

McDowell Sonoran Preserve

Access Areas Report



Approved by the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission
in March of 1999 and Amended in December of 2010

Access Areas Report

INTRODUCTION

The Access Areas Report was first approved by the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission in March of 1999. Since that time, significant progress has been made acquiring lands for inclusion in the Preserve, and many access areas have been constructed to provide public access to the Preserve. In December of 2010, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission amended the Access Areas Report.

BACKGROUND

Initial planning identified a 16,460-acre area of the McDowell Mountains and adjacent high Sonoran Desert for preservation to be called the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. In 1995, Scottsdale voters agreed to raise the sales tax 0.2% for acquisition of land for the Preserve. As part of the planning process, the McDowell Mountains Task Force and, subsequently, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission identified the location and types of areas to accommodate appropriate public access to the Preserve.

In 1997, the Desert Preservation Task Force submitted a report to City Council recommending an additional 19,940 acres of natural desert and mountains be added to the planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The City Council added this land to the area desired for inclusion in the Preserve and, in 1998, Scottsdale voters authorized the City to use funds generated from the 1995 sales tax increase to purchase land in the 19,940 acres. After combining the two areas desired for preservation, the planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve encompasses an area of approximately 34,000 acres. In 2004, Scottsdale voters agreed to raise the sales tax an additional 0.15% to fund land acquisition and capital improvements such as access areas and public trails. The Desert Preservation Task Force and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission assessed the access needs in the expanded area and identified locations and types of access areas. The purpose of this report is to update and consolidate access area plans into a single report.

Contents of the Access Area Report will be included in the Master Plan for the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The Access Area Report will also be a stand-alone document to assist public and private decision making and to serve as a public information tool.

PRESERVE ACCESS AREAS

The planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve covers approximately 34,000 acres of mountains and high Sonoran Desert. Public opinion polls consistently indicate that the highest priority is for the mountains and desert to be maintained in a natural condition to sustain habitat for wildlife and desert vegetation, and to protect historical and archaeological resources. Some parts of the Preserve may not have access due to sensitive or hazardous conditions, or to protect natural and cultural resources.

Respondents also identified opportunities for appropriate public recreation as being important to them. Access should be provided where appropriate; however, providing public access and passive recreation should not conflict with the primary objective of preservation. Access areas are the means to provide for public entry into the Preserve. Access areas will be located at strategic locations on the periphery of the Preserve and will vary in size and in the amenities provided. Experience with mountain preserve or park facilities throughout the Valley has indicated that multiple access areas with adequate parking and staging facilities are critical to prevent overuse of areas where public access occurs.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ACCESS AREAS

The following general guidelines were developed to aid in planning and implementing Preserve access areas. Guidelines are based on recommendations initially contained in the Report of Recommendations to City Council, submitted by the McDowell Mountains Task Force in September of 1993. The Planning Committee of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve initially developed the guidelines in 1994 and updated them in 1998.

The objective is to create enough properly placed and maintained public access areas, with facilities for diverse user groups, to limit the impact on any one particular area. By concentrating appropriate amenities in selected locations, maintenance and management costs will be reduced. Access areas should be planned to avoid the problems of overuse and resource degradation experienced in other communities. Where possible, access areas should be located on already disturbed areas, on locations with limited intrinsic value or scenic features, or in areas that will be unobtrusive to the adjacent residents.

The following issues should be considered in determining an appropriate level of public access for the Preserve:

- Access areas should be located and designed in a manner that will most effectively accommodate appropriate public use of the Preserve.
- The location and character of planned access areas should be appropriately publicized, and should be coordinated with the Scottsdale General Plan and other policy documents.
- Access areas should be of sufficient size to accommodate the projected level of use in an environmentally safe manner and be adequately buffered from surrounding land uses.
- Access areas should be planned so that the privacy of local residents is respected and, when possible, impacts to adjacent private properties are limited.
- Public access should be controlled in order to prevent the overuse of sensitive areas, or natural and cultural resources.
- Four types of Preserve access areas are needed in addition to the existing access provided via the Maricopa County Regional Park. The four types of Preserve access areas include: a gateway, a number of major and minor community access areas, and numerous local access points.
- Access areas should be planned to utilize the existing and planned transportation system.
- Access areas should be planned to provide public access to existing and planned trails, and to key Preserve destinations as appropriate.
- Any local access needs to be consistent with the Trails and Access Plan for the Preserve. The intent is to discourage spider trails or other non-planned trails in the Preserve.

TYPES OF PRESERVE ACCESS

Four types of Preserve access are needed to accommodate the public. Access areas differ based on size and type, and the amount of amenities provided. The type of access area designated for a particular area is based on projected public use and the specific character of the area from an environmental perspective, the amount of land available for the access area, and the type and proximity of existing and planned adjacent land uses. The provision of access area amenities will be phased in over time.

The four types of public access areas inside the Preserve are described below. There will be additional access locations outside the Preserve that can provide the public with access opportunities to the Preserve, or to other recreation and open space amenities.

Gateway to the Preserve

Description: The largest and most strategically located access area is identified as the Gateway to the Preserve. There will only be one Gateway. The Gateway will serve a broad range of needs and users. It will be a visible statement of Sonoran Desert preservation and provide an entry into the heart of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. It will serve as a major passive recreational and tourist experience, a major staging area for exploration into the Preserve, a focal point for educational facilities and programs, and a linkage to the citywide trail system.

A well-designed general use area is needed to avoid the problems of overuse and overcrowding that has been experienced in other regional open space areas. Some potential users will not be able to enjoy the Preserve unless some facilities are available on relatively flat or gently sloping desert terrain. A high priority is placed on gaining a general use area on the western boundary of the Preserve to better serve the existing and future community. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials, and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

Size: 100-200 Acres

Parking: 500-600 Spaces, including buses and horse trailers. Additional parking will be provided off-site.

Amenities: The broadest range of public amenities within the Preserve will be located at the Gateway to accommodate the various needs of the visitors using the Preserve. In addition to parking for a mixture of vehicles, the Gateway may include a transit stop, picnic areas, ramadas, a visitor center, displays, an amphitheater, Preserve offices, restrooms, drinking fountains, telephones, concessions, maps/signage, displays, trailheads, ADA trails, and a Preserve gate. Picnic and ramada areas may be provided to accommodate corporate picnics and other large user groups.

Access: The Gateway should have access from a major collector or higher classification street. The proximity of the Gateway to a future freeway interchange should also be considered. The Gateway will also be accessible by various non-motorized modes of transportation, including foot, bicycle, horse, or wheelchair. In addition, every effort will be made to provide shared off-site parking facilities.

Major Community Access

Description: Major community access areas will provide opportunities for public use of and access to the Preserve for the entire community. They will serve as staging areas for access to popular public areas in the Preserve. The objective is to provide sufficient and convenient access on the periphery of the Preserve. Major access areas will experience considerably less use than at the Gateway, but will contain more amenities and a higher degree of public use than minor community access areas. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials, and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

Size: 30-60 Acres

Parking: 200-300 spaces including horse trailers

Amenities: Major community access areas will generally contain public parking, including horse trailer and bus parking, a transit stop where feasible, multi-use trailheads, maps and signage, restrooms, picnic areas, ramadas, drinking fountains, telephones, interpretative and educational displays, and limited visitor information.

Access: Access should be from a minor collector or higher classification street and includes foot and/or bicycle/equestrian access.

Minor Community Access

Description: These areas will be similar in function to major community access areas, but smaller in size. These areas will accommodate a variety of users, but they will be in locations where public demand is not anticipated to be as high as in those areas where major community access areas are planned. The size of and amenities included in these areas will be dependent on the character of the surrounding area and the level of public use. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials, and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

Size: 10-30 Acres

Parking: 50-100 spaces and limited trailer parking

Note: A minor community access area designated as "Minor Community Access with Additional Parking" is an area that may contain more than 100 parking spaces, if necessary, to accommodate users and, if feasible, given the character of the area. Amenities will be the same as for other minor community access areas.

Amenities: Minor community access areas will generally contain public parking, limited horse trailer parking, multi-use trailheads, maps and signage and, potentially, restrooms, picnic areas, ramadas, drinking fountains, and telephones.

Access: A minor collector or higher classification street is desirable.

Local Access

Description: These sites provide for limited use only, and may be located within neighborhoods and developments as approved through the planning or development review process. Most local access areas will be provided by developers. The specific locations of these access areas will be coordinated and consistent with overall planning for the Preserve.

Size: 0-1 Acre (access may be an entry point providing appropriate public access along the Preserve boundary)

Parking: No parking provided

Amenities: Amenities will be limited to a trailhead and, possibly, directional trail signage and maps. Access will be for hikers and, in some locations, equestrians and mountain bikers.

Access: These locations will be on a local residential street.

Locations: Locations are to be determined through the project review process or through City-neighborhood planning efforts.

Additional Access Areas

Description: These areas are outside of the planned Preserve. These areas will work in conjunction with Preserve access areas by providing additional parking and trail access to the Preserve.

DESCRIPTION OF PLANNED LOCATIONS FOR ACCESS

Specific access areas were identified using the general guidelines and the descriptions provided above. Extensive field work took place to identify general locations for access areas and to match the level of public access that could be accommodated in a particular location.

Ten locations within the Preserve were initially identified to provide Preserve access. These locations include a Gateway, four Major Community Access Areas, four Minor Community Access Areas and one location identified as a Minor Community/Major Community Access Area (the size of which will be based on user demand and other factors). These ten Preserve access areas are described below and are shown on the Planned Access Areas Map. The need for an additional access area along the east side of Pima Road, between Dynamite and Stagecoach, will be evaluated in the future based upon the needs of Preserve users, and whether other access areas become overused or overcrowded.

GATEWAY TO THE PRESERVE

Location: In the Bell Road and Thompson Peak Parkway vicinity.

Rationale:

- Satisfies "General Use Area" recommendation in the McDowell Mountains Task Force Report.
- Provides entire community with vital western access.
- Located near center of range with views of significant mountain features.
- Provides access to major proposed trails and some of the most significant archaeological, historical, scenic and natural features in the Preserve.
- Provides high visibility that will enhance the community's sense of ownership and increases public support.

MAJOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS

Location 1: In the general vicinity of 128th –132nd streets on the north side of the McDowell Mountains.

Rationale:

- Provides important northern access to northeastern mountains, County Regional Park and City land.
- Area is important to many different user groups, including rock climbers, equestrians, hikers, cyclists, bird watchers and botanists.
- Offers access to many important features such as Tom's Thumb, Windgate Overlook, Gardener's Wall, Sven Slab, Mesquite Canyon and the Windmill Trail.

Location 2: In the general vicinity of Lost Dog Wash near Cactus Road and 124th Street.

Rationale:

- Provides access needed for rapidly growing Shea corridor area.
- Provides opportunity for linkage to Preserve lands and trails donated by Suncor and Newhall/Herberger.
- Gives access to several scenic areas, including Lost Dog Valley, Taliesin Saddle, and Taliesin Wash.
- Topography will provide the opportunity to locate parking so it can be screened from adjacent land uses.
- Provides opportunities for linkages to east and southeast end of the mountain range, and to Fountain Hills.
- Provides on-site outdoor educational opportunities for students from the adjacent elementary, middle and high schools.

Location 3: Granite Mountain area near 136th Street and Lone Mountain Road alignment.

Rationale:

- Provides community access to the very scenic mountainous area north of Lone Mountain Road that has an abundance of saguaros and boulder outcrops.

- Adjacent Preserve land provides an opportunity for a wilderness type experience while still in the City.
- Area is important to rock climbers, equestrians, hikers, and cyclists.
- Provides views to Verde River Valley from the eastside of ridgeline, and linkages to forest, county and power line corridors.
- 136th Street provides a good existing street access to area.

Location 4: Brown's Mountain area north of Dixileta near Alma School alignment.

Note: In December of 2010, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission updated the Access Areas Report, and classified this access area as a Major Community Access Area.

Rationale:

- Alma School provides a good street for public access.
- Parking can be placed out of view of future homes.
- Access in the heart of the Preserve and can serve to link trails.
- Preserve land provides users the opportunity for a wilderness type experience while in the City.

MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS

Location 1: Eagle Ridge area at Via Linda extension.

**The City of Scottsdale will work in cooperation with Fountain Hills and the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.*

Rationale:

- Provides access to important southeastern features, including old mines, scenic canyons, and peaks and ridges in eastern portion of the Preserve.
- Proximity to Via Linda and Shea corridor.

Location 2: Fountain Hills at County Park boundary in 144th Street area.

**The City of Scottsdale will work in cooperation with Fountain Hills and the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.*

Rationale:

- Offers southeastern access to City land and County Regional Park.
- Provides eastern link to east-west trails.
- Location convenient for access to several heritage sites, including Dixie Mine, Windmill, and petroglyphs.

Location 3: Fraesfield Mountain area near Dynamite Boulevard and 128th Street.

Rationale:

- Excellent location for visitors to pull off Dynamite to begin exploring desert.
- Parking can be placed on land previously disturbed by grading and wildfires.
- Provides access to north-south trail system and connecting corridor.

MAJOR OR MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREA WITH ADDITIONAL PARKING

Location: Pima Road and Dynamite Boulevard area.

Rationale:

- Area already disturbed by parking and power line corridors.
- Currently serves as prime staging area for mountain bicycling.
- Proximity to saguaro forests and power line corridor trails.

MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS WITH ADDITIONAL PARKING

Location: Desert Foothills Scenic Drive on Scottsdale Road near Happy Valley Road.

Note: A Minor Community with Additional Parking may have more than 100 parking spaces to accommodate user demand.

Rationale:

- Location is great for tourists and visitors travelling along Scottsdale Road.
- Facilities should include bus parking, restrooms, tourist information and Desert Foothills Scenic Drive information.
- Provides access to power line corridor trails.
- Provides linkages to Phoenix trails and open space.

ACCESS LOCATIONS OUTSIDE THE PRESERVE

In addition to planned access areas in the Preserve, there are existing and planned parking areas and trailhead locations outside the Preserve that will provide additional access opportunities for the Preserve, and linkages to other amenities and the citywide trail system. Grade separations should be provided at major roadways for trails or paths linking these additional access locations to the Preserve. Access areas outside of the Preserve are described below:

Location 1: Parking in the vicinity of 136th Street and Shea Boulevard on City land.

Rationale:

- Location was proposed in Settlement between the City and Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community.
- Existing underpass at Shea provides good linkage for trails.
- Access in this area can link Preserve to Shea Boulevard and any future Saddleback Mountain trails.

Location 2: Trailhead at 136th Street adjacent to Scottsdale Mountain.

Rationale:

- Existing City trailhead providing access to existing and planned trails.

Location 3: Trailhead parking east of public schools on McDowell Mountain Ranch Road.

Rationale:

- Existing paved parking provides access to dedicated trails through McDowell Mountain Ranch to both the Preserve and to WestWorld.

Location 4: WestWorld parking areas west of Thompson Peak Parkway.

Rationale:

- Parking around Brett's Barn and stables provides good staging area for equestrian and other trail users.
- Linkages to Reata Wash and planned open space corridors.

Location 5: Community Park in DC Ranch adjacent to Thompson Peak Parkway.

Rationale:

- Links to Wingate Pass, Reata and Beardsley Wash corridors.
- Underpass will be provided under Thompson Peak Parkway for regional trail connections.

Location 6: Pinnacle Peak Park.

Rationale:

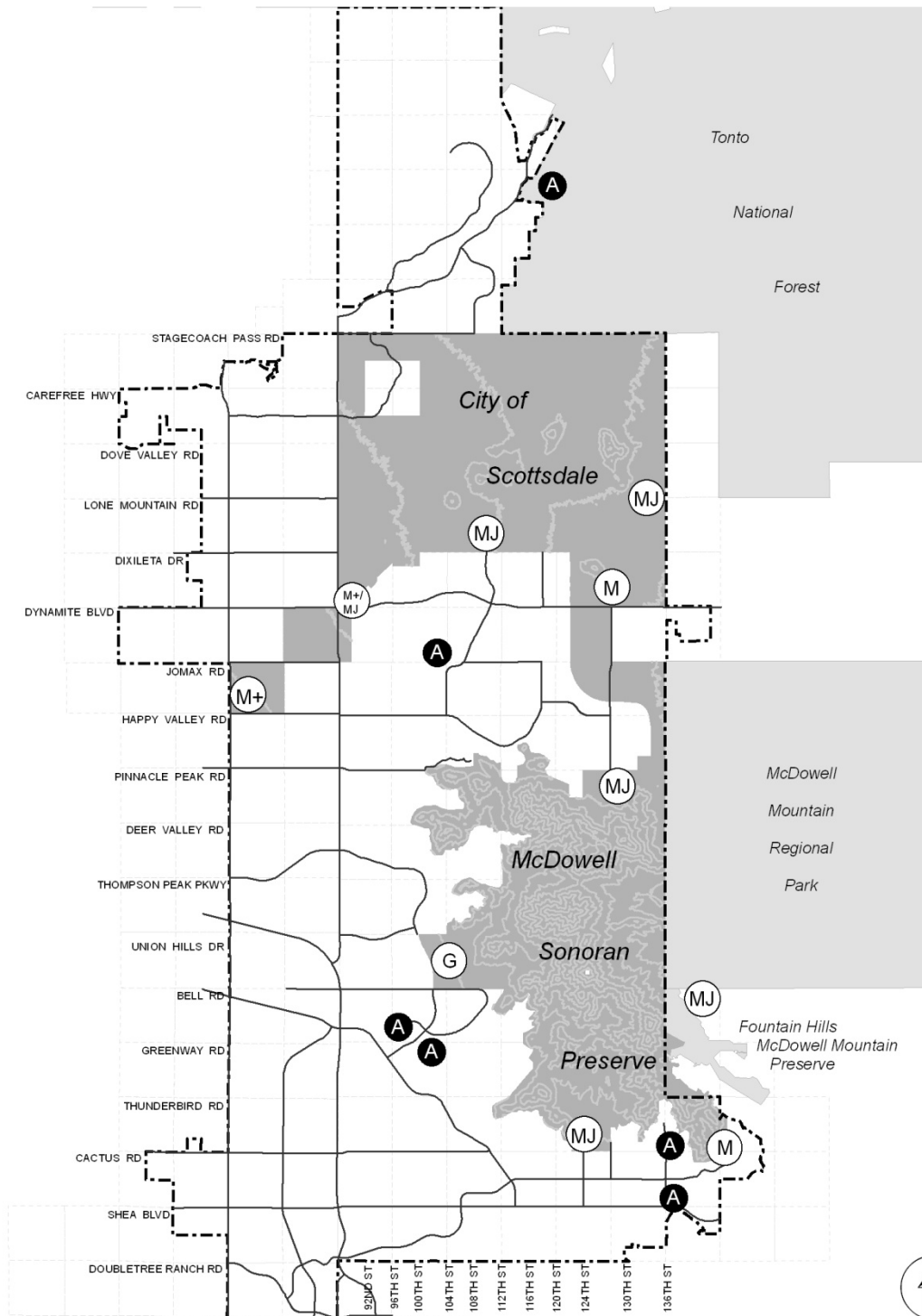
- A lease of State Trust land will allow construction of trailhead parking.
- Parking enables the public to view this landmark, and use the existing trail and climbing areas.

Location 7: Carefree Ranger Station in Tonto National Forest at Cave Creek and Bartlett Dam Roads.

Rationale:

- Ranger station provides staging area, trail information and a rest stop.

PLANNED ACCESS AREAS FOR THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE



G = Gateway Access	M+ = Minor with Additional Parking
MJ = Major Community Access	M+/MJ = Minor with Add. Parking or Major
M = Minor Community Access	A = Access Locations Outside Preserve