magazine of the mcdowell sonoran conservancy

Mountain Lines

Fall 2015

Go Team MSC

Training for the
Tour de Scottsdale bike race

Partnering to Protect Prairie Falcon Nestlings

A key element of MSC's mission

Rock Art in the Preserve

Preserving Critical Cultural Resources

McDowell Sonoran CONSERVANCY

Mike Nolan, Executive Director

One of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's key goals is to build strong relationships with stakeholders who have an interest in our mission to sustain the Preserve. I am grateful and appreciative for the level of support and collaboration we receive from partners around the region, and even around the country, when we need their help, expertise, and support. All build on our long and productive relationship with the City of Scottsdale, which has resulted in the creation of a widely-admired public-private partnership which continues to thrive and grow some two decades after its inception.

A recent example of diverse partners working together for the benefit of the Preserve involved nesting prairie falcons at Tom's Thumb. Last spring a rock climber on the north face of Tom's Thumb reported to city staff a possible falcon nest in a large crack in the rock face. City staff reached out to our McDowell Sonoran Field Institute to verify the siting, the species, and to confirm nesting. Independent trained observers we brought in identified two prairie falcons and confirmed their nest. The Arizona Game and Fish Department provided additional expertise, and ultimately, the City decided to temporarily close the north face of Tom Thumb's to protect and monitor the falcon family during nesting, as they are sensitive to human disturbances. The rock climbing community rallied behind the temporary closure to protect the nesting falcons; McDowell Sonoran Conservancy stewards aided experienced monitors by taking them to observation points and joining them to monitor and photograph the falcons. The end result was the successful hatching and fledging of two prairie falcon chicks, proving once again the value of collaboration among multiple entities that care deeply about preserving and protecting our Sonoran desert flora and fauna.

Another fruitful partnership is developing with groups interested in identifying, documenting and protecting the irreplaceable cultural resources found in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Rock art is one such resource, and our steward Pastfinders, working with the City of Scottsdale, the Arizona Rock Art Coalition, and Arizona State Parks, are helping to develop a master plan to guide the protection and stewardship of these beautiful images.

And, where would we be without our partnership with the DC Ranch Community Council who put on the annual Tour de Scottsdale, and the generous sponsors and participants who support this event which provides much-needed funding to the Conservancy? I thank all our partners who are invaluable in our efforts to preserve and protect Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve for present and future generations.

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The rocky slopes of Tom's Thumb provide a unique Preserve scene.. Cover photo by: Barry L. White

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The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy champions the sustainability of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve for the benefit of this and future generations. As stewards, we connect the community to the Preserve through education, research, advocacy, partnerships and safe, respectful access.

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Sonoran Sunday Series Launched

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is launching a new series of family oriented presentations, "Sonoran Sundays," providing education, information and resources about the McDowell Mountains and the Sonoran Desert. The new FREE series will take the place of the former Family Fridays series which ran for years on Friday afternoons. However, the program has now moved to Sundays to provide more families the opportunity to attend.

Families can join the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Nature Guides and Yvonne Massman at Brown's Ranch Trailhead for the first Sonoran Sunday of the season on Sunday, September 20, at 3:00 p.m. Being prepared is always the best way for you and your children to set out on the trail and the first Sonoran Sunday is designed to help. Yvonne discusses some common items that you should take with you in the event of an injury or trail complication, the process of a rescue, and what you might be able to do to help if an emergency arises.

Have your children ever seen a large bird perched on a saguaro cactus and wondered what it was? On Sunday, October 4, at 3:00 p.m. at the Gateway Trailhead Amphitheater or Sunday, October 18 at 3:00 p.m. at Brown's Ranch Trailhead they can learn all about birds of prey from Liberty Wildlife presenters. They will bring owls, hawks and more. Your family can learn about these majestic birds and why they chose to make the McDowell Sonoran Preserve their home.

Come with your family to join the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy family at our Sonoran Sunday series this year!

A group gathers to hear about Preserve animals and see specimens at one of the Family series presentations. Photo by: Michael Brace

The desert around Tom's Thumb provides good hunting for falcons. Photo by: Michael Brace

The Preserve Community Parents Baby Falcons

By Melanie Tluczek
McDowell Sonoran Field Institute Manager

When the City of Scottsdale received a call from a climber reporting falcons nesting on the north face of Tom's Thumb, it caused quite a stir and set a chain of events in motion that lasted for months. The questions the call raised came easily. Are there in fact falcons nesting on Tom's Thumb? If so, what species of falcon is it? Where exactly is the nest? Is there an actual risk that the nest will be disturbed by human activity? If so, what can we do? Finding the answers was difficult. That relied upon collaboration among the City of Scottsdale, the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute, the climbing community, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, stewards from the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) and volunteers with specialized expertise. These diverse communities contributed their unique skills and pulled together in the common cause of protecting the falcon's nesting site. But to do that, they needed to investigate the situation and develop a science-based strategy.

Experts soon identified the nesting pair as Prairie Falcons. Theses raptors are not common in the Preserve since there are few places for them to nest. But, the north face of Tom's Thumb is an ideal site for a reason – it is inaccessible, it overlooks an ideal habitat for hunting prey, and it contains several deep cracks offering protection from predators. There is no other place in the Preserve quite this perfect, and there is evidence that falcons have nested there in the past. Unfortunately, this is a popular area for both hikers and climbers, and falcons tend to be sensitive to human activity.

The Prairie Falcon is a medium-sized bird of prey that feeds mostly on smaller birds and rodents. It is capable of steep aerial dives, employs rapid, close to the ground maneuvers in order to capture prey, and inhabits desert areas, grasslands and mountainous areas.

A pair will begin breeding in mid-winter. They nest in high cliffs in cracks or deep holes. Rather than building a nest, the female uses a "scrape" – a shallow hollowed-out area on the rock floor - to lay between two and five eggs. The male and female both help incubate the eggs, with the female typically sitting on the eggs while the male hunts and brings food back to her.

After approximately 31 days, the eggs hatch. For the first two weeks, the chicks are unable to control their own body temperatures and are highly dependent upon the parents to keep them warm in the chilly morning and evening hours. About four to five weeks after hatching, the chicks learn to fly. Once this happens they stay around the nest for another two to three weeks, after which they are independent.

Prairie Falcons, being sensitive to disturbance, will give distress calls and fly from the nest if they are approached or hear loud noises. Raptor biologists

An adult Prairie Falcon finds the Preserve an ideal place to stay for awhile. Photo by: Henry Krautter

A Prairie Falcon, fledged in the Preserve, will leave after learning to fly. Photo by: Henry Krautter

report that they show extreme distress if approached from above. Disturbance during the nesting period can cause the parents to leave the nest for a period of time. This may cause the eggs or hatchlings to become too cold, resulting in death. Additionally, a disturbance when the chicks are learning to fly can cause them to flee the nest before they are ready. This can result in injury or death.

When the climber alerted the City about the nesting pair, the City's response was to collect information with which to make the best management decisions. The McDowell Sonoran Field Institute and the City of Scottsdale have a partnership that is based in a shared value of science-based management. So, the City turned to the Field Institute and raptor biologists at the Arizona Game and Fish Department to answer the questions that would result in nest-site management recommendations based on scientific information.

The Field Institute began working with the Arizona Game and Fish Department raptor biologists to monitor the nest site for any kind of activity that would indicate an attempt to nest. Through the Field Institute Science Advisory Committee, several experienced raptor monitors were recruited to make the initial observations. These monitors had previous experience working with the Arizona Game and Fish raptor-monitoring program and were familiar with raptors' behavioral nuances and the protocols used to objectively record falcon behaviors. This data would give clues about whether they were breeding and whether a disturbance was present.

Conservancy stewards aided the monitors by guiding them to the observation points, photographing the falcons' behaviors, and providing valuable local knowledge. They also recorded supplemental observations between visits by the monitors.

The nest monitors confirmed early in the monitoring period, that two falcons were seen frequently near the Thumb, circling and calling to each other. Only a mating pair exhibits this behavior. Weeks later, the female disappeared while the male hunted, frequently bringing prey back to the nest site. During the monitoring time, the nest monitors were able to observe the Prairie Falcon reactions to Preserve users. They noted the falcons giving distress calls and flying away when large groups of hikers approached around the north face.

At this point, the Field Institute recommended a temporary closure to protect the falcon family during the sensitive nesting period. One recommendation was to temporarily prohibit hiking at the north face around the base of the thumb where hiker activity could be seen from the nest. The other recommendation was to temporarily halt climbing activity on the north face of the thumb. With help from the rock climbing community, the Field Institute was able to fine-tune its climbing recommendations so that climbing routes were not unnecessarily closed. The south, east, and west faces of the Thumb could remain open to climbing. However, climbers would be asked not to approach the north face from the summit so that they would not be looking down on the falcons from above. All users would be encouraged to keep their voices down while in the nesting vicinity. The City

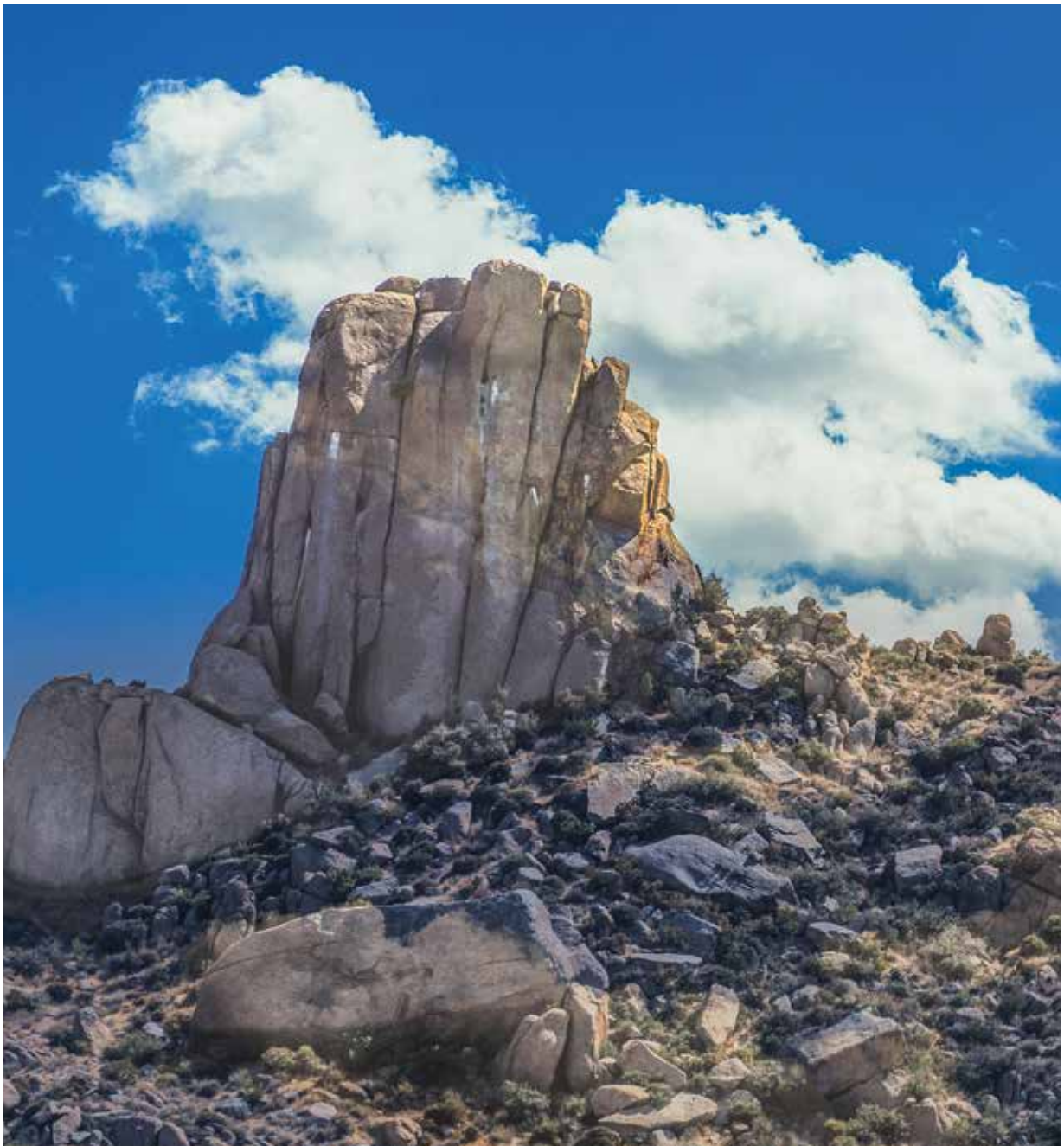
promptly put these recommendations into effect, posting signs and barriers at the temporary closure site and communicating through all possible channels. The closure would be in effect until the chicks were fledged and independent.

For weeks after the temporary closure the monitors watched to see if either of the parents delivered food to the nest site, a sure sign that the eggs had hatched. Finally, two nestlings were spotted peering down from the ledge, their downy feathers still visible on their heads and backs. Soon afterward the chicks were photographed flying back and forth between the nest site and the rocks below.

Three weeks after the chicks successfully fledged, the temporary closure was lifted. That marked the end of a success story for the falcons and for our community of falcon champions for this year. But, Prairie Falcons often return to the same nest site the following year. So, next year we will be on the lookout, hoping the pair return. We'll be ready with training that will allow more observers, both stewards and others, to conduct the monitoring that will help the City make decisions for that year.

The Preserve is home to magnificent wildlife. We learned once again that by working together we can effectively protect it. Thanks to everyone involved - the City of Scottsdale, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, wildlife experts, the Field Institute, the Conservancy stewards, and the hikers and climbers who respected the temporary closures - we were able to do just that.

The rocky terrain at Tom's Thumb provides good nesting sites for Prairie Falcons. Photo by: Barry L. White



Watchable Wildlife: Supermouse!

By Peggy McNamara
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward and McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Field Institute citizen scientist

It howls like a wolf, has a lethal bite, and ounce for ounce is the fiercest mouse anywhere. It's aggressive and pugnacious. It attacks mice bigger than itself, and most of the time - it wins!

We are talking about the grasshopper mouse that inhabits the driest regions of the southwestern United Sates and northwestern Mexico. The Sonoran Desert with its sandy soil and triangle (little-leaf) bursage provides an ideal home for it. Although it has been trapped around Rio Verde, the grasshopper mouse hasn't been seen yet in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. But that's not surprising. This mouse lives alone, has a low population density, wanders widely, and has a large-sized territory of up to eight acres. That's larger than any other mouse. It also marks it territory by means of a scent gland. Clearly, these are the behaviors of a predator species.

The grasshopper mouse's large territory helps it compete for the insects that make up almost 90% of its diet. It eats grasshoppers (in abundance); stink bugs (it attacks even when sprayed); scorpions (it's immune to the venom); centipedes (it's quick in avoiding bites); crickets, beetles, and moths (no problem); and the occasional rodent (mainly the larger deer mouse). It shows no fear in the face of a prey's defenses. It stalks its prey at night and frequently calls out at the killing of it.

A mouse is generally omnivorous. But fossil records indicate that the anatomy of the grasshopper mouse started to change when the deer mouse started competing with it for its food. Many geological periods ago, the teeth and skull of the grasshopper mouse evolved. It developed enlarged jaw muscles and high crowned teeth with pointed cusps suitable

This grasshopper mouse does not make a cuddly pet.
Photo by: Randall D. Babb, Arizona Game & Fish Department

Looking momentarily gentle, this grasshopper mouse hunts its prey at night. Photo by: Randall D. Babb, Arizona Game & Fish Department

for tearing meat - giving it a powerful bite. It grew long toenails on its forefeet to help capture and hold its prey. For the growing percentage of insects in its diet, the grasshopper mouse developed a fundic pouch - a specialization that protects its digestive system from damage by the exoskeletons of its prey. The grasshopper mouse also developed an auditory ability to locate prey better than any other rodent. This ability enables the grasshopper mouse to find prey in the dark quicker than its competitors. The grasshopper mouse is not intimidated by its prey's defenses. In fact, it modifies its attack depending on a prey's defense and persists in its attack until it kills its prey. With these adaptations, the little grasshopper mouse eventually became an insect predator.

Although the grasshopper mouse acts big, it is physically small. It weighs about 0.8 ounces and is between 4.7 and 7.5 inches long, including a short tail about one-half of its body length.

Breeding usually occurs from May to October and gestation is between 27 and 32 days. The litter is an average of four pink, hairless young weighing 0.09 ounces each. Their ears unfold after three days and their eyes open after 19 days. Soon after that, the now furry young leave the burrow.

The grasshopper mouse uses its burrow for nesting, hiding, resting, and escaping the heat of the day and the cold of the winter. It is a poor thermoregulator and its burrow is essential for its survival. It also builds a storage burrow for seeds and preservable foods as insurance against a shortage of live prey, and it builds emergency burrows around its territory to escape from predators.

You might think that a howling mouse with ferocious behaviors would be likely to catch the attention of documentary filmmakers. And so it did. Both the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and National Geographic produced documentaries featuring the grasshopper mouse. In 2012 and 2013, the BBC arrived in Tucson, Arizona to dramatize this mouse's story. With help from the Arizona Game & Fish Department, the BBC filmed a fairly accurate depiction of the calamities that can befall a young grasshopper mouse. The film shows our mouse howling and in action. There are fights with deadly scorpions and centipedes, a close escape from the jaws of a snake, a pursuit by Harris hawks, and a near drowning in a flooding arroyo. Probably the only exaggeration in the documentary is that all this happened in just one day.

The moon illuminates the Northern Preserve. Photo by: Barry L. White

The Preserve contains multiple petroglyph sites. Photo by: Don Meserve

Rock Art in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve

By Barb Pringle

McDowell Sonoran Conservancy master steward and McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Field Institute citizen scientist

Ancient artwork is scattered throughout the Preserve, and as with all beautiful old art pieces, we stare in wonderment and imagine what the artists were thinking about when they created these images. We want to understand the messages they communicated through their work. Like all human cultures, these ancient people who once used Preserve lands pursued a universal activity - the desire to tell their story through art and to make their place on earth known and understood.

While modern archeologists and experts in Southwestern rock art don't fully understand the meanings of the varying forms of rock art, it's universally agreed that their protection and preservation for current and future generations is essential. This is a guiding principle behind the Field Institute's Pastfinder program and the City of Scottsdale's Cultural Resources Master Plan. Working together with other interested stakeholders, including the Arizona Rock Art Coalition, Arizona State Parks, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community and the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, the goal is to promote the protection and interpretation of identified cultural resources, which in turn helps create a unique sense of place and a better understanding of the deep time frame of land use in this area.

Let's define a few terms. "Cultural resource" means any physical manifestation that tells the story of human interaction with the landscape. It includes "rock art," defined as designs that are pecked, scratched or painted on rock. There are two rock art categories: "petroglyphs," which are pecked or scratched, and "pictographs" that are painted on rock using natural pigments. Petroglyphs are typically longer-lasting, as they are made by carving the darker surface layer of rock away to expose lighter rock color underneath. The earliest documented users of the McDowells were nomadic groups of hunter/gatherers known today as Archaic peoples. They left behind traces of their life in the Preserve, one of which is estimated to be circa 7000 BC. It's estimated that Archaic

rock art in the McDowell Mountain region dates from 5000 BC to 200 AD. The Hohokam people were the next to move in, and this culture was typified by agricultural development and a more permanent stamp on the land. Hohokam style rock art is estimated to be circa 600 to 1200 AD. Next came the Yavapai people with rock art dated between 1500 and 1700 AD.

It can be difficult to distinguish which cultural group created which petroglyph, though generally style and element differences exist among the groups. Also, the amount of patina remaining over the art, known as repatination, can help to estimate image age. The basic rock art styles tend to be either abstract (geometric with heavy lines, such as ladders, grids, rakes, circles, asterisks, chevrons and X's) or representational (recognizable figures such as people or animals).

These are not mere childish scratches. According to the Arizona Rock Art Coalition, the artists were in control of their medium, and other researchers have noted that rock art doesn't seem to reflect casual activity, like modern graffiti. Rather, its frequent presence on difficult-access cliff walls and steep rock outcrops indicate considerable effort by ancient artists. And so, we ask why? What was the purpose and meaning? There are lots of theories about the function of rock art, including:

- Signs, boundaries, travel maps
- Language/expression, storytelling
- Ceremonial, religious/sacred images
- Good luck omens, clan symbols
- Hunting scenes depicting animals and people
- Astronomical - relating to the moon, sun and stars
- Solstice or equinox markings for seasonal/calendar records
- Coming-of-age ceremonies
- Artistic expressions

So far, about 75 percent of the Preserve has been surveyed by archeologists for existing cultural resources. They have formally documented 76 sites, though more are likely present as suggested by the 333 rock art petroglyph sites identified but not yet formally recorded. Moving forward, MSC, the City and other interested entities will continue to conduct resource surveys and inventory, evaluate appropriate treatments, begin educational efforts aimed at promoting an ethic of conservation archeology, and develop a volunteer stewardship program to provide for routine monitoring of key cultural resources, including petroglyphs. Stay tuned for possible future opportunities to work with experts in these areas.

Thanks to steward and cultural resources expert Don Meserve for providing information on the Preserve's rock art.

Want to learn more on this topic?

Check out the City of Scottsdale's Cultural Resource Master Plan: http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/preserve/crmp

Meserve, Don, 2003. Ancient Peoples in Scottsdale from the First Hunters and Gatherers through the Hohokam Culture – An Overview of Scottsdale's Prehistoric Sites. City of Scottsdale, Historic Preservation Office.

Archeology etiquette in the Preserve

When visiting cultural sites, minimum-impact techniques are a requirement, as these are fragile and irreplaceable resources. The City of Scottsdale's website offers these guidelines:

- Enjoy rock art by viewing, sketching, or photographing only.
- NEVER chalk, trace or otherwise touch rock art. Any kind of direct contact causes these ancient forms to disintegrate. Oils from even clean hands can cause damage and deterioration.
- Creating "modern" rock art is called vandalism and is punishable by law.
- Cultural sites are places of ancestral importance, even sacred, to Native Peoples and should be treated with the utmost respect.

Dr. Helen Rowe. Photo by Arizona State University School of Life Sciences

Meet Helen Rowe, First Field Institute Director

By Peggy McNamara
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward and
McDowell Sonoran Field Institute citizen scientist

After a nationwide search, Dr. Helen Rowe has been named first-ever Director of the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute (MSFI).

Dr. Rowe comes to us with 20 years of dedication to conservation, resource management, and coalition building. She holds a doctorate in restoration ecology (the process of restoring disturbed lands) from Colorado State University and did post-doctoral work in this area at Purdue University. Five years ago, she came to Arizona State University as an Assistant Research Professor in the School of Life Sciences, and her research interests led her to become involved with the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute. Two years ago, she became the Principle Investigator of the Field Institute's trail impacts study. This study focuses on collecting data on plants from specific plots along Preserve trails and from control plots 25 feet away from the trail. Over time, comparing the trailside data with the control data may reveal if there are changes caused by human trail use in the trailside plots. The results of this monitoring will be used to understand and manage human impact.

Dr. Rowe has also been doing other volunteer work at MSFI. She is a member of the MSFI Science Advisory Board, is on two subcommittees, and is helping to develop ecological restoration project ideas. "The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy encapsulates exactly the intersection of science and resource management that I'm interested in," she notes.

Recognizing what an enormous asset the MSFI Citizen Scientist program is to natural resource management, Dr. Rowe says, "The volunteer stewardship program offers the opportunity to do important applied research and monitoring that would otherwise be difficult to fund. This is very exciting and opens up many opportunities to answer basic questions that will improve management in the Preserve. In particular, I can think of many restoration questions that lend themselves to citizen science. Stewards can help make real progress in arid lands restoration work."

As the first Director of the Field Institute, Dr. Rowe will focus on a number of major projects. She intends to use the Ecological Resource Plan (ERP)* as the foundation to prioritize MSFI's long-term monitoring and research projects. Dr. Rowe sees that steward volunteers and community and academic partners all have roles to play in tackling the priority projects. Volunteers will cover the most essential projects, and she will work with ASU partners and others to develop research proposals that address and fund the remaining priority projects.

In recent years, Dr. Rowe has become interested in work that links science with decision-making. She has been working in the area of coalition building and partnership development. She is excited to work with other leaders in the valley to develop an eco-regional plan to coordinate efforts in monitoring, land conservation, connectivity, invasive species issues, and biodiversity protection. Dr. Rowe states, "By working with other land agencies in the valley, MSFI can more effectively achieve its own strategic goals."

Finally, Dr. Rowe wants to better understand the stewardship program and the possibilities for exporting the program, or aspects of it, to other conservancies. "This is important," she states, "because MSC has created a very successful model that should be useful to others. There are already opportunities for teaching our model regionally and nationally."

Summing up, she says, "The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the Field Institute provide an incredible opportunity to apply science-based management to protect the treasured McDowell Sonoran Preserve and to work with other leaders to build a regional coalition that can meet larger conservation goals. I am truly excited to be joining this unique and successful force in conservation."

**The Field Institute created the ERP in 2015. It identifies the Preserve's resources and lays the foundation to put their management on a scientific basis.*

Dr. Rowe takes every opportunity to perform research in the field.

Thousands of cyclists ride in the Tour de Scottsdale each year. Photo by: McDowell Sonoran Conservancy

Team MSC Trains for Tour de Scottsdale Bike Race

By Barb Pringle
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy master steward and
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Field Institute citizen scientist

While many of us escape our fierce desert summers by heading to cooler climes, lollygagging by the pool, or dashing from our air-conditioned cars to our air-conditioned homes, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's (MSC) first-ever steward-based cycling team has been out on the road all summer training for the Tour de Scottsdale (TDS) bike race, set for October 11th. The TDS, now in its 12th year, offers both a 30- and a 70-mile road race, and Team MSC will field riders in both groups. These men and women say they enjoy the challenge, the exercise and the camaraderie of riding with and getting to know other stewards.

MSC is lucky to have two enthusiastic and experienced steward team captains - Bill Heob , who is leading the 70-mile team, and Steve Dodd, training and leading the 30-milers. Steve has been riding for years and plans to help his team have a fun and fulfilling experience. Bill is a four-time State of Arizona Road Cycling Champion and a previous member of the professional Landis-Trek racing team. In addition, steward Toni Vallee, MSC's Patrol Chair, is helping to organize the training rides for the 70-mile riders since Bill headed north for the summer. He has helped Toni by providing virtual training to his team. Other riders range in ability from beginner to experienced, and team leaders stress that everyone is welcome to join the fun.

Considering joining Team MSC? Here are a few tips from our team leaders:

It's all about having fun for a good cause

Yes, this is a race, and there will be some very determined riders on the course. For Team MSC, it's important to "go have some fun and feel good that you did it," says Heob. Some of the riders have set a finishing time goal, and that's great, says Dodd, but he also stresses the importance of not taking things too seriously. And remember, proceeds from the race benefit

MSC, so you get the added bonus of doing something positive for the Conservancy.

Learn to ride with a group

Teams start as a group and there will be lots of riders at the race beginning, so it's important to learn how to comfortably and safely ride in a large crowd. Group practice rides can help prepare you for this situation, and the good news is that the crowd will rapidly start to spread out once the race begins.

Eat predictably and hydrate well

On race day, stick to your tried and true foods, and be sure to fuel up and hydrate before starting the race. Take more water than you think you'll need and take advantage of the aid stations along the route to get more fluids if you run short. Find out what portable bike fuels work for you during training rides. Heob suggests adding electrolyte powder to your water. Vallee carries a product called Sports Beans, a fuel and electrolyte snack that can be easily carried and eaten during a ride.

Prepare your body

It's extremely important that you put enough time in the bike saddle to be comfortable during the race. While this can be a challenge on hot days, it's critical so that you're prepared on race day. Heob recommends doing one long ride per week of at least three hours on the bike to be ready for the 70-mile ride. Also, during your training rides, learn how to handle your bike on flat and hilly terrains, and very importantly for beginners, how to safely descend.

Prepare your bike

Get to know your bike and accessory equipment before the race. Practice getting out of toe clips quickly and safely. Know how to change a flat and fix a chain derailment. Make sure you have a pump and good quality tires on race day, as well as a clean and properly lubricated chain.

Would you like to join the fun? It's not too late to sign up and get a discount on the entry fee. There's also a Facebook page (Steward TDS Team) where you can learn about training ride schedules and tips for having a fun and fulfilling race. E-mail Toni Vallee (tonipatrol@cox.net) or Kathy Dwyer (kathy@mcdowellsonoran.org) if you'd like an invitation to join the Facebook page or come out on a training ride.

Fun bike quotes:

"Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride." John F. Kennedy

"I thought of that, while riding my bike." Albert Einstein, on the theory of relativity

"You can't buy happiness, but you can buy a bike, and that's pretty close." Anonymous

Cyclists ride along scenic roads on the Tour de Scottsdale routes. Photo by: McDowell Sonoran Conservancy

This view shows Granite Mountain as seen from Brown's Mountain. Photo by: Barry L. White

McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and McDowell Sonoran Preserve Receive National Honor

By Barb Pringle
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy master steward and
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Field Institute citizen scientist

It took an inspired network of citizens to create Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve (Preserve) and a unique public-private partnership to steward the Preserve. The American Society of Landscape Architects will honor that vision and ingenuity this fall. The Society will present its Medal of Excellence to the City of Scottsdale and the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) on November 9th in Chicago. The award recognizes significant contributions to landscape architecture policy, research, education, project planning and design, or a combination of those disciplines.

The evolution of Scottsdale's scenic preserve required all of those facets. Since voters approved its creation in 1993, the Preserve has grown to more than 30,000 acres, making it the largest urban preserve in the United States. More than 600,000 people visit the preserve annually from around the world to enjoy a network of award-winning trails and trailheads hosted and maintained by McDowell Sonoran Conservancy volunteer stewards.

In announcing the Scottsdale award, organizers cited the public-private partnership of the city and the non-profit Conservancy to nurture and protect the Preserve, which covers roughly one-third of the city. At least five nominations were received in support of the granting of this award to MSC and the Preserve. One such nominating letter, from the Urban Land Institute's executive director Debra Z. Sydenham, noted that: "More than three decades ago, concerned citizens of Scottsdale recognized the fact that most, if not all, of the remaining undeveloped land that comprised most of north Scottsdale, was in the process of being planned for various types of development. Because of its natural beauty and close proximity to the city, this area was considered to be one of the most prime development parcels left in the entire Phoenix metropolitan area. Beginning as a grassroots effort, the MSC began a dialogue that influenced public officials, community opinion and the private sector to create partnerships where none had existed before to preserve this amazing piece of fragile Sonoran Desert for the benefit of generations to come. Remarkably, in a city best known for its resorts, golf and shopping, the MSC organized and led the campaign to educate the public about this unique environment and to gain public approval of a dedicated sales tax to purchase this land and to create the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The sales tax for preservation was approved by 64% in 1995. In order to finance future purchases to finalize the 57 square mile Preserve, the citizens of Scottsdale approved an additional sales tax in 2004 that also allowed the development of the acclaimed trailheads areas that provide public access to the Preserve, as well as serving as demonstration projects for appropriate sustainable development. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division continue this mission of conservation, education and stewardship."

Thank you 2015 Tour de Scottsdale Sponsors. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy would like to thank this year's sponsors for supporting the 2015 Tour de Scottsdale to be held Sunday, October 11th.

The Tour de Scottsdale event produced by the DC Ranch Community Council provides funding to the Conservancy to perform our mission to protect and preserve Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve for this and future generations.

There is still time to join the growing list of Tour de Scottsdale Sponsors. Contact Edward Phillips by email ed@mcdowellsonoran.org of phone (480) 998-7971 ext. 101.

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Join Our Circle of Friends

Through your support as a member of our Circle of Friends, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy can continue to protect and preserve everything you enjoy about Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Your contribution is vital to keeping the Preserve beautiful and a place to be enjoyed by this and future generations. This shared appreciation of our Sonoran desert is why we invite you to become a Friend of the Preserve by returning the membership form below. You may also make your gift online at www.mcdowellsonoran.org. Just click Support.

- ❑ Friend of the Preserve - $1 to $99
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Take a Hike!
Celebrate Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve

This view looks northward from Upper Ranch Trail. Photo by: Barry L. White

October is McDowell Sonoran Preserve Month. To celebrate, Scottsdale is hosting a free community Preserve Day event supported by the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Preserve Day will start at 8 a.m., Sunday October 18, at the Brown's Ranch Trailhead, 30301 N. Alma School Parkway.

The Conservancy plans a variety of hikes and informative activities for the day, focused on the Preserve. This scenic expanse of natural Sonoran Desert and McDowell Mountain terrain covering more than 30,000 acres is a jewel in the desert to be celebrated. Event details and complete schedule can be found starting in September at www.ScottsdaleAZ.gov/preserve, or http://mcdowellsonoran.org.