



MCDOWELL
SONORAN
CONSERVANCY

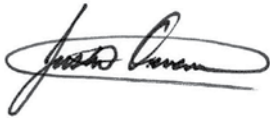
science is in our nature

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2020

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020





Justin Owen, CNAP
Chief Executive Officer

Dear Community Partner,

What an incredible year FY 2020 has been for the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy mission!

We now have a small, professional, full-time staff, along with 700+ volunteer stewards who contributed more than 63,000 hard-worked hours towards our goals.

The generous contributions from donors like you make it possible for us to achieve our objectives of expanded awareness in our local community and beyond.

As you will learn in the coming pages, we have expanded and improved programs to support our mission, allowing us to: preserve land and increase awareness of the need for natural open space; provide access to free educational and experiential opportunities for all—with an ever-increasing focus on youth

and underserved communities; expand scientific research to impact the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, the region and beyond.

Looking ahead, we have a number of exciting initiatives, outreach opportunities and programs in the works, which will depend heavily upon the continued support of donors like you.

It is my honor and privilege to lead this organization, and none of this would be possible without your support. I hope we can count on your continuing encouragement and engagement with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, where *science is in our nature*.

As you read more about our achievements and initiatives, I welcome your feedback.

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PARSONS
FIELD
INSTITUTE

Science



Science Mission: Conduct ecological research through partnerships and citizen science to inform long-term natural resource management of the Sonoran Desert.

Leveraging Our Scientific Research on a Broader Scale

Arid and semi-arid environments, like the Sonoran Desert, are the least-studied of all environments, yet they cover over 40% of the world's landmass.

By 2040, it's estimated at least 50% of the world's population will live in these environments. It is essential to determine how to live within them in a sensitive and sustainable way.

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Parsons Field Institute, in collaboration with donors like you, is conducting a number of scientific research projects aimed at this important mission.

Wildfire-Prevention Research

Non-native, invasive plants are one of the major threats to biodiversity worldwide. Wildfires in many areas of the world are caused, and worsened, by the fuel-load generated from invasive plant species. In partnership with the City of Scottsdale, the Conservancy is researching different removal techniques to compare cost-effectiveness and impact on native plant communities. The results will

directly benefit the Preserve and will also be shared broadly with regional partners, and beyond, including through international journals, conferences, and public outreach. At the same time, with the help of our volunteer base, we are actively removing invasive species from the Preserve and recruiting and training other organizations to do the same across the region.

Through cooperation, research, and implementation of remedies that work, we can all make a difference in helping to protect the Sonoran Desert, and arid lands, for generations to come.

Desert Restoration

In addition, the Conservancy is actively researching innovative approaches for restoration of damaged areas, including wildfire-affected landscapes. We recently completed a study of past restoration practices, with findings published in an international peer-reviewed journal to be shared with land managers in arid lands across the globe.



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This year, the Conservancy initiated two, new, restoration field studies; and, we completed a four-year study of how to restore degraded land. Those results will also be submitted for publication.

approaches that are most suitable for different disturbance conditions in a changing climate. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is a global partner in protecting biodiversity.

science is in our nature

Soil Crust Experiments Have Global Impact

As part of our satellite program at Northern Arizona University, we continue with our soil crust experiments, which involve “growing” soil crust in controlled environments and then transferring the crusts to the field for establishment in disturbed areas. Results to date show that in only 11 weeks, crusts increased by 38–62% in the controlled environments. This type of growth in its natural environment can take more than 15 years! We have now replanted the grown crusts in the natural desert for the ultimate test of viability. This research will have global impact in the fight against dust storms because missing soil crusts contribute to dust storms, which can lead to rapid environmental degradation and negative consequences for life at all levels.

RestoreNet Field Trial Collaboration With the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

Over the past year the Conservancy initiated a region-wide field trial called RestoreNet in collaboration with the USGS. The initiative provides an opportunity to compare restoration practices in the Sonoran Desert with those being used in other North American deserts. This large-scale experiment helps identify conditions and

The McDowell Sonoran Preserve is home to more than 1,000 types of plants and animals—identified by our Parsons Field Institute and Citizen Scientists—making the Preserve one of the richest ecological areas in the valley. This year, the Conservancy added nine mammals to its species list, which tripled the number of bats identified, and added the iconic Ringtail.



417 plant types



178 bird species



39 mammal species



36 reptile and amphibian species



More than **350** invertebrate types

The Conservancy monitors the health of the Preserve, not only by tracking species, but by applying scientifically-sound monitoring techniques to identify whether target-species groups maintain their populations in the face of urbanization and climate change. This data is shared with regional and global partners through online databases.





Education



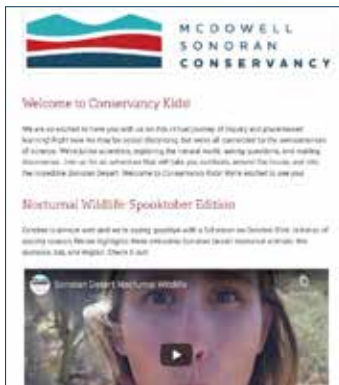
SONORAN
DISCOVERY
ACADEMY



Education Mission: Inspire, develop and support environmental stewardship of the Sonoran Desert and natural open space through impactful education.

The Changing Nature of Education

Conservancy Kids Online



COVID-19 has encouraged us all to be more creative. With that in mind, and with the goal of continuing our support for youth, teachers and parents, **in March of 2020 the Conservancy**

launched *Conservancy Kids Online*.

Formatted as weekly video newsletters delivered by email, these new, youth-education offerings combine inquiry-based exploration with structured lesson plans designed for both teacher and parent implementation.

Hard copies of materials were also provided free of charge so schools could print and send them home with children who may not have internet access.

Conservancy Kids Online will continue to provide fun, interactive lessons to help youth understand their place in our ecological environment and how they can help support its health.

Expedition Days

Prior to COVID-19, the Conservancy held its annual, flagship, STEM program: *Expedition Days*. Hosted at the Lost Dog Wash Trailhead, the curriculum was re-written this year to incorporate the new Arizona Science Standards, and to emphasize place-based learning that helps youth understand their place in the Sonoran Desert.

The event continues to center on Title I students from across the Valley. The revised program also delivers ready-to-use lesson plans for teachers that are in keeping with state guidelines, allowing *Expedition Days* to provide meaningful support as teachers work to fulfill new state standards.

Due to generous donations, the Conservancy was able to double the student capacity of this year's Expedition Days.

Saturday remained "public day" as we welcomed families and multi-generational groups to learn from the student lessons as well as additional stations produced by stewards and partners.



CONSERVANCY
KIDS



EXPEDITION
DAYS



This past year, the Conservancy committed to a goal of becoming a regional leader in adult, youth, and steward conservation education by increasing public understanding and appreciation of desert environments, leading to systemic change.



Nearly 50,000 adults participated this year in Conservancy facilitated hikes, bike rides, walks, lectures and other activities, offering many adults their first Sonoran Desert experience.



Adult Education



The Conservancy believes that through education, we all become part of the environment, and will learn to respect and value our unique and diverse desert ecosystem.



Each year new activities are added that focus on encouraging all to become stewards of the land. This year, we added Sensory Hikes to the *Nature as Therapy* program, as well as topic-driven, educational bike rides. We also increased the number of planned, free public hikes and bike rides to over 150. Moving forward the Conservancy will continue to seek ways to encourage our community to understand and appreciate the world in which they live.

GUIDED HIKES

Free, public hikes continue to expand in frequency and number. More lead stewards are being trained so that we can keep up with the demand for these popular programs.

INTERPRETIVE HIKES

Interpretive Hikes are interpretive, walk-and-learn experiences. These flat, short, easy "hikes" are ideal for those who would not normally use the Preserve, and do not see themselves as "hikers," but would still like to experience the desert. *Interpretive Hikes* offer us a unique opportunity to expand our educational reach, and to develop new, non-typical supporters of the Conservancy mission.

"NATURE AS THERAPY" HIKES

These are another type of interpretive hike that include frequent stops to discuss using the five senses. This successful and highly-requested hike has of focus of mindfulness and appreciation of our place within the desert environment.

EDUCATIONAL BIKE RIDES

All educational bike rides have a specific focus on topics such as regional history, native flora, wildlife and conservation.







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Stewardship



Stewardship Mission: Train and equip 700+ volunteer stewards with the knowledge, tools and structure needed to discover, learn and ultimately teach people to be stewards of the land.

Stewardship is at the Heart of Everything We Do

Our volunteer-steward population continues to grow as more locals and seasonal-residents commit to joining us in delivering our mission of becoming stewards of the land. We aim to teach our stewards, so that, in turn, they can teach others.

The Conservancy currently has over 700 dedicated and skilled stewards who work tirelessly to deliver meaningful experiences, both within the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and the Sonoran Desert at large.

With the arrival of COVID-19, many programs were severely impacted and in March, 2020, we made the difficult decision to pause all public-facing activities to ensure the safety of both the community and our stewards. Up to that point, the Conservancy was on track to deliver the most events, as well as impact the largest number of people, in our 29-year history.

Through COVID-19, the Conservancy continued scientific research, as well as trail-maintenance and trail-ambassador activities—all with an overarching focus on social distancing and safety.

A Look Back

Throughout the past year, the Conservancy:

- **Patrolled the Preserve's 225 miles of trails** (two thirds of stewards help patrol the trails regularly on foot, bike and horses), identifying trail-condition issues.
- **Partnered with the City of Scottsdale to maintain trails**, including involvement in over 400 projects to both repair identified trail concerns and mitigate potential trail hazards. All projects outcomes are geared towards visitor safety and optimum trail conditions for hiking, biking and equestrian use.

- Advised and assisted over 34,000 visitors at trailheads, and over 12,000 on trails, to maximize their enjoyment and ensure their safety.
- Held 124 free hike and bike events, although an additional 30 had to be postponed due to COVID-19. Even so, 2,300 regular trail users and new visitors attended the 124 events to enjoy the interpretative and fitness aspects they provided.
- Delivered education to youth, families and adults through place-based and virtual learning opportunities. Long-term plans include both in-person and virtual events allowing the Conservancy to expand the number of people impacted and encouraged to become stewards of the land.
- Involved an increasing number of stewards and community members in scientific research in the Preserve.

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy currently has **700+ stewards**. During 2019, these stewards provided **63,000+ volunteer hours**, representing a **value of \$1.5M, or the equivalent of almost 50 full-time staff**.





New Trailheads

During 2020, the Conservancy partnered with the City of Scottsdale to open the new Fraesfield and Granite Mountain Trailheads. Each of these trailheads includes interpretative signage and trailhead ambassador service to enhance the visitor experience.

We are currently partnering with the City of Scottsdale to complete a *new interpretative trail* at the Fraesfield Trailhead, which is planned to open in 2021.

A Look Ahead

Many Pastfinders have qualified as Site Stewards, which means they are able to identify and care for the historic sites within the Preserve.

During 2020-21, the Conservancy will officially formalize the Site Steward Program for the Preserve. Working in

conjunction with the City of Scottsdale, the Conservancy will further develop this program to ensure that historic sites are identified, monitored and protected for future generations.

Steward Appreciation

Conservancy stewards donated more than 63,000 hours in 2020, which is valued at over \$1,500,000 or almost 50 full-time employees. Many of our stewards are also financial donors, and in 2020 they donated over \$230,000, representing an increase of 76% over the prior year. Our stewards truly believe in, and support, our mission, and we are incredibly thankful for them.

Without supporters like you, the Conservancy would not be able to deliver important services that make such an impact on both visitors and our community.



Accreditations



McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Internationally Honored

In 2019, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy was officially selected as the host organization for the new *Sonoran Desert Plant Species Specialist Group* of the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This exciting initiative gathered regional, national and international partners from across the Sonoran Desert, with the long-term goal of comprehensively assessing the extinction risk to the more than 4,000 native plants of the Sonoran Desert. We are honored by this international recognition of our highly-respected, scientific organization.

Regional projects and increased partnerships allow us to share research and findings with other specialists across our region and beyond. This broader sharing approach facilitates understanding and progress to ensure, together, we increase the resilience of our ecosystems, especially in face of climate change.



POINTS OF LIGHT Creating a Global Culture of Volunteering

In December 2019, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy concluded a year-long initiative with **Points of Light**—the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service—and we were honored to receive **Service Enterprise certification** from the **Governor's Office of Youth, Family and Faith**. A Service Enterprise is an organization that strategically leverages volunteers to achieve operational efficiency and greater social impact. The *Service Enterprise Program* helps organizations gain a greater return on volunteer investment to better achieve their mission.

Achieving Service Enterprise certification is a very prestigious accomplishment for an organization. In fact, organizations that meet certification criteria join the **top 11% of nonprofits nationwide** in volunteer management and organizational performance.





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Financials

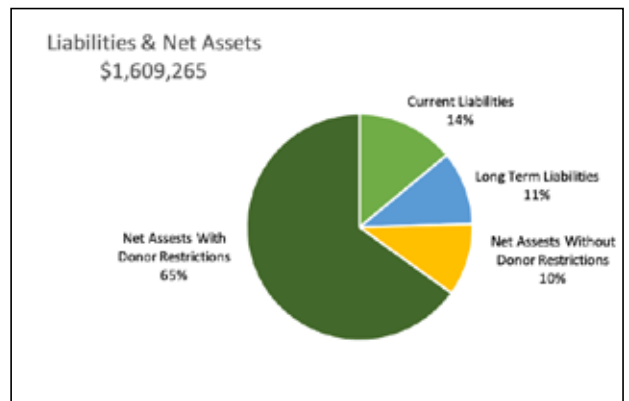
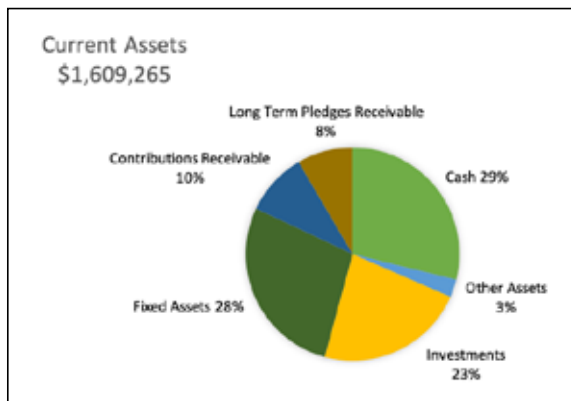
Statement of Financial Position
FY 2020 - For the year ended June 30, 2020

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash	\$ 464,526
Other Assets	43,846
Investments	364,144
Fixed Assets	447,420
Contributions Receivable	153,812
Long Term Pledges Receivable	135,518
Total Assets	\$ 1,609,265

LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities	225,501
Long Term Liabilities	169,540
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	166,498
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	1,047,726
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 1,609,265



*Unaudited financials

Statement of Activities

FY 2020 - For the year ended June 30, 2020

REVENUES

Contributed Volunteer Services	\$ 1,502,018
Individual Contributions	584,095
Corporate & Events	181,409
Foundations	184,620
Program Services	126,265
Other Income	12,719
Total Revenues	\$ 2,591,125

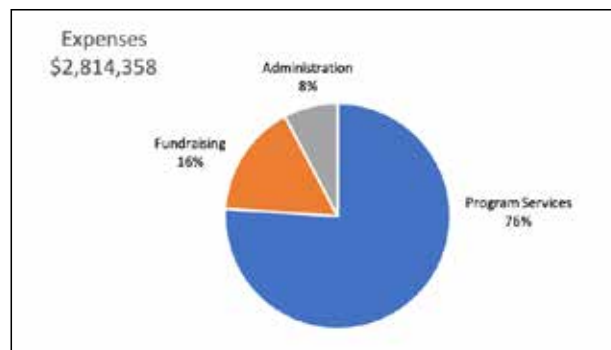
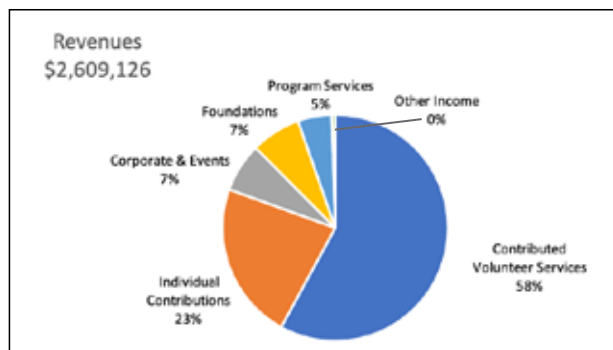
EXPENSES

Program Services	2,147,016
Fundraising	458,043
Administration	219,299
Total Expenses	\$ 2,824,358

CHANGE IN NET ASSETS (233,233)

NET ASSETS

Beginning of the Year	\$ 1,413,048
End of the Year	\$ 1,179,815



*Unaudited financials



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Donors

For the calendar year ending December 31, 2019

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is grateful for the many people, companies, and organizations that supported our work through donations between January 1 and December 31, 2019. Every effort has been made to ensure that this list is accurate. Due to space constraints, we are only able to include those who contributed \$25 or more. Regardless of the amount, your contribution helps us preserve and advance natural open space through science, education and stewardship in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and beyond.



INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Champions (\$10,000)

Anonymous
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Jim and Lynda Frantz
Rick Harrington
Bill Hurtle and Cathy Campbell-Hurtle
Christine and Rick Kovach
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Sandy and Gary Neale
Doug and Judy Newton
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John and Linda Oliver
Rick Parsons and Linda Harrison-Parsons
Rick and Frances Pearce
Thomas Pfafman
Joanne Phillips
Theodora and Robert Potts
William and Karen Powell

With more than 30,500 acres in Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy oversees and protects the largest urban preserve in North America.

Through our three pillars of Science, Education and Stewardship, we research, educate and raise awareness of the importance of conservation and stewardship of the land.





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Robert and Sheila Press
Barb Pringle
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Rich and Leanne Reel
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Jona Davis
Patricia Davis
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