



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, September 16, 2021
Meeting held electronically**

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

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

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Wenstrom called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present as noted above.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments submitted.

4. SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUESTS

Scott Hamilton, Preserve Manager, reviewed the special use guidelines for the Preserve. Guidelines state that any special uses of trails require a permit when organized by a business or organization with fees being charged for participants. In instances where requests have a competitive nature, the Preserve Director is required to get support from the MSPC and the Conservancy.

A. November 2021 – Equestrian Distance Ride

Mr. Hamilton presented the Equestrian Distance Ride event request. The event is scheduled for November 6, 2021. He said that the event will be staged in County Regional Park, with the exception of a watering station that will be located in the parking area at Tom's Thumb trailhead. There are 20 riders participating in the 100 mile leg of the race that will access approximately 4.11 miles of the Preserve and riders are spaced out. A \$5 commercial rate will apply per person. He noted that an identical permit was issued in 2018.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Hamilton confirmed that signs will be put up on the trail and at the trailhead, letting people know that an event is going on and

stewards will have information about the event. Commissioners expressed concern about setting precedent for the number of participants in future events. Mr. Ekblaw said that each event is evaluated individually and consideration is given to how spread out the participants are during any event, as well as how much of the Preserve is being used. Events are not allowed to stage within the Preserve and cannot be in the Preserve after dark.

Commissioners were in consensus, supporting approval of the special use permit for the Equestrian Distance Ride on November 6, 2021.

B. December 2021 – Distance Running Event

Mr. Hamilton reviewed the annual McDowell Mountain Frenzy event request. The event is scheduled for December 4, 2021. This year's event will have a 50-mile route and a 50-kilometer route; a \$5 commercial rate will apply per person. Past events have received no negative input from stewards or trail users.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Mr. Ekblaw said that typically over 600 people will utilize the trailhead throughout the day on a Saturday in December. Counters are used to track the number of cars parking at the trailhead and that number is calculated by 1.4 to find an average number of people. Commissioners expressed interest in monitoring the growing number of people using the trailhead at peak season when approving future events.

Commissioners were in consensus, supporting approval of the special use permit for the McDowell Mountain Frenzy Trail Run in December 2021.

5. POLICY PROCESS UPDATE

Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, will provide an update on the Policy Process including:

A. Policy Summary Sheet to correlate with the City Council's Strategic Objectives

Mr. Ekblaw reviewed the Policy updated Summary Sheet, which includes the two Council strategic objectives. He noted that the chart will be updated with the new numbering system by the next meeting.

A presentation outlining past years budget estimates versus actuals will be prepared by the next meeting.

B. Update/summary presentation of Policy Item #3 – Sonoran Desert Research and Education

Tiffany Sprague, Parsons Field Institute Manager, gave an overview of ongoing work being done by the Conservancy in the areas of research and education. Her presentation included an explanation of why ecosystems are important, biodiversity loss, habitat loss, management challenges, protection of the ecosystem, and the importance of the Preserve. She noted that the Preserve is important from a biological viewpoint in part because it is a protected landscape, which offers scientists the ability to conduct long-term monitoring in a stable environment. The Preserve is a complex ecosystem, hosting approximately 1,000 types of plants and animals. The wildland-urban interface provides the ideal opportunity to investigate

urban influences on the Preserve and an opportunity to engage and educate the public. The goal of long-term monitoring projects is to assess trends of species and populations, using established protocols and regular monitoring.

Ms. Sprague recapped her previous presentations. Areas that she highlighted included:

- Long-term monitoring of the Preserve. Goal: Monitor trends of species and populations
- Habitat Connectivity. Goal: Maintain regional connectivity, monitor species and movements, identify stressors and impediments, collaboration and education
- Non-Native Plants. Goal: Effective control of invasive plant species.
- Ecological Restoration. Goal: Effective restoration of degraded lands.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Ms. Sprague confirmed that the Conservancy has a list of areas within the Preserve that should be researched. Models that have been developed by other agencies are being used to help determine areas that are feasible to accomplish over the long term. Justin Owen added that focusing on collaboration with organizations nationally and internationally allows for sharing of information. Having access to this information has allowed the Conservancy to identify key projects as priorities.

Ms. Sprague said that the Field Institute is monitoring soil crust and trying to identify how to successfully reestablish degraded areas. It would be ideal if wild soil crust could be monitored to determine whether additional management is needed.

Ms. Sprague said that two new species were recently identified: Little Flycatcher and Woodhouse's toad. This is the first identification of a new amphibian species in the Preserve in over 11 years.

Ms. Sprague explained that there are not enough resources to manage the number of non-native plants that are being seen in the Preserve. The project is lacking people, coordination, and materials. Mr. Ekblaw said that one of the purposes of the policy project is looking at long-term maintenance costs and identifying items of importance to put in a presentation to Council. One goal is to advance more action on invasive plants and restoration. He noted that a meeting is scheduled next week to review the need for non-native plant mitigation. Discussion ensued regarding the importance of restoration in the fight against non-native plants, strategies for preventing people from entering and further degrading certain areas, and long-term management.

Mr. Owen said that one of the areas the Conservancy is collaborating on is the effects of past agriculture and ranching. From a degradation standpoint, agriculture that has left the Valley is a primary cause of dust storms.

Ms. Sprague said that there is a list including animals, vegetation, and soil crust that they would like to monitor. She hopes that in the future additional species can be added to studies that currently only include Mule Deer and Desert Tortoise. She would support a wildlife bridge as well as a separate area for human passage.

C. Overview of Policy Item #5 – Invasives, Wildland Fire and Restoration

Mr. Ekblaw gave an overview of policy item #5, Invasives, Wildland Fire, and Restoration and efforts that have been made over the past 18 months to mitigate areas at most risk and the Fire Department's multilayered strategy for areas both within the Preserve and to natural open space areas outside the Preserve.

Cost of preemergent applications have been estimated at \$100,000 annually. Thinning areas and pre-emergent application at trailheads is estimated to cost \$168,000 annually. In partnership with the Fire Department, the City was recently successful with an application for a matching funds grant that will be used towards both the Preserve and the Firewise program. Mr. Ekblaw briefly talked about the potential of future grant opportunities, strategies for utilizing funds, and time frames that would likely be applied to those funds.

Mr. Ekblaw said that he is hoping that the power companies will be willing to work with the City to contribute to the cost of pre-emergent applications along the powerlines.

D. Overview of Policy Item #7 – Cultural Master Plan

Mr. Hamilton gave an overview of the Cultural Master Plan. He reviewed the goals and objectives of the plan. His presentation included review of the purpose of the Preserve and the Cultural Resource Master Plan. Action items that were identified in the master plan include:

- Complete surveys of the portions of the Preserve that have not been surveyed. Approximately, 75 percent of the land has been surveyed, leaving 7,600 acres that need to be surveyed, much of which lies in the McDowell Mountains. \$10,000 annually for a period of 20 years has been identified to complete this project.
- Cultural landscape inventory for the Preserve. This includes studying and analyzing areas based on topics such as mining, ranching, and rock art. \$15,000 per topic has been identified to complete this project.
- Providing targeted educational venues. Includes developing relationships with groups such as libraries, schools, the Conservancy, and Experience Scottsdale to do public outreach about cultural resources. \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year has been identified for this project.
- Stabilizing cultural sites. Focusing on cultural or historical elements that are threatened. \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year has been identified for this project.
- Brown's Ranch site. Develop an interpretive trail. The PastFinders group in the Conservancy is developing a list of elements for interpretation. Estimated cost is \$200,000.

Another item that has not been identified in the Cultural Master Plan is analyzing and documenting old range fences. Of the ones that remain, they would be documented, photographed and catalogued before being removed. Some portions could be kept as a means of relaying history, but most would be removed because they can potentially create barriers to wildlife movement. A one-time cost of \$20,000 has been identified to complete this project.

Commissioners were given an opportunity to ask questions. Discussion ensued regarding providing targeted educational venues to the public and making archeological sites available to the public while protecting the sites from harm. It was noted that vandalism occurs in particular to areas where rock art is present and in areas that are sensitive to Native American heritage.

6. SAFETY MESSAGING

Mr. Ekblaw presented examples of safety messaging campaigns in Scottsdale and throughout the Valley. He said that discussions are underway at the regional level about developing extreme heat campaigns. Mr. Hamilton added that one of the regional goals is to develop freeway messaging signs highlighting heat danger.

Mr. Ekblaw presented a draft comparison of Scottsdale trailhead usage during the August Phoenix closures of Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak during extreme heat days.

Commissioner Olsson commented that he and Mr. Hamilton recently had a discussion about the possibility of displaying real-time current temperatures and ground temperatures at the trailheads.

It was suggested that the tourism department could be involved with making sure that visitors are aware of excessive heat dangers.

7. STAFF REPORTS

Pima Dynamite Trailhead Update

Fraesfield Interpretive Trail

October Celebration Dates

Mr. Hamilton reported that because of a delay with delivery of electrical equipment, the Pima Dynamite Trailhead dedication has been moved to Saturday, November 13, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

8. UPCOMING MEETING DATES, LOCATIONS, AND AGENDA ITEMS

All dates listed are tentative and subject to amendment:

2021 meetings thru November:

Regular meetings

October 14th – Policy Process

November 3rd – Policy Process

Special meetings

October 21st – Policy Process

November 18th – Policy Process

11. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hackbarth recommended that Commissioners read an article about wildlife crossings. One interesting thing in the article is that Los Angeles was able to raise \$44 million in voluntary contributions for the development of a wildlife crossing. He suggested that in addition to the potential for public donations, car insurance companies might be interested in donating

based on the idea that a wildlife crossing would curb the number of collisions with wildlife. Mr. Hamilton will forward the article to Commissioners.

Chair Wenstrom noted that the Transportation Commission received the letter sent by the MSPC regarding 128th Street and will be reviewing it during their meeting tonight.

12. ADJOURNMENT

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

With no further business to discuss, being duly moved and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

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