



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, April 6, 2023
Granite Reef Senior Center Room 1
1700 N. Granite Reef Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85257

PRESENT: Chairperson Laurie LaPat-Polasko, Vice-chair Marsha Lipps, Commissioners Steve Coluccio, Mark Hackbarth, Kerry Olsson, Jeffrey Smith, and Savannah Engelking

STAFF: Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director; Scott Hamilton, Senior Trails Planner; Dave Myers, Coordinator; Mike Murphy, Senior Management Analyst

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 23, 2023

It was noted that on page three, first paragraph, under climbing plan update should say "climbing community" instead of "tortoise community."

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 23, 2023 MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO 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 ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

5. POLICE STAFFING FOR THE PARKS AND PRESERVE

Police Chief Jeff Walther provided an update on the police presence in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. His presentation included an overview of the park ranger application process, which is currently under way; review of required qualifications for applying as a park ranger; an overview

of the current resources provided by the Police Department to the Preserve and Preserve staff; and plans for the future of the park ranger program. Currently, the department has funding for three park rangers; they will be attached to the mounted unit, located at WestWorld. The two units will be able to work together to provide more robust coverage. Chief Walther commented about how he is addressing current police staffing problems and how he envisions the various units working together to cover parks and the Preserve.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Chief Walther said that qualities they are looking for in a park ranger would include being a sworn police officer or having the ability to become certified within 30 days of hire, having previous park experience, or U.S. Forest Service experience. At this point, he has seen an applicant who is sworn park police officer and two former U.S. Forest Service police. He anticipates the park rangers will spend at least 25 percent of their time in the Preserve. Park Ranger presence in the Preserve will be positive in terms of community contact and education, as well as a visual deterrent for criminals. Chief Walther explained that applicants with federal law enforcement background would not qualify, because training for those areas are completely different than with local law enforcement agencies. The unit will be required to go through ongoing training required of all officers as well as going through the mounted school. When patrolling in the Preserve, they will be on horseback or mountain bike.

Chief Walther anticipates that the park ranger program will be fully operational by the end of summer 2023.

6. MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY UPDATE

Melanie Tluczek, Conservancy Director, gave an update on McDowell Sonoran Conservancy activities. Her presentation included updates on community events, including the Virtual Parsons Field Institute Symposium scheduled for May 17, 2023 from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m.; the Children's Learning and Play Festival, scheduled for June 24, 2023; Earth Day events in partnership with both the City of Scottsdale and Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community; the joint invasive plant efforts; and Living Labs end-of-year activities. She encouraged everyone to go out to see the abundant wildflowers.

7. PROTECT THE PRESERVE PROCESS UPDATE

- Council and Task Force Process update

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, gave an update on costs and programs to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

As part of his presentation, he reviewed the updated forecasts that will be presented to the task force, noting that the Preserve presentation is scheduled for later in April. In speaking with Task Force Member Wenstrom, she requested that the Preserve prioritize their requests. He suggested that yearly costs be highlighted as the priority as opposed to going through each item individually. Highlighting annual costs would help protect core items in the event of an economic downturn. The finance department will present to the Commission on April 13, 2023.

- Daily Preserve Activities and Operations

Mr. Ekblaw reviewed the Daily Preserve Activities and Operations updated cost projections, which include daily support details. He gave examples of areas where he anticipates staff will come back with revisions to numbers later in April. Revisions to the language will be prepared to present to the Commission in May.

- Habitat Protection

Mr. Ekblaw presented invasive wildland and restoration numbers. He noted that he will be meeting with Ms. Tluczek over the next few weeks to discuss possible adjustments to be made to the education and preservation numbers based on rising costs.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton explained that there is a posting and waiting period that must be undergone before the contract can be executed with EnviroSystems. Commissioners will be given an opportunity to be involved with the planning and cost projections once the process begins.

Mr. Hamilton said stewards have not reported any concerns about the archaeological preservation sites. He anticipates that issues could come up as the program is expanded to include additional sites.

- Process update

Mr. Ekblaw explained that staff is not targeting additional funding for land acquisition. The second tax allows for strategic land acquisition.

Mr. Hamilton said that the Trails Working group was in place since 2013 and has not been active recently. In the near future, they will likely be called to meet and discuss maintenance standards and planning. They will likely also review the remnant and active social trails and go through a planning process to determine why people are still using those trails and possibly incorporate some of those trails into the trails system.

8. STAFF REPORTS

- Conceptual Rock-Climbing Plan update

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the updates to the climbing plan. He noted that there will be a robust public input process regarding the potential modifications in the area of Granite Mountain from the 2016 plan and adding Cholla. Updates will include a cultural review and an ecological review. Efforts will be made through signage and mapping to not invite the general non-climbing public to these areas. Climbing routes and climbing access will not be included on general user maps. Climbing will be promoted in a safe and reasonable way, while protecting the habitat and animal populations. Herpetological experts will be consulted about possible affects on animal habitats in climbing areas and trails will be rerouted as necessary.

- Power Utility Update

Mr. Ekblaw said that the utility companies will be undergrounding the telecom fiberoptic line, which would be confined primarily to within the existing maintenance access road. He explained the process, noting that the utility companies will meet all requirements for fire protection, including having a separate water truck for fire and crews will carry water packs. Work is expected to occur May through September 2023.

- Canine Safety Day

Mr. Hamilton said that canine safety day was held last weekend at several trailheads. Scottsdale Fire Department, Police Department, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and Maricopa County Animal Care and Control all participated in the event. Participants were

educated on rattlesnake safety, heat safety, leashing dogs, litter pickup, and the importance of vaccinations, and registering animals with the County.

9. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

- April 13 – Finance update– Protect Preserve Costs
- April 27 — Protect Preserve Costs
- May 4 – Large Mammal Survey– Protect Preserve Costs
- June 1– Protect Preserve Costs

Other topics to be scheduled include transit access to Preserve, fire mitigation, and trailhead development.

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Lipps commented on the improvement that removal of vegetation has made to the trailhead parking lots.

Commissioner Engelking requested that there be further discussion regarding park rangers applicant qualifications, and park ranger training. She opined that the job of a park ranger is to protect the people from the land, the land from people, and people from each other and that she feels that a police officer is only qualified to do one of these three things. Mr. Ekblaw said the selection process is under the purview of the Police Department. He is confident that their selection and training process will include appropriate training for situations they will encounter in the Preserve. Chief Walther will be invited to give a follow-up presentation to address Commissioner Engelking's concerns.

Commissioner Hackbarth commended the yield to pedestrian/yield to bicyclists signs recently installed on trails.

Commissioner Coluccio mentioned that there was recently an article in Arizona Republic highlighting the Federal Government offering grants in the amount of \$350 million for infrastructure for wildlife crossings and corridors. Mr. Ekblaw said that he has spoken with the City Treasurer and the Public Works Director about looking into those grant opportunities. He is unsure that the City of Scottsdale would qualify, because the City does not currently have a planned project.

11. ADJOURNMENT

COMMISSIONER HACKBARTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COMMISSIONER COLUCCIO 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 ENGELKING VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

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