future opportunities, including possible conservation easements. Chair Coluccio invited them for a potential future presentation. Carla, Preserve Pioneer, emphasized the importance of taking strong action on purchasing parcels, noting that eligible land should be considered for purchase.

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, provided an overview of Preserve land. She noted that “acquisition” is not necessarily a purchase, it is referring to land added to the preserve.

Jenna shared proposed criteria for evaluating future preserve land additions, including:

- Alignment with City Code
- Uniqueness,
- Ecological Value
- Physical Nature
- Buffer Function
- Connectivity
- Return on Investment
- Risk and Vulnerability
- Greater Community Benefit
- and additional criteria determined by the Commission.

These were presented as a starting point for discussion, Jenna also shared potential areas for future land acquisition.

Commissioner Hallagan asked about state land “postage stamp” parcels. Jenna noted these parcels exist and were originally identified as a potential connector to the City of Phoenix trails but that drive to include them no longer exists, they were not classified as conservation land. Commissioner Westrom remarked that historically these parcels have had limited value.

Discussion followed regarding conservation easements. Chair Coluccio asked whether easements could be terminated. Jenna explained that city ownership and zoning tools provide the highest protections; Jenna noted that Jesus Murillo from Planning will participate in future discussions to provide needed clarification. Commissioners offered several suggestions to refine the criteria, including Commissioner Hirshman’s recommendation to develop a decision tree and Commissioner Hallagan’s idea of using bands or tiers to support evaluation. Staff clarified, in response to Commissioner Engelking, that the list was not currently in priority order. Chair Coluccio observed that not all criteria must be met, while Commissioner Hirshman noted that some may be essential. Commissioner Rybarczyk commented on the potential for interpretive flexibility. The Commission decided to provide feedback to Director Kohl, who will then revise the list and bring it back to the Commission for consideration at a future meeting.

Chair Coluccio reminded Commissioners of open meeting law requirements when responding via email. Commissioners will submit their feedback to Jenna by September 14.

## **9. COMMISSION WORK PLAN AND CALENDAR**

Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, presented a proposed annual work plan for the Commission’s review. She highlighted several major topics and decision points included in the plan. Jenna explained that the work plan is intended to help the Commission stay organized, remain aligned with previously committed timelines, and maintain a clear structure for upcoming work.

She emphasized that although the plan provides a strong framework, it is also flexible and can evolve throughout the year as needed. Additionally, Jenna noted that the plan supports transparency and offers clarity regarding priorities for the coming year.

## **10. COMMISSIONER COMMENT**

Commissioner Layton inquired about the anticipated number of participants in the Trail User Group. Jenna Kohl, Preserve Director, reported that representatives will be identified from the various user communities (equestrian, hiking, cycling, ect.). The group’s purpose is to promote harmony, support safe trail use, and foster community engagement. She emphasized the multi-use nature of the trails, noting existing areas of conflict and non-compliance. The group will meet periodically, will serve as an information conduit, and

assist in developing a Trail Etiquette Guide while communicating user challenges effectively.

- Commissioner Hirshman asked whether trail etiquette signage is currently in place.
- Commissioner Hallagan noted the installation of extended parking stalls intended for vehicles with trailers and stated that some users remain unaware; improved information sharing would support compliance.
- Commissioner Wenstrom expressed appreciation for the exchange of information to increase awareness of user concerns and preferences.

Chair Coluccio noted his attendance at the Browns Ranch construction site tour alongside Commissioners Layton and Hallagan, remarking on the tour's value and expressing appreciation for the opportunity.

## **11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS**

Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment.

Regular Meetings:

- October 1, 2026 at Via Linda Senior Center
- November 5, 2026 at Granite Reef Senior Center

## **12. ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Hirshman moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Wenstrom seconded the motion, which carried seven (7) to zero (0) by roll call vote. Chair Coluccio, Vice-Chair Engelking, Commissioners Hallagan, Layton, 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 6:34 p.m.