



MY STORY

Don Meserve, *Lead Steward*

Don Meserve's perspective on the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is as unique as it is genuine. As a member of the City of Scottsdale's Planning Department serving in a variety of capacities, Don was intimately involved with the City's years long effort to preserve the land in the McDowell Mountains. As a Steward of the Conservancy since 2012, Don has been an active participant in the growth and development of the Preserve upon his retirement a year later. Regardless of his professional title and role, Don's continuous support for the Preserve has been driven by a love of nature developed at a young age and a curiosity about natural history that he was cultivated as an adult.

Don fondly recalls his childhood summers spent wilderness camping in New England. As an adult, he and his family have been frequent and extended visitors to National Parks in the western U.S. It is no surprise that Don found himself at the center of so many of the City's activities around the creation and management of the Preserve.

In the early 1990s the City had taken note of the acceleration of development toward the mountains and attempted different approaches to preserve natural space. The City initially adopted a zoning regulation called the Hillside District Ordinance, which was struck down by the Arizona Supreme Court in June 1986. In 1991, the City adopted the Environmentally Sensitive Lands Overlay District, which created rules for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands. As Don recalls, in those years there was always a sense in the City government and among many of the City's residents that regulation could only achieve so much, and that a bigger preservation strategy would be required.

In 1993 the City created the McDowell Mountain Task Force, which ultimately recommended the formation of a permanent McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission and the adoption of a sales tax to fund land acquisition. Don notes that land acquisition was really only the first step in creating the Preserve as we know it today. He points with particular pride to his role in "putting lines on paper," which is to say designing the trails and the trailheads in a way that permits access to the Preserve while also working harmoniously with the surrounding neighborhoods.

After providing staff support for both the Task Force and the Preserve Commission, Don's role continued to evolve when he was named the first City Archaeologist in

Scottsdale. Don laughs when he mentions that he had no formal archaeological training other than his lifelong interest in the land and its history. He recalls a Steward driven project to perform an archaeological survey of Brown's Ranch using a balloon held camera.

When asked about the moments he is most proud of during his decades of work with the Preserve, Don is not lost on examples. Like most people involved with the Preserve in its infancy, he is proud of the City government and Mayor Drinkwater for supporting the creation of the Preserve, and of the majority of the City's residents who approved two sales taxes to acquire land and build infrastructure. More particularly, he is proud of the Environmental Excellence awards received from Valley Forward for several Preserve achievements, including the public/private partnership between the City and the Conservancy and the Tom's Thumb Trailhead design.

In retirement, Don can spend more time in the Preserve he helped create. As a Conservancy Steward, he particularly enjoys leading hikes and is excited by the Conservancy's continued expansion of its science and education related activities. Don would love to see the creation of an interpretive plan for the Preserve, which would utilize a variety of media to educate visitors and enhance their experience in the Preserve. He also foresees the Conservancy expanding its youth programming and helping young people develop a deeper relationship with the land. Not a surprising outlook from someone who has spent his entire life experiencing, appreciating, and learning about nature.