



MCDOWELL  
SONORAN  
CONSERVANCY

# Mountain Lines

MAGAZINE OF THE MCDOWELL SONORAN CONSERVANCY WINTER 2024



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**ONEAL**





Kelly McCullough, Interim CEO

Dear Friends of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy,

Welcome to the Winter 2024 Mountain Lines. This edition is not just a testament to the changing seasons but also a celebration of the tireless efforts and unwavering commitment of our dedicated community. Conservancy volunteer stewards are in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve every single day patrolling trails, teaching the public, and conducting scientific research to ensure our beautiful Sonoran Desert is conserved for the future.

Next time you see a member of our blue-shirted steward team

in action in the Preserve, take a moment to share a word of gratitude for the gift of their time and energy to our shared community. We truly could not do all that we do without their unwavering support.

This winter, let us reflect on the wonders of the Sonoran Desert, its incredible resilience, and the lessons it teaches us about adaptability and perseverance. Our desert flora and fauna show us that even in the harshest environments, life thrives with determination.

Within these pages, you will find a variety of articles, from discovering the Preserve through the eyes of our favorite four-legged friends, to diving into its fascinating and rich cultural history.

May the stories inside inspire you to connect with the natural world around you and join us in our mission to conserve, educate, and protect the Sonoran Desert. Together, we can continue to nurture the profound beauty of this unique ecosystem, ensuring that future generations will be able to experience its wonders.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to sharing this season's wonders, and adventures, with you. See you on the trails!

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# Legacy Society

Leave a legacy of conservation, care, and inspiration for the next generation



*"We give to the Conservancy because their mission aligns with our beliefs. Maintaining open space for future generations to enjoy promotes positive mental and physical health. Also, the Conservancy's education program working with school districts helps make young people more ecologically aware and better stewards of our planet."*

*Including the Conservancy in both our Trust, and today through making annual donations, allows us to share the good fortune we've experienced in our lives."*

- Gary and Mary Dokes

## About Us

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy preserves and advances natural open space through science, education, and stewardship. We create a culture that ensures, preserves, and values natural open spaces for all to enjoy.

Connect with us:



Cover photo: This biker is learning early that planning your route before hitting the trails is key to a safe and fun outing in the Preserve. Photo by Dennis Eckel

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*Including the Conservancy in both our Trust, and today through making annual donations, allows us to share the good fortune we've experienced in our lives."*



# New Police Park Ranger Unit Provides Additional Law Enforcement Resources for the Preserve

By Scott Hamilton, Natural Resources Manager, City of Scottsdale Community Services

With the launch of a park ranger unit, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve has new resources available from the Scottsdale Police Department (SPD). A team of three sworn police officers is now dedicated to the community's parks and the Preserve.

"The vision of the unit is to keep the city park and Preserve system safe and enjoyable for everyone who comes and uses the system," Sgt. Greg Masten, Supervisor of the park ranger unit, said at a recent informational session for Conservancy stewards.

The community has long been proactive in forming management objectives, rules, and regulations to protect the natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the Preserve. These elements are embodied in Chapter 21 of the Scottsdale Revised Code, also known as the Preserve Ordinance, and are carried out through the unique partnership between the City of Scottsdale and the Conservancy.

Primarily, this is done by educating and advising the public of the rules and regulations of the Preserve, asking for their compliance, and explaining

the importance of following the rules. Educational efforts have proven to be highly effective at protecting the Preserve and keeping people safe, but effective management cannot rely on education alone.

Launched in Fall 2023, the new park ranger unit focuses on proactively addressing public safety matters and partners with our Preserve management team to meet both education and enforcement needs across the Preserve. It is important to note that all SPD resources previously available to the parks and Preserve are still available.

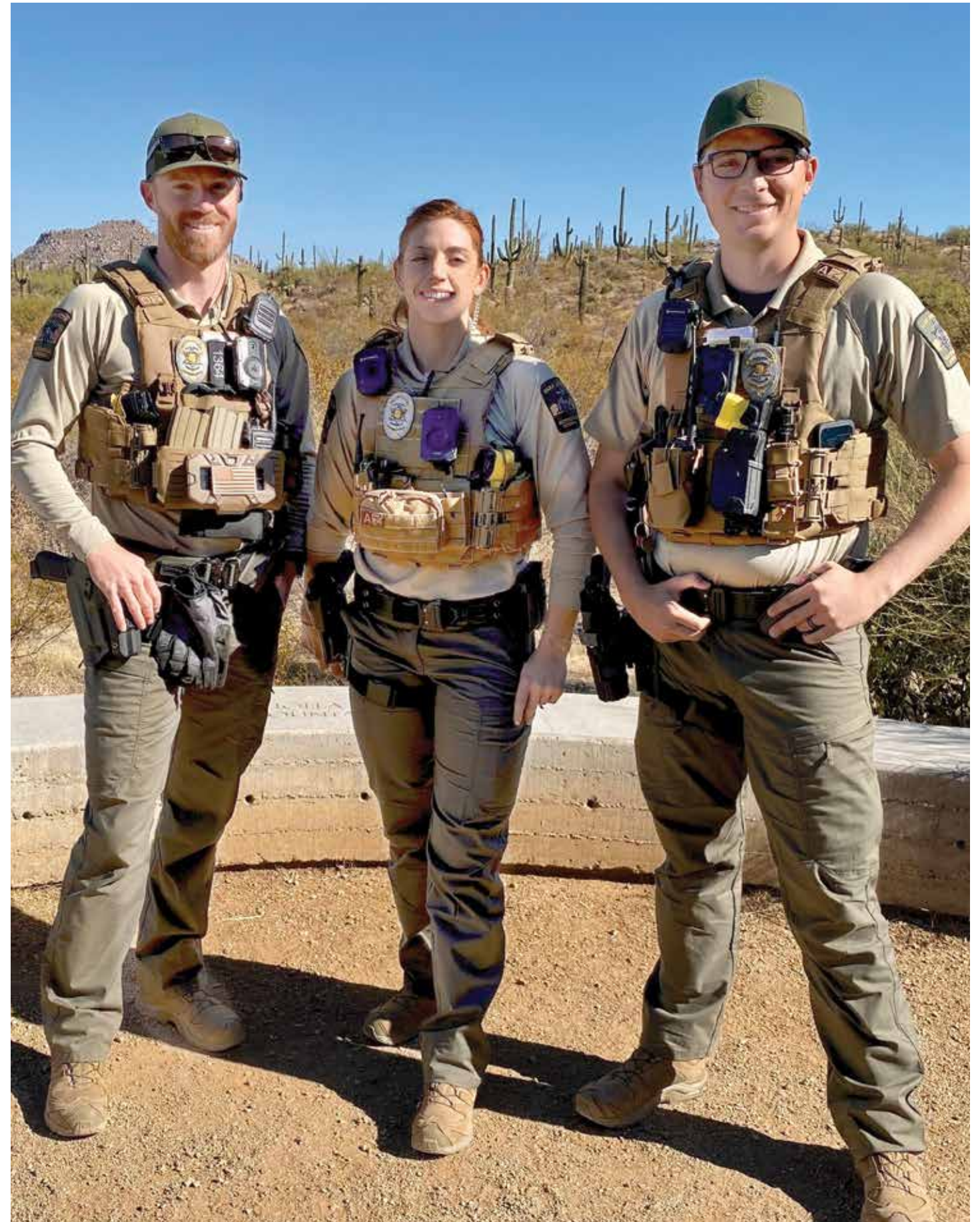
Each member of the new unit has a connection to the Preserve and a love for the outdoors. "I went to school to be a park ranger, so this is what I always wanted to do," said Hayden Scott, who has been with the SPD for three years and is the youngest member of the team. He has a degree in park and recreation management, enjoys the outdoors, and says that Tom's Thumb Trail is one of his favorite hikes.

Adam Saylor has been at the SPD for more than 12 years, spending much of his time working at or near the

Preserve. "My background is with the outdoors...Eagle Scouts when I was a kid, mountain biking, and running...it seemed like this was a natural fit," said Saylor.

"I love fitness and being outdoors," said Amber Fleming who has been with the SPD for more than four years. She enjoys mountain biking and has taught her children how to ride the trails at the Brown's Ranch Trailhead. "I think this is a dream job for all three of us and we wouldn't want to be anywhere different."

From the earliest days of the Preserve, the SPD has been an integral part of our Preserve management team and this new unit will be an extension of those resources. SPD officers and personnel will continue to serve an important role in the planning and design of Preserve infrastructure, the language and placement of signs throughout the Preserve, the education of our Preserve visitors, and the enforcement of laws when necessary.



The new park ranger unit, left to right, Adam Saylor, Amber Fleming, and Hayden Scott. Photo by Denise Villalon



# Keeping the “Wild” in Wildlife

By Jessie Dwyer,  
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy  
Biodiversity Manager



Wild animals like this cactus wren have specialized diets that help them stay properly nourished. It's best not to feed wild animals as it may cause illness, malnutrition, and habituation. Photo by Lynne Janney Russell

If you are anything like me, you have a deep respect and compassion for animals. Our hearts call us to help animals that appear in distress. However, we must be very careful about how we interact with wild animals to ensure that we are not causing more harm than good. In general, approaching, removing, or feeding wild animals is very strongly discouraged. Even with the best intentions, our actions can have detrimental consequences.

It is almost never necessary to approach or handle wildlife. Unless clearly injured or in imminent danger (i.e., in the middle of the road), wild animals do not need our help. If you

are concerned about sick, injured, or abandoned wildlife, it is critical that you contact a wildlife professional to assess the situation. Sometimes an animal may seem like it is in distress when it is not. For example, many people think that baby animals have been abandoned, when their mother is actually nearby or returning soon. Young wild animals that have been removed from the wild may not ever be able to be released as they have not learned enough skills to survive. So, if you ever find that your backyard has been turned into a bobcat daycare, the best thing you can do is not disturb the bobcats and enjoy the special moment until they leave.

Some animals are protected by law. For example, the Sonoran Desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) is a sensitive species protected by the state of Arizona. It is illegal to remove a desert tortoise from the wild or release



The Conservancy is tracking Sonoran Desert tortoises, a sensitive species protected by the state of Arizona, as part of an authorized research study evaluating the effect of urban stressors on tortoise movement. The equipment attached to their shell allows for tracking but does not cause them harm. Photo by Adam Rader

captive tortoises into the wild. These actions can be detrimental to the health of the population by increasing stress of the individual, increasing risk of disease spread, and ultimately resulting in population declines. If you find a desert tortoise in the wild, please admire it from afar. If you see a desert tortoise that is injured or in a populated area, please call the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Desert Tortoise Adoption program (844-896-5730) so they can help make the best decision for that tortoise.

Do not feed wild animals. Feeding animals can lead to habituation, a reduction of an animal's natural fear of humans, which increases wild animal presence around more populated areas. If a bird has ever demanded your food at a restaurant, you have seen habituation in action. Wild animals in populated areas are more subjected to vehicle injury and more susceptible to harm from humans. Further, many wild animals have very specialized diets, and human foods can cause illness and malnutrition. To avoid attracting wildlife to populated areas, keep your human food, pet food, and trash securely stored out of the reach of wild animals.

Ultimately, the best thing we humans can do to keep wild animals safe, is to let them be wild animals! In most cases, it's best to let wildlife eat their natural food and exist in their natural home. For the safety of you and the animals, admire wild animals from afar and take steps not to attract them to populated areas. And remember, if you are concerned about a wild animal, call a wildlife professional. ▲▲



An ethical way to interact with wildlife is by viewing them through binoculars or cameras. This motion-and-heat sensor trail camera captured a rare glimpse of mountain lions, a cryptic and elusive species that are difficult to spot in the wild. Photo provided by McDowell Sonoran Conservancy



If you see baby wild animals alone, like these bobcats, that does not mean they have been abandoned. Do not remove them from the wild; their mother is likely nearby or will be back soon. Photo by Lynne Janney Russell





# It's a Dog's Life in the Preserve

By Susan Matthews, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Master Steward  
Photography by Dennis Eckel, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Steward

It's not every day that we get to interview and photograph dogs. And because we were talking with them at a trailhead in McDowell Sonoran Preserve, they were their happiest selves and quite chatty. Here's what they had to say.



**Maya, Golden Retriever, age 4**  
**Hikes with Meg and Bill**

I'm the luckiest dog because I get to come out to the Preserve every weekend. It's so great to see the other dogs and all the people, and I just love to walk. I've never seen a snake on the trails, but I've been through rattlesnake training. Maybe today is the day I can put that training to the test.

**Yetti, Husky mix, age 3**  
**Hikes with Winsome**

When Mom gets out her backpack and hiking shoes, I know what that means. Before we even leave the house, I'm bouncing with excitement. Once summer ended, Mom promised we could come to Brown's Ranch every weekend and I'm holding her to that. She is super careful about water in the desert. I carry two bottles, she carries two more bottles for me, and she has two for herself. She's pretty smart.

*Continued on page 10*







**Nico, Chihuahua terrier mix, age 3  
Hikes with Tom**

This is my seventh time at the Preserve, and I love it. But sometimes I freak out when I see other dogs. It makes me want to get off my leash, although I know I can't do that. My Dad works hard to keep me safe in the desert. We usually hike on wider trails so I don't get stickers on my coat or paws. He also tries to give me water on the trail, but I'm usually too distracted to drink.

**Dieter, German Shepard, age 2  
Hikes with Joan**

I like meeting and greeting others on the trails most. It's fun to see other dogs, but do you know who I like best? Humans.



**Jamie, Golden Retriever, age 4  
Hikes with Anna**

I like hiking out to the ranch relics at Corral and Brown's Ranch Road. Before we head out, and after we get back, I drink a lot of water at the trailhead. I know how to put my paw on the knob to make the water flow, but I haven't yet mastered how to press down hard enough. I'll keep working on that.



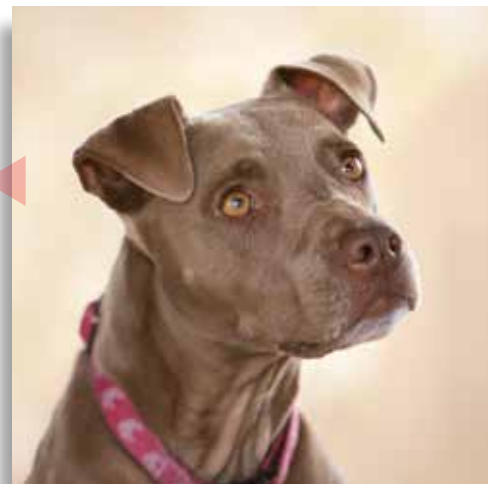
**Schmuey (Schmoo ee), Samoyed, age 4  
Hikes with Brandon**

I live by the Lost Dog Wash Trailhead, so I go there a lot. I hike Sunrise Peak and Dixie Mine and have gone up to six miles, but I know I can go further. My goal is to hike eight miles. Of course, I never ever go off leash. If I didn't have my leash, I'd be running after rabbits and snakes and getting into all kinds of trouble.



**Beasley, American Staffordshire Terrier and Chihuahua mix, age 3  
Hikes with Maureen and Daniel**

I had so much fun during my first time at the Preserve, I'm back for a second visit. It's not just that they have treats for me at the trailhead, though that's pretty cool. I love the desert! And I love all the attention I get. In fact, I kind of expect it and don't understand it when humans don't stop to say hello. Also, I'm strong. I've done eight-mile hikes and could have gone further, but my parents tired out.



**Peach, Labrador Retriever with dwarfism, age 5  
Hikes with Frances and Gary**

Usually, Mom takes me walking in the neighborhood, so it's extra special to be out in the Preserve. I'm excited to check everything out. I wonder if I'll see a rabbit. I'll be on my leash, just like when I'm in the neighborhood. I'm used to that and don't really mind at all.

**Max, Yellow Labrador Retriever, age 4  
Hikes with Frances and Gary**

Peach is my sister, and we love doing things together. It doesn't get much better than checking out new trails in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. My humans are taking really good care of us here. They've packed water and a collapsible bowl. Mom took several blue bags from the dispensens. (I honestly think she'll have extras.)



**Cleo, Black Labrador Retriever Australian Shepherd mix, age 3  
Hikes with Maggie**

Most days I'm a therapy dog for a darling little girl, and I love that. But today is my day off, and our whole family is going for a hike. What a special treat! My owner even wears a tee shirt that says, "Life is Better With Dogs."



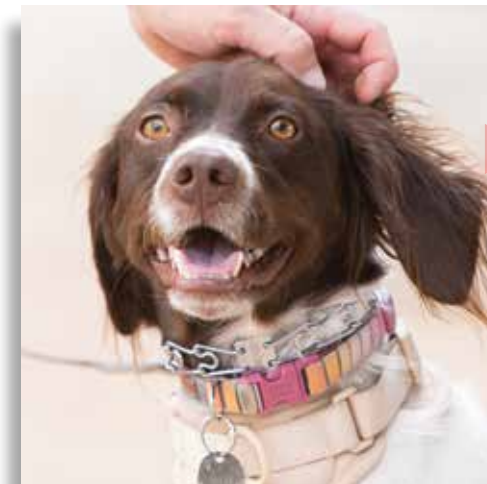
**Saba, Husky, age 13  
Hikes with Laurel and Justin**

I'm 13, which makes me older than most of the dogs out here in the Preserve. But my age doesn't stop me from loving the fresh air and getting exercise. It's a beautiful place to hike. I haven't encountered any snakes, which makes my Mom especially happy. What's my favorite hike? It's heading out on Upper Ranch Road.



**Nova, Brittany, age 2  
Hikes with Laurel and Justin**

I come out to the Preserve with my older sister Saba (above) every few weeks, and we like to do loop trails. I get super excited when I see horses. I want to chase them, so it's a good thing my parents keep me on a leash. I'm two years old and full of energy. Everything excites me! The desert is a great place to explore new things.





# ROCK ON!

## A Crown Jewel of a Mountain

By Joanne Paolini, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Steward  
 Photography by Dennis Eckel, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Steward

Gigantic granite boulders have weathered into interesting shapes. Photo by Dennis Eckel

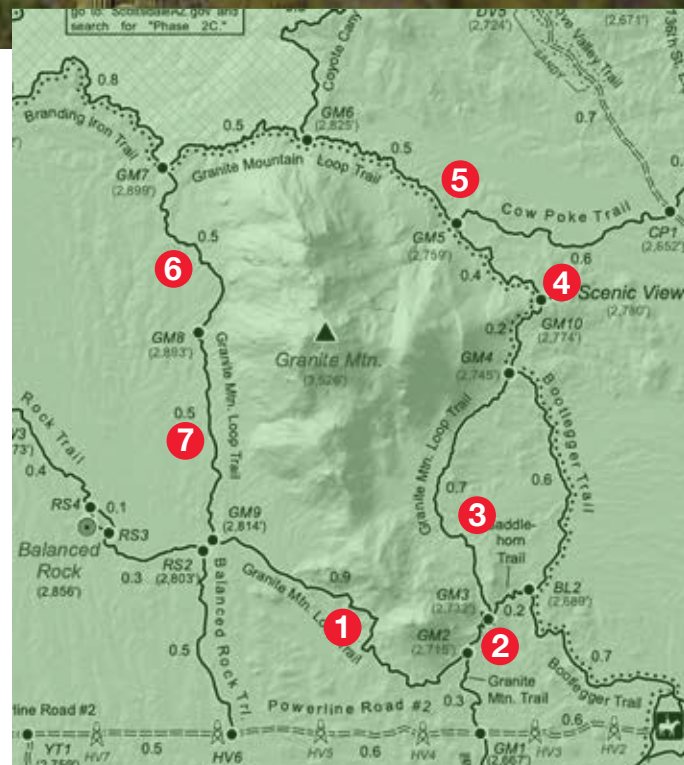
Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve is a vast, sustainable desert habitat that spans over 30,500 acres. It is the largest urban preserve in the contiguous United States and is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna.

For me, Granite Mountain, one of five mountains in the northern portion of the Preserve, is the crown jewel. The Granite Mountain Loop trail offers some of the best views in the entire Preserve. You can escape from the city for a hike, bike ride, or horseback ride on this 5.5-mile trail that circles the mountain.

Start your hike at the Granite Mountain Trailhead (31402 N. 136th Street, Scottsdale, Arizona) using

the map (right) that highlights just a few of the special places you can see when touring the loop trail.

**#1** The Granite Mountain Loop trail is known for its show-stopping saguaros (*Carnegiea gigantea*). These cacti look as though they are welcoming you with open arms. They are a critical component of this ecosystem and host a variety of wildlife. You might see white-winged



**NOTE:** If you're viewing this on your computer, click on the map numbers and you'll see a short video of some of the trail highlights. If you're viewing a printed copy of the magazine, use the QR code on page 13 to view the videos on your smart phone.

doves (*Zenaida asiatica*), woodpeckers, cactus wrens (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), or even bats. There are often raptor nests cradled among a saguaro's arms, and saguaro skeletons are host to countless small insects and bugs.

**#2** The rock garden, as some people call it, references a spot where the rocks are too large for some to bike over, and it is best to walk with careful steps. These spots are a great example of the granite that makes up this majestic mountain.

**#3** The trail takes you around the boulder-strewn peak, but make sure you look up at the large granite boulders that have been weathered into odd formations. The geology of this mountain shows us that it was originally covered by soil. Over millions of years, the soil around these boulders washed away with the elements and exposed these incredible rocks, which are continuously weathering and ever-so-slowly changing shape.

**#4** Going north on the east side of the mountain there is a well-marked scenic viewpoint. It's worth the short walk to capture some great views to the east of this mountain. Looking northeast, you can see the Bartlett Lake Dam in the Tonto National Forest.

**#5** Here, you'll find a typical section of the trail, which is popular for biking, walking, or riding your horse. Volunteers keep the trails well maintained without disturbing the natural landscape.

**#6** When you arrive on the west side of Granite Mountain Loop Trail and start a gentle descent, note the unusual boulders cascading down to the trail.

**#7** The lower part of the west side is a gradual downhill trail from north to south with a great view of Tom's Thumb to the south.

Since there are five seasons (the fifth season being monsoon season from July to mid-September) in the Sonoran

Desert, you will see a variety of plants at various times of the year. There are also several trails that branch off from the Granite Mountain Loop trail that offer additional hikes that are worth exploring.

It is always helpful to take along a trail map, even if you feel you don't need one. In addition to being a resource during your hike, they make a great souvenir. ▲▲



See some of the oldest and most impressive saguaro cactus in the area. Photo by Dennis Eckel



Scan this QR code with your smart phone to view the short videos described.





*During the spring, Granite Mountain offers some of the best wildflower displays in the Preserve. Photo by Dennis Eckel*



# Decrease Fire Risk While Attracting Pollinators Like Birds and Butterflies with Native Plants

By Melanie Tluczek,  
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy  
Director of Science and Education



Queen caterpillars feed on several species of milkweed, including desert milkweed, a native plant that thrives in local gardens and landscapes. Photo by Lynne Janney Russell



The desert willow is a fast-growing native plant that produces highly fragrant blooms that persist throughout the summer, drawing in hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees. Photo by Lynne Janney Russell

We all feel lucky when birds, butterflies, and other pollinators visit our yards and open spaces. They bring a burst of color, a sense of wonder, and the ability to help plants propagate and proliferate. What if we could increase habitat for pollinators in our urban spaces while also helping decrease fire risk to our communities and places like the Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve? You can, by swapping your fountain grass for native plants!

Fountain grass is a common landscape plant, one that you may have in your yard or notice around the neighborhood. It is a large bunch grass that was brought to the United States as an ornamental plant because it is decorative and drought hardy.

However, fountain grass spreads outside of landscaping easily, establishes in dense populations, and puts our desert spaces at risk for hotter and larger fires than would be the case with native plants. Additionally, it has low wildlife value, with fewer native species using it for shelter or food.

Native plants are adapted to the climate and conditions of the Sonoran Desert and are part of the complex and interconnected web of life that makes the area unique. The Preserve has about 370 species of native plants that have been documented by the Parsons Field Institute. Native plants are naturally low water usage, saving you money and resources. They are already adapted to the local environment, so are more likely to do well



A native alternative to fountain grass is side oats grama which has a similar appearance and can grow up to three feet tall. Photo by Lynne Janney Russell

when transplanted. They also support and attract more butterflies, birds, and other pollinators, benefiting the local ecosystem and bringing joy to our lives.

With so many plants to choose from, it can seem overwhelming. Here are some recommendations for native plants that are widely available and make lovely additions to any landscape.

If you are looking to replace your fountain grass with another decorative grass, look no further than side oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*). This beautiful native grass can grow up to three feet tall. The flowering stalks emerge during late summer and early autumn and produce seeds that hang jauntily to one side, hence the name side oats. Grasses are not often touted as pollinator plants, but they are vital to

the life cycle of many butterflies. Side oats grama and other similar grasses are host to several species of skipper butterflies, as well as moths.

Speaking of butterflies, the monarch butterfly is dependent on milkweed to complete its life cycle. Desert milkweed (*Asclepias subulate*) is a host plant for monarch butterflies, queen butterflies, tiger moths, honeybees, and many native bees. It grows to four feet tall with a spray of dusty bluish-green branches that make an attractive accent. The white flowers appear throughout the spring and summer, depending on water and temperature. It is one of the hardiest milkweeds, making it a landscaping staple.

The last is a personal favorite, the

desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*). This medium-sized tree is tough as nails but wispy and beautiful. It sports long, narrow leaves and large tubular flowers that range from pale pink to deep magenta. It requires little water, is heat resistant, and grows quickly, making it a delight for the less patient gardener. The flowers are highly fragrant and persist throughout the summer, drawing in hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees.

These are only three possible native plants that can easily replace fountain grass in your yard or space. The best way to find out more is to pay a visit to your local native plant nursery. Happy planting! ▲▲



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Enable the ecological maintenance of 30,500+ acres of Sonoran Desert in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve by donating your car today!

SCAN HERE

# Meet the Specialists

The professionals employed at the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy include experts in conservation, biodiversity, education, and program management. Our staff members partner with hundreds of knowledgeable and skilled volunteer stewards to conduct dozens of conservation, education, and creation projects, research studies, and other activities each season.

Meet some of our amazing boots-on-the-ground specialists here!

## Sydnee Glass, Administrative Coordinator

Bio: I have a background in environmental health and research with Midwestern University in Glendale, Arizona. I earned a Bachelor of Science in public health and environmental studies from the University of Arizona. Once graduated, I was hired with the Conservancy to support administrative processes and programs. I fell in love with the work that the stewards do and enjoy volunteering in Conservancy programs whenever possible. When I am not working with the Conservancy, I enjoy spending my time practicing yoga, traveling, and doing things outdoors – especially hiking in the Northern Preserve!



*“Having grown up in Arizona, my passion for conservation is rooted in my love for the desert and my belief that there is a connection between a thriving environment and the well-being of people. I take pride in the work that we do, which actively protects the Preserve that I grew up loving and intrinsically creates a greener, healthier world for all!”*

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# Meet the Specialists



**Robin Sprague, Program & Events Manager**

At the Conservancy, I support our steward programs, volunteers, and special events as we preserve natural open spaces for everyone to enjoy. My background is in outdoor and environmental education. I studied at George Williams College and received my Bachelor of Science from Arizona State University in Outdoor Recreation with a minor in Natural Resource Management. Before joining the Conservancy in 2020, I spent many years as an adventure summer camp director in both the western United States and the Caribbean and managed my family's environmental education/adventure center in Wyoming. In my free time, I volunteer in the arts, and I enjoy hiking, birding, playing the piano, photography, and spending time with my family.

*"Ever since I can remember, I have known that we each have a responsibility for the Earth. In turn, nature provides power for healing our minds and bodies and teaches us wisdom."*



**Kerry Quinn, Development Manager**

Bio: I have been working in non-profit fundraising for nearly 10 years since graduating from Southwestern University with a B.A. in Biology. I moved to Arizona from Texas in 2021 and started with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy in 2023. My current focus is on corporate and foundation relations with an emphasis on fundraising and revenue growth.

*"I love working at the Conservancy because I get to be creative and find new ways to support a cause that I'm passionate about! I feel lucky to be involved in the incredible conservation and education work happening here. Hiking on the job is a great added bonus!"*



**Melanie Tluczek, Director of Science and Education**

I moved to Arizona 20 years ago and immediately fell in love with the Sonoran Desert. I earned a Master of Science degree in wildlife ecology from Arizona State University, studying the diet and water requirements of pronghorn antelope, and learning about the local plants. After graduation, I landed at the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy as their research coordinator, where I worked with the steward and staff team to develop the Parsons Field Institute and citizen science program. In my current role I have the joy of working with a dynamic team of staff and stewards to combine science and education to create an integrated kindergarten through grade 12 STEAM program. Our hope is that this program will provide students of all ages with opportunities to learn about the Preserve and the Sonoran Desert, and to see themselves as stewards.

*"The Sonoran Desert and the Preserve are incredibly special places, and I feel very lucky to be able to make protecting them my career. My goal is to make these special places accessible to everyone."*



**Bridget Blixt, Chief Operating Officer**

Bio: I have worked in the nonprofit industry for more than 25 years. I worked with the American Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services for 13 years traveling to military bases world-wide and worked at the Phoenix Indian Center for the 14 years. I have expertise in operations, workforce development, fundraising, and social media. I am a food and travel enthusiast and enjoy the outdoors. I am also a Buffalo Bills die-hard fan and a Parrot Head to boot – Fins Up!

*"I always wanted to make a difference in people's lives and create a positive impact in the community. After working in emergency services helping underserved youth and adults, joining an organization with an environmental focus matched another passion – protecting the earth for future generations – a natural next step in my career!"*





# Not Your Average Teddy Bear

by Robbi Fowler, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Steward

These green-yellow flowers are marked with lavender petals, making them a beautiful sight to behold in the springtime. Photo by Dennis Eckel

**T**eddy-bear cholla (*Cylindropuntia bigelovii*) may look adorably cute, but they are not cuddly, stuffed animals. Their spines are barbed and attach to anything that gets too close. While these spines enter skin easily, they resist removal due to their tufts of tiny hairs (*glochids*) that may seem innocuous but stay beneath the skin and irritate long after the needlelike spines are gone. *Glochids* are not easy to see, are challenging to remove, and easily penetrate clothing.

Since encounters with this formidable cactus cause such discomfort, each new steward at the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy receives a

“cactus kit” containing a comb, tweezers, and adhesive bandages. Stewards use these tools often to assist visitors, or their pets, who come into contact with a teddy-bear cholla. Inadvertent encounters with cholla balls can happen anytime in Scottsdale’s McDowell Sonoran Preserve, so it would be wise to prepare your own kit and always keep it handy in your pack. To safely remove cholla balls, place the comb between the cactus segment and the skin and quickly flick the cholla ball off and away from the other nearby people and pets. Check the skin for needles and hairs and tweeze them out, being careful not to break them off

under the skin. Also, after a hike, check your boots for spines embedded in the soles and use tweezers to remove them.

Teddy-bear cholla prefer rocky, sandy soil, on a southern slope or in a desert wash. A mature teddy-bear cholla can grow to five feet. The base becomes trunk-like with age as the brownish-black mature branches die and fall off, leaving the newer yellow segment growth on top. To reproduce, “fuzzy” joints break off and root into the ground where they have landed. Segments detach easily, so even a strong wind or animal can carry them to areas where they can quickly take

root. During a hike with your dog, be sure to periodically check his coat and paws for any cholla “marbles,” the dried, spiny remains of the cholla’s flowers.

Despite the teddy-bear’s more annoying qualities, it does have a few fans. Packrats (*Neotoma abigula*) gather the loose segments to use as defensive armor for their nests. Several predators



Packrats are known to collect loose cholla segments to line the entrances of their burrows as a defense mechanism against predators. Photo by Dennis Eckel

who might otherwise choose the inhabitants of a nearby packrat nest for their next meal are deterred by the vicious spines. Hummingbirds and bees love the plant’s flowers, and native, non-stinging solitary bees will sleep inside the flowers when they close at night. Cactus wrens (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*), curve-billed thrashers (*Toxostoma curvirostre*), and white winged doves (*Zenaida asiatica*) like the plant for its defensible nesting opportunities. What little fruit produced is eaten by mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and javelina (*Tayassu tajacu*).

Though the branches of the teddy-bear cholla may look like the limbs of a lovable stuffed bear, they are far from embraceable. Indeed, they are an accident waiting to happen. When hiking in the desert, learn to recognize them and be attentive; appreciate their traveling strategy and be sure to carry a comb and tweezers. ▲▲



Cholla populations become dense colonies, forming thickets of impenetrable, needle-bearing shrubs. Photo by Dennis Eckel

## Teddy-bear Cholla Quick Facts:

**Scientific Name:** *Cylindropuntia bigelovii*

**Common Name:** Teddy-bear cholla

**Family:** Cactaceae, cactus family

**Synonyms:** (*Opuntia bigelovii*)

**Status:** Native

**Duration:** Perennial

**Size:** Up to five feet

**Growth Form:** Tree, shrub, sub-shrub; densely branched, branches shorter than trunk.

**Leaves:** Leaves modified into spines or glochids and emerging from areoles.

**Flower Color:** Pale yellow, pale green, greenish yellow, sometimes lavender streaked.

**Fruit:** Deciduous

**Flowering Season:** March to June and again in September.

**Elevation:** Up to 3,000 feet

**Habitat Preferences:** Sandy flats, gravelly to rocky washes, bajadas and hillsides, warm slopes in desert mountains; found in both Mojave and Sonoran Deserts.





# Tour de Scottsdale is Off to a Healthy Start with HonorHealth as its Title Sponsor

By Vickie McWatters, McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Director of Development & Marketing

The HonorHealth Tour de Scottsdale slated in April promises amazing views, thrilling challenges, and positive community impacts. Photo by Dennis Eckel

We recently connected with Todd LaPorte, CEO at HonorHealth, about the nonprofit healthcare organization's decision to support the Tour de Scottsdale as the title sponsor. Hosted by the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, the event will generate critical funds to support our mission. LaPorte shares his insights about the Blue Zone concepts, how the race supports the local community, and the status of his own training efforts.

The race, which took a short hiatus during COVID, is slated for April 13, 2024.



Todd LaPorte, CEO of HonorHealth, plans to do some of his Tour de Scottsdale race training at the Lost Dog Trailhead in the Preserve.

To register or get more information, go to the event website at: [www.tourdescottsdale.org](http://www.tourdescottsdale.org).

## Q: Why support the Tour de Scottsdale as the title sponsor?

We are excited to see the return of the Tour de Scottsdale and honored to play a role in getting it off the ground. As a healthcare system with roots in the Valley that go back almost 100 years, we know the impact being active has on overall health. We want to do everything that we can to encourage people to live a healthy lifestyle.

Our hope is twofold: that our involvement will encourage other organizations to get involved, and that we will encourage cyclists from the Valley and beyond to see all that Scottsdale has to offer. We also hope this event becomes an annual tradition, growing in popularity year after year.

## Q: How does the Tour de Scottsdale fit into HonorHealth's Mission?

HonorHealth's mission is to improve the health and well-being of those we serve, and we want to be the partner of choice as we transform healthcare for our communities. That transformation starts before people get sick. It means encouraging people to stay active, to get connected to their communities, and to live a healthy lifestyle. These are all principles that the cycling community already knows, but this will be another opportunity to spread the message broadly in the Valley.

## Q: What social or community-oriented initiatives are associated with this sponsorship?

In addition to being the title sponsor for the Tour de Scottsdale, we are also the primary sponsor for the Blue Zone's Project Scottsdale. This community initiative, which will also launch in 2024, is an organized effort to transform the environments where people live, work, learn, and play to make healthy choices easier for all.

Cycling enthusiasts already

incorporate many of these characteristics into their lifestyle, and the Tour de Scottsdale will shine an even brighter light on the benefits of adopting the Blue Zone's core principles.

## Q: What is the Scottsdale Blue Zone initiative?

The Blue Zone concept is based upon an in-depth study of communities around the world where people live longer, better lives with improved productivity. By working to implement those concepts in other places, the end goal is to empower healthier choices and build healthier environments that benefit not only individuals, but the entire community. While this effort is starting in Scottsdale, we expect that the impact will be felt throughout the Valley and all of Arizona.

## Q: What engagement do you hope to achieve with the Tour de Scottsdale?

We hope that HonorHealth's involvement will lead other organizations to get involved and provide a foundation for the community to come

together to support this event, the riders, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, and many amazing nonprofits who will benefit from the cyclists' fundraising efforts. This will truly be a community event made up of participants, volunteers, and organizations coming together to impact positive change in the Valley, and we are excited to play a leading role.

## Q: Have you started training for the race yet?

Walking before I run... before I spin. But the training is the best part, and while I realize April will be here before we know it, I'll be ready. I love the Lost Dog Trailhead that is maintained by the Conservancy. So, if you see me out there, please say hi!

## Q: How will you measure the success of this sponsorship?

We know that the return of the Tour de Scottsdale by itself will be a success for the community on many levels. At HonorHealth, we will be encouraging our team members and physicians to

participate, and we can't wait to see all the smiles, cheer loudly, and feel the energy of cyclists enjoying a ride through the Sonoran Desert while supporting so many amazing nonprofits across the Valley. ▲▲

## Implement the Blue Zone Concepts in the Preserve

Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve is a perfect place to practice many of the Power 9 concepts. This is a set of nine healthy lifestyle habits that are common among people living in Blue Zones, regions around the world that have lower rates of chronic diseases and longer life expectancies. These habits include:

- Move naturally as a part of daily routine.
- Have a sense of purpose.
- Be able to have down shift time.
- Only eat to 80% of your appetite.
- Consider plant-slant dietary choices.
- Moderate consumption of wine\*.
- Be part of an encouraging social circle.
- Spend time with loved ones.
- Be connected to your community.

HonorHealth, Goodwill of Central and Northern Arizona, and Cigna are working in collaboration with the City of Scottsdale to launch the Blue Zones Project Scottsdale in 2024.

\* Alcohol is not allowed in the Preserve.

**April 13, 2024**  
**WestWorld**

- Metric Century
- Metric Half-Century
- Post-Ride Celebration

Register: [www.tourdescottsdale.org](http://www.tourdescottsdale.org)



# Enjoying the Richness of Our Cultural Resources

By Chris Crum, Legacy Steward and Jakki Casey, Master Steward

Most of us are familiar with our natural resources, the resources that exist in the environment in their natural forms and can be used by living things. The Earth's natural resources include water, air, sunlight, minerals, flora, fauna, and more. We observe many of these in abundance when we enter the Preserve. However, are we all as familiar with cultural resources? Cultural resources tell the story of our human past and interaction with the natural environment. They encompass the evidence of past human activity. These resources can be physical remains or indicators of human endeavors such as artifacts, sites, and structures, or intangible evidence experienced through culture, storytelling, and folklore.

Rock shelters provide protection from the elements. This one at Cathedral Rock includes some Bedrock Mortars used in creating meal from seed pods. Photo by Dennis Eckel

As the McDowell Sonoran Preserve pioneers and others started to envision the Preserve, they realized the importance of protecting our cultural resources along with our natural resources, "...Cultural resources play a significant role in creating a 'sense of place' that attracts visitors to the Preserve". This focus continued as the City of Scottsdale adopted the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Cultural Resources Master Plan (the Plan) in 2016 which lays out the approach to cultural resources for the Preserve. The Plan states "... Unlike tourism, the contribution of the Preserve's cultural resources to the preservation of Scottsdale's rich heritage cannot be quantified." The Plan ensures we protect these non-renewable treasures, recognize the achievements of various cultures, and provide interpretation, understanding, and implications of the past.

The Plan mentions "Within the Preserve there is a wide range of prehistoric resources present spanning Archaic lithic scatters and Hohokam village sites; to the ephemeral vestiges of the area's early homesteading heritage; and historic ruins of once-thriving ranching operations."

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's PastFinders Program focuses on protecting and sharing our extensive cultural resources. In partnership with the City of Scottsdale and the State of Arizona, the Conservancy has qualified stewards who participate in the Site Steward Program. This state-wide program trains people to monitor and manage these precious resources.



Petroglyphs are indigenous rock imagery. They are integral to the cultural traditions of the early people of the Sonoran Desert, and the Preserve contains many examples. Source: McDowell Sonoran Preserve Cultural Resources Master Plan

The City and Conservancy work together to identify sites to be monitored. These include rock shelters, petroglyphs, pictographs, structures, a ballcourt, and much more. Some of these cultural resources are easily accessible in the Preserve, including Balanced Rock and Cathedral Rock. Many more are further from the trails and the locations are not shared. Protecting these resources for future generations requires them to remain hidden from most of us. We can still learn from them through storytelling.

Rather than looking at natural and cultural resources in isolation, we should try to consider them in combination. Take ranching as an example. Why was there so much ranching here? What was the impact of this? Without valuable mineral resources or adequate water for sustained agriculture, ranching was the best way to get value from the land with modest investment. Ranching resulted in several things, including importing non-native plants for erosion control and to supplement feed. More than 50 years later, these plants continue to have an impact

throughout the region. The major remediation process for these plants has been human intervention. What have we learned? Can we prevent it happening again? If not, what can we do to prepare for it?

The next time you hike or bike to Balanced Rock or walk or ride down Brown's Ranch Road, take a few minutes to think about who used to live here, how they adapted to their surroundings, and what we can learn from them.

We are impressed with the incredible accomplishments of the people who have survived and thrived in this often-harsh environment. Their ability to adapt themselves to the desert as well as adapting it to their needs is inspiring and offers many lessons for us today. Let's all keep in mind that our cultural resources are non-renewable. The loss of a cultural heritage is no less impactful than the extinction of a plant or animal. ▲▲



Non-native grasses were introduced to the desert to feed cattle and control erosion. Today, some must be actively controlled as they have become invasive, overtaking native plants, and fueling fast moving wildfires. Photo by Leona Weinstein





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Connect with us:



The Scottsdale McDowell Sonoran Preserve is owned by the City of Scottsdale and is managed through a unique partnership between the City of Scottsdale and the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy. Our shared goal for the Preserve is to maintain it in a natural state while providing appropriate recreational and educational opportunities for this and future generations.

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