



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

Wednesday, April 3, 2024
Granite Reef Senior Center -- Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Chairperson Steve Coluccio; Commissioners Savannah Engelking, Mark Hackbarth, Robert Hallagan, and Jeffrey Smith

ABSENT: Vice-Chair Kerry Olsson and Commissioner Susan Hirschmann

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Coluccio called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

Chair Coluccio welcomed Commissioner Hallagan to the Commission.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the Regular Meeting minutes of - March 7, 2024

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 7, 2024, MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. COMMISSIONER ENGELKING SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FOUR (4) TO ZERO (1) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBARTH, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER HALLAGAN DISSENTED, VICE-CHAIR OLSSON AND COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMANN WERE ABSENT. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON AND COMMISSIONER HIRSHMAN WERE ABSENT.

5. McDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included updates on Steward patrol; public hike, bike, and walk events; Trailhead Ambassadors; Youth Education for K-9; the Living Labs program for high school students; and Expedition Days on the Trail hiking program. She noted that this year's Expedition days program was closed with a hike for Title-I school third- and fourth-graders.

She announced that the Conservancy, in collaboration with the Citizen Science Program, construction and maintenance, and Living Labs students, has completed installation of a large-scale restoration experiment researching the best ways to restore Saguaro Cacti after a burn. The experiment consists of 120 baby saguaros and 28 Palo Verde plants that will be tested under different conditions to show the best way to restore saguaros to their habitat after a burn.

Ms. Tluczek said that one tortoise from the Tortoise Project has been lost. She noted that another one was also taken around the same time last year to be presented as a gift. Both were unable to reacclimate when they were returned. She stressed the importance of sharing the messaging that wildlife that are removed from their habitat and then replaced do not have the same chance of survival as those who are not removed. It was mentioned that new "Keep Wildlife Wild" signs depicting a tortoise with the tracking equipment on their back have been posted in the area.

The Conservancy will be hosting Tour de Scottsdale for the first time on April 13, 2024. She noted they currently have 2482 people registered. The program will act as a fundraiser for the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Commissioners commented on a collaboration between Arizona Fish and Game, wildlife scientists and ASU wildlife students and their visit to the Preserve. In response to questions, Ms. Tluczek explained that she anticipates the saguaro experiment to run three to five years, with data being analyzed along the way. Once completed, the findings will be published.

6. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, announced that City Council approved ballot proposal B and ordinance. The City Council did not approve but tentatively agreed to the replaced and reduced ballot language as well as adding the word "solely" for clarity of fund distribution. City Council's action included dissolution of the Protect and Preserve Task force.

If the ballot is approved by voters, text outlining the Commission's oversight role will be added to the Preserve Ordinance under Preserve Commission responsibilities and will become effective on July 1, 2025. The Preserve Commission will have oversight of the 2025 0.15% tax, and in accordance with the master plan and strategies, reference will

also be made to wildlife habitat protection, invasive plant mitigation, wildland fire fuel reduction, restoration of disturbed lands, and the ERP (Ecological Resource Plan). City Council's approval stipulated that any future changes to the document would require a supermajority vote of council members.

Scottsdale public relations department is working with staff to put together ballot language for the city clerk to submit to the elections department and to complete a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource. Preserve staff and the Preserve Commission now have an education role when it comes to the ballot item. Preserve Commissioners are free to advocate as individuals but should not mention their position as a commissioner when advocating. The Protect and Preserve Task Force also has been dissolved by the City Council's action

7. FUTURE ONE-TIME PRESERVE COSTS 5-YEAR-PLAN PRIORITIES

Mr. Ekblaw provided a review of costs for possible future improvements to the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, including a summary of one-time costs associated with trailheads, a future wildlife crossing, and annual projects across the Preserve. He reviewed the updated draft for the current year and for the five-year plan. He also noted the desired general projects across the Preserve, which total approximately 59.12 million. Planned projects will change with regular updating as scope and design of projects are assessed and updated. Currently projected items include:

- Safety issues within the Preserve, including old mines.
- Improved signage.
- Preserve trailhead improvement estimates.
- Wildlife crossing estimates.
- Invasive plant management.
- Wildland fire.
- Wildlife water improvement.

He said that the biggest project would be for gates and fencing, because of the amount of edge exposure that has been identified. He reminded the Commission that these are just estimates that will fluctuate based on the five-year planning process. Mr. Ekblaw said that this is the final step of the planning process and the Commission will have an opportunity to make a recommendation to City Council to accept these projections as part of the five-year Capital Management Plan.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw noted that the biggest concern is the land issue and that is why they suggested \$20 million devoted to the land. Mr. Ekblaw said that, if the Commission is comfortable with the document, staff will work with the Treasurer's office over the next few months to update projections and overall Preserve funding for presentation to City Council. Commissioners requested that estimated timelines be included for each project. Mr. Ekblaw will work on the timeline and put it in a format to present at a future meeting.

8. STAFF REPORTS

- ERP Update

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, said that input from the Commission during the last meeting is being incorporated into the ERP. Staff will be meeting with Conservancy staff and Game and Fish, and discussions will focus on the topic of frequency and thresholds of change. Additional information will be available for the May Commission meeting.

- Brown's Ranch Homestead Trail

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the progress at Brown's Ranch Homestead Trail, Corral Trail and Granite Trail. He mentioned that, since this is an archeological site, an archeologist walked with the crew as they completed the rough grading of the top soil. Nothing sensitive was found during the process. The trail will be completed within the next week to 10 days. Signs will be put up letting the public know that this is phase one of the project and they are free to enjoy the trail as well as reminding them that it is a cultural site and to stay on the trail and not touch anything. No bikes or horses will be allowed on this trail, primarily because of the decomposed granite. As part of phase two, a hitching rail will be installed at the trail entrance. The PastFinders have been working with local artists for almost two years to put together a package of what sign panel artwork should look like. In October, the PastFinders will be giving a public lecture related to the ranch and the trail in November. Mr. Hamilton anticipates a grand opening celebration to be planned during McDowell Sonoran Preserve month in October.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that Trailhead Ambassadors at Brown's Ranch will be provided with information. He noted that, once the trail is opened, the "coming soon" panel at the trailhead will be changed to include the beginning of the Brown's Ranch story, which will generate interest to continue on the trail and learn more.

- Wildland Fire Fuel Treatments

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the wildland fire fuel treatments schedule, noting that fuel treatments are made possible through a Healthy Forest Initiative Grant through the Department of Forestry and Fire Management. Areas that have been completed include Granite Mountain Trailhead, Fraesfield, and parts of Legend Trail, Pima Road, Stagecoach Pass, and 128th Street. Tom's Thumb Trailhead area will be delayed because the grant funding has run out. Costs that have been programmed into the potential future tax would help with this type of project. A goal for the future would be to continue to apply for grants and match those funds with dollars collected as part of the tax.

- Invasive Plants Update

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the progress of invasive plant treatments, highlighting areas that have been completed. The second grant from the Department of Forestry and

Fire Management's Invasive Plant Grant program will be used to treat more remote areas.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton said that conversations are underway with other agencies to determine the best way to address the problem with stinknet. Some areas of stinknet were treated last year and preemergents have been used in those areas. He confirmed that preemergents affect all plant growth, and the goal is to be as sensitive as possible, but a priority needs to be put on eliminating the stinknet problem. Mr. Ekblaw noted that if the program gets dedicated funding, it will be possible to proactively manage invasive plants in a sustainable way. Mr. Hamilton explained that Pennisetum, referenced in the strategic plan, is the genus of buffelgrass and fountain grass. Stinknet is something different and can be included once a plan is developed.

Mr. Hamilton said that the goal with the ERP is to get to a point where there is a finalized plan and continue to make updates on at least a five-year rotation. It can be updated at any time if an indicator is identified. Mr. Ekblaw explained that the ERP is really a master plan and individual studies are being done on a yearly/bi-yearly basis. The issue of stinknet will be addressed as staff continue to gain knowledge. He noted that different areas of the ERP work individually, but also synergistically and collectively. If studies indicate that there is a problem, the master plan doesn't have to be updated in order to react. Mr. Hamilton confirmed that annual summary reports on each of the elements of the ERP will be available. The goal is to every three to five years have a panel of experts review annual reports and form a health assessment. Priorities can be shifted as needed based on those assessments. The ultimate goal is for the Preserve to continue to be a living, breathing, high-quality habitat.

11. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS AND AGENDA ITEMS

All Dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- Regular Meetings
 - May 2 (ERP status, AZ Game and Gish update, PPSTF)
 - June 6 (public safety updates ?, PPSTF)
- Site tour
 - April 25
 - Meet at Gateway at 4 p.m.

12. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hackbarth mentioned that there is flagging tape on Broken Spoke Trail. Mr. Hamilton will look into the reason for the flagging tape and report back to the Commission.

Possible future agenda items include:

- Presentation from Police Park Rangers

13. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED FIVE (5) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR COLUCCIO, COMMISSIONERS ENGELKING, HACKBART, HALLAGAN, AND SMITH VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. VICE-CHAIR OLSSON AND COMMISSIONER HIRSCHMANN WERE ABSENT. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:27 p.m.

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