



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE  
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
Wednesday, April 7, 2022  
Florence Ely Nelson Desert Park  
8950 E. Pinnacle Peak Road  
Scottsdale, AZ 85255**

**PRESENT:** Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson, Jeffrey Smith, Cynthia Wenstrom

**STAFF:** Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager; Dave Myers, Natural Resources Supervisor

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair LaPat-Polasko called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Members present as noted 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 of March 3, 2022

Commissioner Hackbarth noted a spelling error on page 3.

COMMISSIONER WENSTROM MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 3, 2022 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SIX (6) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, SMITH AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. COMMISSIONER OLSSON ABSTAINED. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

## **5. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE**

Melanie Tluczek said that through a new partnership with SUSD, seventh grade teachers were given an opportunity to bring approximately 700 middle school students to the Bajada Trail and to do activities based on the Bajada Nature trail signage and some scientific studies. The Conservancy recently met with the SUSD Board of Directors and the partnership is expected to grow.

The Mustang Lecture Series is being restarted following COVID. The Conservancy is looking for opportunities to hold lectures at additional libraries throughout the Valley.

To date, approximately 1,800 students have signed up for Expedition Days live event and the online event. The Conservancy is finalizing the curriculum for the adult public education program. The motto for the adult program is “Everything is Connected and Always Changing.”

The semi-annual butterfly survey was completed last week, resulting in over 1,300 butterflies, from over 30 different species. In February the bird survey was completed.

The Conservancy has been working with the ACE crews to prioritize projects for removal of invasive plant species.

The Conservancy is in the process of reactivating the camera project, in hopes of furthering their knowledge of how urbanization affects wildlife in ways that can be proactively reacted to.

The tortoise project is ongoing with the help of a growing number of volunteers.

The steward season is winding down and planning for next season has begun. Lessons learned over the past year and during COVID will be considered in planning for the next year.

The Conservancy is collaborating with the River of Time Museum in Fountain Hills to create a new Fantastic Foragers Hike. She encouraged everyone to participate. Ms. Tluczek noted that the Conservancy assisted with the museum’s bat exhibit.

## **6. ARIZONA GAME AND FISH UPDATE**

Debra Groves, Arizona Game and Fish Wildlife Manager Region VI, noted that the annual surveys of deer and javelina populations in the Preserve are conducted under an agreement between Arizona Game and Fish and the City of Scottsdale dating back to 2015. She explained the process of collecting raw data, and reviewed the population estimates for each species. The mule deer population estimate has gone up from last year, with 3.63 deer estimated per square mile, compared to 2.8 last year. She noted that the juvenile to adult ratio this year is a success story for the survey this year. The javelina population has increased slightly from last year. She said that the wildlife study provides a base of population data and herd health; the analysis found the populations to be stable and self-sustaining.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Groves explained that during the flights a mark, recapture survey is used, where one observer is in the front part of the helicopter to observe the animals and one behind to “recapture” the observation. Based on the number of deer seen and verified, gives the confidence interval per square mile of survey effort. She said that the population estimates have lowered since 2015, primarily because the increase in development around the Preserve has caused many animals to travel to other locations. ‘

Kriselle Colvin, Arizona Game and Fish, explained that mule deer estimates have trended down in conjunction with long-term drought statewide. Immediate response was seen following last year's rain events, with the increase in the fawn population. Mr. Ekblaw said he will pull out old mule deer reports for comparison.

Ms. Groves said that data points are identified during observations, which offer just a snapshot in time each year. Mr. Hamilton noted that the tracking information is compared with the collaring project data points. Mr. Ekblaw noted that the annual surveys were originally funded through a grant from the Conservancy and since that time the City has funded the project. Ms. Tluczek recommended that in order to maintain good data collection, it is recommended to do a collaring project every ten years.

## **7. STAFF REPORTS**

- Status of Council Strategic Objectives related to Preserve and Future Funding

Mr. Ekblaw gave an overview of the status of the City Council strategic objectives related to the Preserve and future funding. Council is tentatively scheduled to hold a study session May 3, 2022, to further review the City budget. Discussion will also include potential formation of a citizen committee in late 2022 or early 2023, tasked with making recommendations to Council regarding future citywide funding opportunities by May or June of 2024. Once the committee puts forth a recommendation to Council, a community outreach effort will be conducted and Council will consider whether to go forward with a November 2024 election.

Based on the timeline, the Commission has an opportunity to consider Council direction and make revisions to the plan and be prepared to have information ready to support a citizen committee by early 2023. In an effort to gain more public input, it was suggested that in addition to the Trails working group, an Access Area/Trailhead working group, and a Land Acquisition Working group be formed. Mr. Ekblaw discussed what the working groups would be responsible for. He would like to have one or two Commissioners participate in each group. He requested that Commissioners submit their first and second preferences to the Chair prior to the next meeting. Further discussion about the working groups will be agendaized for the next meeting.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw clarified that City Council will be reviewing the long-term funding process during their May study session and will also review the FY 2022/23 budget in May.

- Vegetation Management Project – Invasive Plants in the Brown's Mountain Region

Mr. Hamilton said that hiring ACE as a contractor to work on the invasive plants project was great support for the work the stewards have been doing. The project is funded with APS funds, which are available through a special revenue account. The available funds should be enough to fund through 2025, when hopefully a regular revenue stream will become available. A grant application for an invasive plant grant is being prepared for submission to the State of Arizona. If received, APS dollars could be used as matching funds along with the in-kind and volunteer services. The weather service is predicting a wetter than average monsoon season this year, so staff plans to be ready by late August to proactively treat affected areas. Priority areas will be identified each season moving forward and additional contractors could be brought in over time. Mr. Hamilton shared photographs of the helicopters delivering water containers to the crews so they could mix the herbicide.

- Summer Heat Messaging and Coordination with Valley Communities

Mr. Hamilton mentioned that during the recent high heat week, heat warning messaging and dog safety signs were increased at trailheads and through social media. There were zero rescues in the Preserve that weekend.

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on Brown's Ranch Trailhead signage. The goal is to have signage similar at Brown's Ranch as it is at Pima Dynamite Trailhead, while including the cultural and historic theme. Information will include more safety and orientation messaging, an introduction to Jane Rau and Brown's Ranch Homestead Trails, enhanced Conservancy information, and donor recognition. The revamp will be done in conjunction with Jane Rau's 100th birthday celebration.

He announced that Fraesfield and Granite Mountain Trailheads received Arizona Forward Crescordia Environmental Excellence awards for building structures, landscape, natural environment, and preservation.

Staff changes were announced. Dave Myers was introduced as the new coordinator at Pinnacle Peak. Yvonne Massman will be at Gateway, Madison Barasha will be at Brown's Ranch, John Loleit will be at Pima Dynamite, and Kelly Hayes is part-time support and admin.

Mr. Hamilton gave an update on the "illegal trail" that was recently discovered. Repairs have been made to the trail, cactus have been put back in the ground, and archeologists surveyed the area and found no major cultural sites. The city is providing dollar value of repairs to the police department so they have it available if needed for future prosecution.

Share the Trail Day was held on March 19, 2022 at five trailheads. Stewards were available to share messaging about trail etiquette, ebike education, Sonoran desert education, and rule enforcement.

Canine Safety Day was April 2, 2022. Staff and stewards were available to provide education at five trailheads, together with Scottsdale Fire Department and Maricopa County Animal Control.

Commissioner Coluccio said that he had a conversation with one of the firefighters during the event on Saturday and it was suggested that the City of Scottsdale partner with other communities to pool resources and run advertisements on days leading up to high heat threat days. He suggested that staff consider looking into the possibility of sharing resources in the future and educating out-of-town visitors. Mr. Ekblaw noted that there have been ongoing discussions with other cities about messaging. Partnerships are part of the overall goal and will continue to be developed over time.

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

- Field Tour options
- May 5<sup>th</sup> – tentative listing of agenda topics**
  - Public Safety in the Preserve
  - Preserve future cost projections update
  - Summer heat messaging coordination
- June 2<sup>nd</sup> – tentative listing of agenda topics**
  - Studies related to cooler paving options
  - Transportation update on Rio Verde trail crossing analysis

Commissioner Smith noted that the City of Phoenix won awards for heat abatement and suggested that information might be available from the City of Phoenix regarding heat abatement tactics.

Mr. Ekblaw suggested that a field tour be scheduled for early fall once the working groups have had an opportunity to flush out issues of interest.

Commissioner Olsson requested that future agenda items include an update on the Ecological Resource Plan revision, and a discussion on the possibility of updating the Enabling Ordinance.

## **9. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Commissioner Smith said that he recently drove through Fountain Hills and Rio Verde to access Granite Mountain Trail Trailhead and there were no signs for Granite Mountain from that direction. Mr. Hamilton said that it could be because that area is outside of the City. Efforts can be made in collaboration with the County to get additional signage in that area.

## **10. ADJOURNMENT**

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER SMITH SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED SEVEN (7) TO ZERO (0) BY ROLL CALL VOTE. CHAIR LAPAT-POLASKO, VICE-CHAIR LIPPS, COMMISSIONERS COLUCCIO, HACKBARTH, OLSSON, SMITH AND WENSTROM VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSIDENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

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