Mountain Lines



Biotic Communities

The interplay of species

Disability Community Partnerships

Creating accessible Preserve experiences Experience the Preserve

A hike across the McDowells





When I think about a community, two definitions come to mind. In a social context, a community is a group of people who share interests, values, identity, emotional connection,

Mike Nolan, Executive Director or other commonality. In biology, community refers to a group of living organisms that share an environment where they interact with one another.

This Mountain Lines celebrates both types of communities. At its heart, the Mc-Dowell Sonoran Conservancy is a community of people who share a love for Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Within our ranks we have many other communities of shared interests and experience.

These communities can enrich your involvement with the Preserve, and no experience is necessary for you to join them. You can, for example, become a citizen scientist who assists with research projects and dives deeply into learning about the natural world. You can join bike patrol and learn the pleasures of mountain biking in the Preserve. You can learn to be a hike leader. You can teach schoolchildren on the trails. Or you can bring your own interests and find others who want to join you in sharing them to benefit the Preserve.

Our understanding of the ecology of the Preserve has been enriched by identifying and beginning to study the biotic communities that occur there. Many don't realize that within the broad subdivisions of the Sonoran Desert there are a variety of smaller, distinct associations of plants and animals that function as communities.

Changes in species populations are often linked to changes in the larger natural community within which they interact. Plants and animals coexist in an ever-changing balance, and we can only interpret long-term changes in populations in the context of the communities in which they occur.

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's staff community grew recently with the addition of two new staff members. Kathy Dwver joined as director of steward operations, providing full-time staff support to all of the stewardship activities we undertake. Ed Phillips became the director of development and communications, overseeing our fundraising and marketing activities. With their help we continue to strengthen our ability to manage the Preserve.

This issue also contains our annual report, a brief summary of our 2013 results and a celebration of all who make our work possible. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy continues to grow remarkably quickly in its capabilities and expertise, and I thank all of you who have helped make it possible and who work hard to make the Preserve the outstanding ecological, recreational, and community asset it is today.

Table of Contents

Conservancy Up Close	3
Disability Community Partnerships	4
Watchable Wildlife	8
Annual Report	9
Biotic Communities of the Preserve	
A Hike Across the McDowells	14
The Equestrian Community	16
Dog Days in the Preserve	18
Spring Events	

Cover photo: Spring flowers bloom amidst the rocky Preserve landscape. Photo by: Barb Jabara

About Us

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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The Birding Community

By Peggy McNamara McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward

rab your binoculars and dust off your field guide, we're going birding in Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Our guide is Walter Thurber, former principal investigator of birdlife for the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute. Thurber, an avid birder for more than 50 years, is also a member of the Arizona Field Ornithologists, the Desert Rivers Audubon Society and the Field Institute's Science Advisory Committee.

Thurber planned and conducted all the bird surveys done in the Preserve. Starting with the first survey in January 2012, he has led experienced birding stewards on multiple surveys each year to the same six locations throughout the Preserve. These surveys identified year-round residents and seasonal migrants. The January surveys identified wintering birds. March, April and May surveys added breeding birds, and the late August and September surveys added fall migrants. Nocturnal auditory surveys in March and May identified birds by their calls.

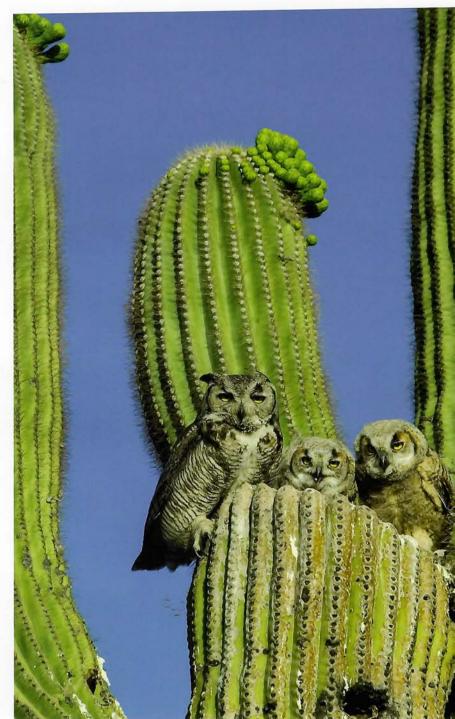
Recently, the Field Institute, the research center of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, entered its bird-monitoring phase and is working with Thurber to develop a long-term monitoring plan. This means that future seasonal counts will happen only every few years.

As of December 2013, the bird count was 128 species! Photographs sent by hikers continue to add an occasional new bird to the list of observed species. One of the last birds added to the list was the solitary sandpiper, captured on a photograph by Marianne Jensen, photographer and McDowell Sonoran Conservancy master steward. This shore bird is a rarity in our desert environment!

So keep your binoculars and camera handy when you hike in the Preserve, and you may be the next one to discover a rare bird!

Note: The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) publishes a list of some of the birds found in the Preserve and photos of the commonly found birds on our "Bird Watch" web page at mcdowellsonoran.org/content/pages/birdWatch

Check this web site for MSC-led bird hikes that occur several times a year. mcdowellsonoran.org/event



A great horned owl family nestles in the saguaro cactus. Photo by: Barry White



Unlocking Nature's Door for the Disabled Community

By Barb Pringle McDowell Sonoran Conservancy master steward

t's a sunny Thursday morning and the small community of folks settles in for their weekly 10 a.m. meeting. About 25 people, along with their facilitator, have gathered at the HealthSouth Rehabilitation Center to participate in the Aphasia Support Group, an outreach program that seeks to help those with aphasia (the inability to understand speech, caused by brain injury) continue their rehab and enjoy positive social relationships with others who share their challenge. There's a diverse age range in the group, and roughly equal numbers of men and women.

One of those women is McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) steward Wendi Ryan, a bundle of blonde, smiling energy and a very important link between the Phoenix area's disability community and Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. No one individual has done more to promote the Preserve and the value of nature to a wide range of disabled/special needs communities and the agencies who serve them. Her leadership has been evident for over five years, as she has planned, created and led activities on the Preserve's Bajada Nature Trail for a variety of disabled groups.

Opened in 2009, the Bajada
Nature Trail was designed by the City
of Scottsdale to exacting standards so
that people in wheelchairs, those with
sight challenges or ambulatory difficulties, young kids or the elderly could all
safely enjoy nature and experience the
beauty, health benefits, and healing
solace of the Sonoran Desert. In 2011,
the Bajada Nature Trail was awarded
the Arizona Disability Advocacy

Award. The Gateway, Tom's Thumb, Lost Dog Wash and Brown's Ranch trailheads all include handicapped facilities, and future accessible trails such as the Jane Rau Trail in the north region of the Preserve are soon to open.

Nature and Trails Enhance Health

It's a given, based on numerous scientifically rigorous studies, that humans need nature and that nature confers measurable health benefits to people of all ages and abilities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) instituted its Trails for Health program to encourage and promote the connection between trails and health. Benefits of regular activity, says the CDC, include better weight and blood pressure control, reduced arthritis pain and disability, as well as reduced risk for Type 2 diabetes,

Wendi Ryan (front left, kneeling) and the Aphasia Support Group enjoy the Preserve's Gateway Trailhead and the barrier-free Bajada NatureTrail. Photo by: Kathy Murdoch





Beautiful Preserve vistas along the Bajada Nature Trail. Photo by: M. Jen

heart disease and colon cancer. Further, an Australian study found a 36 percent reduction in dementia in people who spent more time outdoors.

In addition to the physical benefits of outdoor activity, there are important psychological benefits. As famed naturalist John Muir wrote, "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul." The CDC notes that regular activity reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Local outdoor enthusiasts are drawn to the Preserve's hiking trails for many reasons. Unfortunately, people with mobility, cognitive, communication, visual and/or auditory disabilities frequently face limitations in accessing activities

in which they are interested or were previously involved.

Wendi's Story

Wendi Ryan became an MSC steward in 2007. She grew up in Kansas and was a gifted student and an active track and swimming competitor. She was an excellent math student and enjoyed running. In 1997 when Wendi was only 27 years old, her life suddenly changed after suffering two cardiac arrests and a massive stroke. These catastrophic medical events permanently damaged her left brain, leaving her with acquired aphasia, which affected her mobility and communication.

Three years after her stroke, she could speak three words; after five

years, five words. Sixteen years of speech, cognitive and physical therapies have given Wendi back the use of her right arm, fingers and hand. She is an increasingly agile verbal communicator and her progress has exceeded medical expectations.

Aphasia, as defined by the National Aphasia Association, is an acquired communication disorder that impairs a person's ability to process language, but does not affect intelligence. Aphasia hampers the ability to speak and understand others, and most people with aphasia experience difficulty reading and writing; some also experience mobility, cognitive, visual and auditory disabilities. The most common cause of aphasia is stroke—about 25 to 40 percent of stroke

survivors acquire aphasia. Many people with aphasia also experience weakness or paralysis of their right leg and right arm, because those with aphasia usually have damage to the left side of their brain, which controls movement on the right side of the body.

Wendi exemplifies the spirit of the saving, "Never give up." She loves hiking in the Preserve with her two dogs. As a volunteer steward, she has donated thousands of hours of service helping the Preserve and MSC. Her efforts to promote the Preserve have not been lost on her fellow Aphasia Support Group colleagues, who see how important the Preserve is to Wendi and want to support her. She's been instrumental in organizing the group for hikes in the Preserve. After their initial visit, those who had previously been hesitant to participate were anxious to go back again. Being able to use their canes, walkers, wheelchairs, and motorized carts to and on the Bajada Nature Trail was a great release. And those who couldn't read or see the signs describing the flora and fauna on the trail were happy to have stewards along to explain the surroundings.

The disability communities in our state and across the country are full of people like Wendi, who choose to fully embrace the possible. Wendi has served as a bridge to many such groups through her contact with peers in these groups and her encouragement to get out and enjoy nature and the opportunity to hike the Preserve. Her efforts serve as a reminder to other organizations to do more to involve the disabled, as they have much to offer. She's promoted the benefits of the Preserve to Barrow's Neurological Institute, the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona, the American Heart Association, the American Stroke Association, Whispering Hope Foundation in Payson, and Camelot Therapeutic Horsemanship.

The latter group is located in north Scottsdale on a 14-acre parcel of land that's home to a variety of horses. Special needs children and adults follow a program that facilitates independence, balance, communication, speech and horsemanship while working with and riding horses. Horseback riding, says Executive Director Mary Hadsall, improves muscle tone, balance, flexibility and ambulation. Further, the relationship that participants develop with their horse is very powerful. Horses live in a non-verbal world and for people, like Wendi, with communication challenges, that quiet world can be a stress reliever.

Did you know that there are about 57 million people in the U.S., according to the 2010 Census, who have some sort of disability? The federal government's U.S. Access Board is on a mission to improve accessibility at the nation's outdoor recreation areas—parks, campgrounds, picnic areas, scenic overlooks, beaches, and hiking trails—for people with disabilities.

Improved access can also result from a concerted outreach effort to the many groups and agencies who serve this community. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and especially steward Wendi Ryan, and the City of Scottsdale are working to bring the benefits of nature to the disabled community, so that they embrace a sense of life's possibilities. The disabled founder of Camelot, Eileen Szychowski, says it well, "Take up a sword against the most formidable enemy of all...the voice within that says, 'I can't."

Want more information?

National Aphasia Association www.aphasia.org

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital, Scottsdale www.healthsouthscottsdale.com

Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona www.biaaz.org

Camelot Therapeutic Horsemanship www.camelotaz.org

Whispering Hope Ranch Foundation www.whisperinghoperanch.org

United States Access Board www.access-board.gov

A Conservancy steward answers questions on the Bajada Nature Trail. Photo by: Don Bierman



Watchable Wildlife: How to Identify an Animal Without Seeing it

By Susan Aufheimer
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward and
Field Institute citizen scientist



The white-throated wood rat (pack rat) often builds a highly-defensible cholla midden. Photo by: M. Jen

ou can learn to identify an animal without ever seeing it, because animals leave all kinds of clues for you to discover. Next time you walk in Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve, see if you can find telltale signs of the animals that

walked before you.

Take holes, for instance. The ground squirrel digs a nice, neat, round hole about two inches in diameter. The hole is usually found underneath a bush or cactus. A badger digs a big hole about six inches across, and it excavates quite a bit of dirt as it tunnels down. If you're surprised to hear mention of a badger

in the desert, you will be more

surprised to learn that they are

native to the Preserve. A badger was sighted recently for the first time in 30 years!

Contrary to popular opinion, snakes don't make holes. They live in holes vacated by other animals, often the victims of the snakes who move in after a nice meal.

Then there are tracks to inspect. Mule deer and javelina hooves are split into two toes. A deer's hoof can measure up to 3.5 inches

long; a javelina's hoof is considerably smaller, about 1.25 inche long. Bobcat tracks look a lot like the tracks of a domestic cat and are about the same size. Mountain lion tracks look like do

mestic cat tracks, too, but are easily four times larger. Another kind of track attributed

bobcats and mountain lions are the scratch marks seen in the dirt where the cat has used its

"litter box."

Finally, there is scatter examine. Scat is another name for animal droppings. Coyotes leave behind gray, fuzzy scattheir last meal was a furtheir last meal was a furtheir

It's always wonderful to see the animals that I in the Preserve. But if you're not lucky enough to see them, yo can always find signs that they were there. All you have to do open your eyes to another way of "seeing."

pear spines.

Center photo: Raccoons leave distinct tracks in the desert soil. Photo by: Jennifer Woelke

> A proud saguaro raises its arms to the deser Photo by: Barry V



From the Chair and Executive Director

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy had a robust 2013 financially, organizationally and scientifically. Financially we ended the year with assets of nearly \$1.3 million, up \$63,000 from 2012. Our unrestricted contributions were up 22% over last year and our steward volunteer hours and services were 35% higher than the previous year, close to \$850,000. All told our revenue was up 12% or \$154,000 from 2012. These numbers are from our audited 2013 financial statements which are available by contacting Mike Nolan and are summarized below.

Our financial numbers are strong but the organization we are building to steward Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve is even stronger. The Preserve, already the largest urban preserve in the Americas, added 6,393 acres, opened a new major trailhead and expanded the trail system. The Preserve now encompasses about 47 square miles which is about one-quarter of Scottsdale's land area. To serve the growing Preserve, MSC trained 133 new stewards in 2013 (a 50% increase over the preceding year) which helped us surpass 500 active stewards. Stewards devoted almost 40,000 hours to patrolling and maintaining trails, welcoming visitors, and educating the community through hikes, outreach programs, school tours, and other key activities.

We continue to address important questions regarding how human communities can best protect and sustain urban preserves. To do that we are building the scientific knowledge and the volunteer strength of the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute, our research center. This year the Field Institute completed the first-ever biological inventory of the plants and animals in the Preserve, a three-year effort funded by the Pulliam Trust. This ground-breaking work will result in

several published articles in scientific journals and is becoming the basis for an ecological resource plan that will help guide future management of the Preserve.

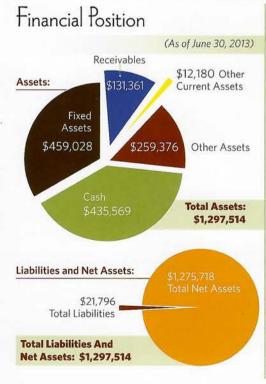
Melanie Tluczek, Manager of the Field Institute, and our twelve-member Science Advisory Committee, made up of prominent experts in Sonoran desert ecosystems, are supervising the other projects underway which are advancing our knowledge of the geology, plant communities, human impacts, and other natural features of the Preserve. We are now developing monitoring programs, partnering with universities, state agencies, at non-profit organizations to bring broad expertise and science to our management challenges and training interested stewards to create an innovative citizen-science program to do in-depth scientific work in the Preserve.

Yet with all our success, we must continue to grow at an increasing rate for the next few years. Miles and miles of new trails, new trailheads and increasing numbers of visitors are all adding to the challenge of helping our partners at the City of Scottsdale manage the largest urban preserve in the Americas. We extend our thanks to all our supporters, to those who dona hours and to those who donate dollars, for all you have done to contribute to our success and to steward Scottsdale's McDowe Sonoran Preserve for this and future generations.

Tom Headley Chair, Board of Directors Mike Nolan Executive Director

ecological areas in the Valley.

How We Measure Success



Statement of Activities Science-Based (in Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve (As of June 30, 2013) (as of December 31, 2013) 2013 Revenue: 59% **Plants** Contributed **VOLUNTEER Service:** 128 Birds 33% Cash & Pledges Mammals 5% In-Kind Donations 2% Program Service Revenue and Special Events 1% Investments Total Support and Revenue: \$1,440,014 2013 Expenses: Reptiles and 82% Program Services amphibians 9% Management and General 9% Fundraising Total of 743 plants and animals Total Expenses: \$1,379,356 identified through our Field Institute, Audited financial statements available upon request. making the Preserve one of the richest

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We gratefully acknowledge our supporters

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continued on pg. 12



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Communities in the Desert

by Susan Aufheimer McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward and McDowell Sonoran Field Institute citizen scientist

hen we think of "community," we think of a group of people linked by some common characteristic or interest. The plants and animals of Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve also form communities; however, their communities are not defined by interests but rather by their survival needs. Plants depend on animals to spread their seed and fertilize the soil, and animals depend on plants to provide sustenance and protection. These communities of flora and fauna are referred to as biotic communities.

For a biotic community to be successful, it must include three types of living organisms. First it needs producers, which are the plants and bacteria that convert energy into food. Then it needs consumers, which are animals that eat plants and other animals to survive. And finally, it needs decomposers, which are bacteria and fungi that eat dead plant or animal material.

A biotic community is identified by one to three dominant plants that have adapted to the weather, soil composition, and

altitude of their location. Plants can't move around like animals that will leave a place if it doesn't meet their demands. A plant's only choice is to adapt or die. So, identifying a biotic community by its dominant plants represents the environment of a particular area.

Plant life in the Preserve is very rich and diverse. To date, 368 species of plants have been documented (380 if you count varieties), from the giant saguaro cactus to the petite combseed, a groundcover. With so much plant diversity, the Preserve contains fourteen biotic communities. We even have a bit of semidesert grassland near Brown's Ranch and Fraesfield Mountain.

The biotic communities of the Preserve are highly organized, hard-working communities that are as efficient and productive as any community devised by humankind.



The Preserve is home to a variety of biotic communities. Map credit: McDowell Sonoran Field Institute

Legend



Triangle-leaf bursage foothill palo verde mixed scrub association



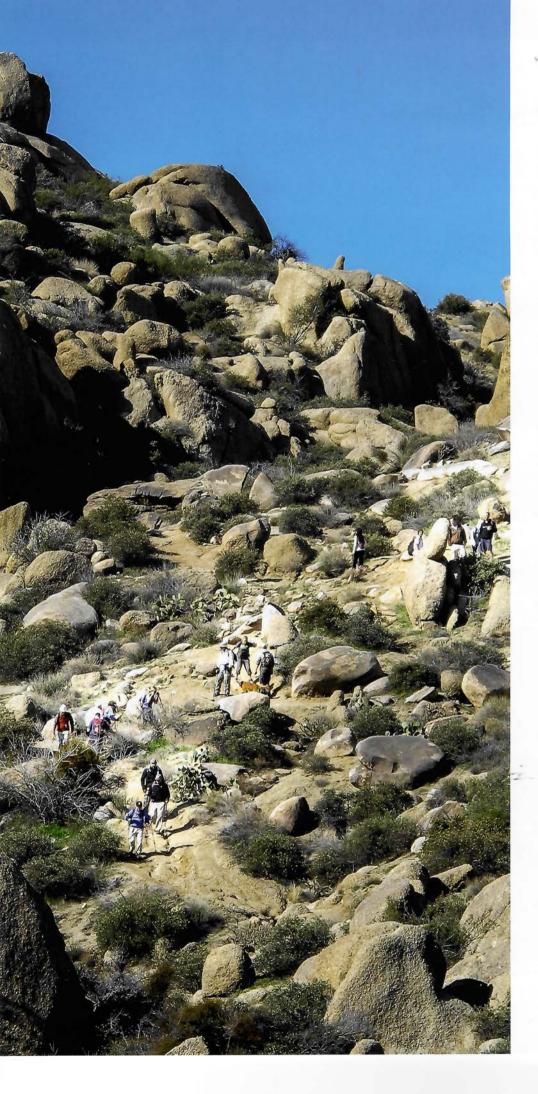
Jojoba - mixed scrub association



Brittlebush - mixed scrub association

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Hike Across the McDowells with the Grayhawk Hiking Club

By Bob Roliardi McDowell Sonoran Conservancy steward

o you want to do something to get to know your neighbors? You've done the wine-and-cheese mixer, and the annual block party needs a shot in the arm. How about doing something different? Take the example of the Grayhawk Hiking Club and their annual "Hike Across the McDowells."

The Grayhawk Hiking Club was originally founded for residents of the Grayhawk community, which consists of interconnected neighborhoods in north Scottsdale. Grayhawk is an active community that has events for all ages and interests planned throughout the year. The Grayhawk Hiking Club organizes some of these planned activities.

Former Grayhawk resident Larry
Shaw started the Grayhawk Hiking Club
in 2004. Larry wanted to share his passion for the mountains, for hiking new
trails in and around the Valley, for meeting others of like interest, and especially,
for contributing to the mission of the
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Larry
spent many hours working on construction and maintenance projects in the
Preserve, helping to build and repair

Hikers enjoy the Tom's Thumb region of the Preserve. Photo by: B.White

trails. Since Larry's move from Scottsdale, the Club has continued under organizer Kathleen Kelly and a team of co-organizers and event hosts. The "Hike Across the Mc-Dowells" is open to non-Club members.

The "Hike Across the McDowells" began in 2008 with 36 participants, who all finished the hike. "This adventure was the brainchild of both Larry Shaw and Kathleen Kelly. The goal of the event was, and still is, to create awareness of the beauty of the McDowell Mountains and provide participants the opportunity to experience hiking on the trails that lead from Fountain Hills to Scottsdale," stated club member and MSC steward Lorraine Houle.

Hikers receive transportation, commemorative shirts and opportunities to win raffle prizes from sponsors who help cover the costs. The after-celebration at a premiere sponsor location is an enjoyable part of the experience. This event has grown from 36 hikers to more than 140 in 2013.

On event day, hikers gather at 6:30 a.m. at a designated location. Buses

transport hikers and their gear to the McDowell Regional Park in Fountain Hills, where there are restrooms and drinking water, and the trek begins. It is not a race—hikers cross the Preserve at their own pace, guaranteeing an opportunity to chat with other trekkers and to enjoy the scenery.

Participants have two route choices: a moderate 12-mile trek over Windgate Pass back to Scottsdale, or the more difficult 15-mile hike, up the East End and over Tom's Thumb. The East End trail up to Tom's Thumb is one of the most strenuous climbs in the Preserve. Both groups, regardless of which route is taken, conclude their hike at the same location.

Because club members enjoy many of the trails in the Preserve, members appreciate opportunities to give back. They have helped with donations of tools and equipment, and regularly participate in volunteer work projects organized by Preserve Coordinators

Claire Miller and Robbin Schweitzer. "Stewardship of this natural resource is a shared value of the Preserve and the members of the Grayhawk Hiking Club," Miller said.

The Grayhawk Hiking Club is a great example of a community group that utilizes the natural resource of Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve, But you don't have to form a club to get the benefits. Hikes through the natural wonder of our local Preserve could benefit many types of groups such as people who work together, attend the same church, or are neighbors. Hiking together allows you to get to know people in a new and different way, by sharing a unique experience in this natural wonder. So join us. Think of a way in which your group can enrich your experiences together in the Preserve.

For information about the annual Hike Across the McDowells, visit www.grayhawkhikingclub.org.

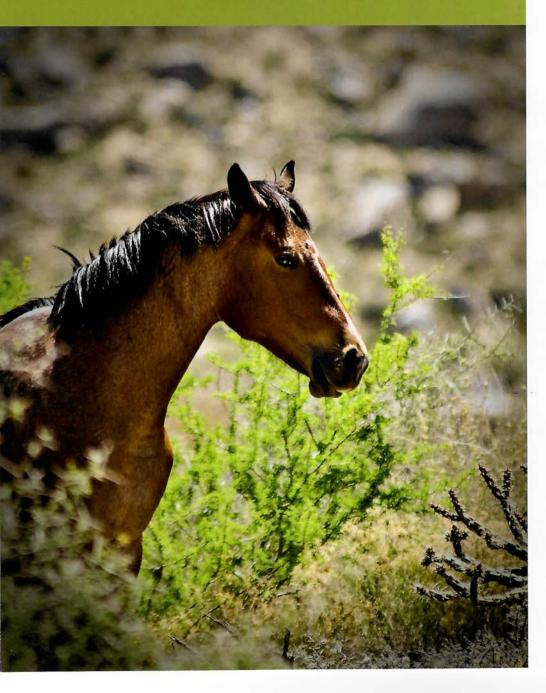
Enjoy the sights and physical challenge of a hike in the Preserve. Photo by: B.White





Equestrians in the Preserve

By Nancy Howe McDowell Sonoran Conservancy lead steward



or the majority of Scottsdale's McDow-ell Sonoran Preserve users, what we know about equestrians is limited to recognizing that horses sit atop the triangle yield signs. On a typical winter weekend at Gateway, hundreds of hikers and mountain bike riders pass through the breezeway. But few equestrians will enter the Preserve from the Gateway equestrian lot. For horses and their riders, weekends are dangerous, especially in the southern region of the Preserve where trail activity always includes bikers and runners passing on the left, going in both directions.

But in the northern region, Preserve users delight in the discovery that almost every outing includes sharing the trails with horses. For steward and equestrian Terry Holmes-Stecyk, who rides in the northern region three to four times a week, the feeling is mutual. "People like seeing horses out there. They often ask if we would stop so they can pet the horses. As a steward, it's a great opportunity for us to teach people about the Preserve and the Conservancy."

Terry is one of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's equestrian-ambassadors, a board member of the 650-member Rio Verde Horseman's Association, an MSC patroller, and an Arizona native raised on a horse ranch. Her knowledge and experience serves as a bridge between equestrians and other user communities, all of whom love the Preserve and can benefit by gaining more knowledge and understanding about each other.

Hikers, runners, and riders know that trail etiquette requires them to yield to hors es, but how, exactly, does a runner or biker yield? Terry finds that a quick anatomy les-

Horses are ideal riding companions in the Preserve. Photo by: Robert Grebe



Equestrians and hikers can comfortably co-exist on the trails, just by following a few simple etiquette and safety rules. Photo by: M. Jensen

son can be helpful. Horses, she explains, have the ability to use both eyes separately, giving them almost 350-degree visibility. Those missing 10 degrees are concentrated in two blind spots: directly in front of the horse's head, and directly behind the tail. On the trail, these two blind spots correspond precisely to the locations from which hikers, runners, and bikers suddenly appear.

Equine behavior is as important to understanding as anatomy. "Horses are natural prey in the wild, always on the alert, and sensitive to quick, jerky motions," she explains. If horses feel threatened, they can spin and run, or if approached from behind, can deliver a kick with the force of 900–1,200 pounds of muscle. "A spooked horse puts all of us at risk," she says, "the rider as well as the person who suddenly appears around a bend."

"Calm and smooth" is what Terry recommends. "If you see a horse approaching, we appreciate your stopping to greet the rider in a calm voice, allowing the horse time to identify you as nonthreatening, and asking the rider what is the best course of action," she explains. "Riders know their horse's behavior and, from their 8-foot-high perspective, are the best ones to read the trail situation."

If space allows, a rider may want to move to the side and ask you to pass, she says. Other times, if there is room, you'll be asked to give a wide berth and slowly pass the horse. It is tough to universalize the correct behavior because many trail sections in the northern region are too narrow to allow users to pass without a bit of vocal coordination. "We ask that non-equestrians never try to blast past us on a bike or run up

behind us. If you are coming up on us from behind, please call out in a calm voice and wait for us to acknowledge you and recommend action," Terry requests. While it might require a runner to slow his pace, or a biker to actually stop and give an equestrian time to respond, that is what "yielding to horses" means.

Equestrians anticipated with great excitement the transition of the northern region from state trust land to Preserve. "We are happy to take the time to explain trail etiquette; we know that knowledge is the safest tool for everyone as we learn to share the trails."

Now that the trails of the northern region are open, all Preserve user communities are learning about their new responsibilities to steward the land. Safety, trail courtesy, and mutual respect will ensure a great experience for everyone.

Dog Days in the Preserve

By Jace McKeighan

McDowell Sonoran Conservancy lead steward



he McDowell Sonoran Conservancy is committed to keeping Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve dog-friendly. As warmer weather approaches, our thoughts turn to the well-being of our furry visitors. Overheating and dehydration are always major concerns for both people and dogs in the Preserve, and they are issues that MSC stewards deal with on a regular basis every summer. To help you and your dog enjoy the Preserve, we offer a few basic suggestions.

Be especially mindful of the heat and humidity when taking your dog into the Preserve. Try to hike early in the day to avoid the hottest temperatures. If you are hot or thirsty, assume that your dog is both hotter and thirstier than you. Your dog does not have as efficient a system for dealing with the heat as you do. Because the ground temperature that your dog experiences is much hotter than the air temperature that you experience, the situation is even more dangerous for your dog. Such temperature differences are surprisingly extreme in desert conditions. The highest ground temperature ever recorded was 201° F in Death Valley, even though the maximum air temperature for that day was "only" 128° F, according to the National Park Service.

Give your pet plenty of rest and water. There are doggy water fountains at some of the trailheads, but be sure to have ample water for you and your dog on the trail. Just like you, your dog needs to stay hydrated. Since your dog cannot talk, be alert to the signs that your dog can give. For example, if your dog is stopping or lying down whenever it finds some shade, it's telling you that it needs a rest, and probably a good long drink. You may find that the summer temperatures simply prevent your dog from completing the hike you want to do, so be prepared to adjust your goals to keep your pet safe.

Consider your dog's conditioning before you head out. If your dog has not been hiking, it is no more prepared to take on a long walk than you would be if you had not trained. Hot temperatures will drain your pet's energy more quickly than at other times of the year. Select a hike that is appropriate for you and your dog.

Be considerate of others and abide by the Scottsdale ordinance that governs the Preserve. One intent of the ordinance is to protect both the Preserve and its many users. Keep your dog on a leash at all times. This will help you control your dog and avoid wild animals, other dogs, or the random cholla ball. (A standard comb is a great tool to carry to remove the unwanted cholla from your pet's coat.) A leash assures other hikers that your dog is controlled. Pick up after your dog – it's the law. Blue mitts are available at all trailheads. Remember that you are expected to carry the bags back to the trailhead to dispose of them. There is no regular waste removal service on Preserve trails.

We hope you and your dog continue to enjoy the Preserve this summer and we look forward to seeing you both on the trails.

Make sure your dog has plenty of water along the trails. Photo by: R. Raish

REI Stands by Their Motto

hank you to REI for their generous support of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Funding provided by REI over the past five years has made a significant impact in the conservation and protection of Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve, a living ecological treasure and significant wildlife habitat.

REI's generosity has been a significant factor to help increase volunteer stewardship of the Preserve. Stewardship growth is of particular importance in light of the recent expansion to more the 30,000 acres in the Preserve. REI has also assisted in several educational programs and outreach programs like the McDowell Sonoran Speakers Bureau.

"At REI our motto is to inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventure and stewardship," says Joe Impecoven, Phoenix Outdoor Programs and Market Outreach Coordinator. "That's the driving force that calls us to support such a great program as the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy."

Thank you REI for your continued commitment to help protect, preserve and share our majestic McDowell Sonoran Preserve for our community and for future generations.



Join Our Circle of Friends

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy champions the sustainability of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve for the benefit of this and future generations. Our mission is a promise to our children, and theirs – to protect and promote Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve so that it will flourish for years to come. Help us keep our promise to the future and return this form with your gift today.

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Earth Day Community Project



Saturday, April 19, 2014 8:00 a.m.

Want to make a difference in your community?

Join our Earth Day Service Project! Perfect for teens, volunteers will work side by side with stewards. Enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded people and contribute to the preservation of one of Arizona's precious natural resources. Contact Kathy Dwyer at 480-998-7971, extension 106, for more information and to get involved.

Photo by: M. Jensen