

Good News!

WATERLINE CONFLICT RESOLVED

Concerns raised by PMPC regarding a large capacity water line crossing a portion of the new Sonoran Preserve near the Carefree Highway have been resolved.

The City of Phoenix has committed to a tunnel for the waterline following the Carefree Highway alignment and within the existing right of way on the south side of the road. This new route will avoid a wide long scar across a foothill portion of the Sonoran Preserve.

After extensive meetings where PMPC President Terry Horne offered practical suggestions for alternative routes, five city departments worked through a complex

set of issues (including traffic and federal 404 permit) and agreed to the new route.

The effort made by city departments to resolve this issue while protecting this newest portion of the Sonoran Preserve is noteworthy.

September Meeting

Due to the Labor Day Holiday the meeting has been changed to: **Monday, September 12th.**

Location: Clubhouse at Ruth Hamilton's home; 500 West Clarendon, Phoenix at 7:00 P.M.

Agenda includes Jack Allen (ADOT) with an update on the freeway around South Mountain Preserve plus Diana Rhoades will discuss the State Trust Land ballot initiative.

LOOKOUT

Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council, Inc.
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The Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council is dedicated to protecting our Phoenix Mountains Preserves.

<http://www.phoenixmountains.org>

New Visitor Center to Host Public Lands Day

This month the North Mountain Visitor Center will host numerous events on National Public Lands Day, September 24th, according to the Phoenix Parks, Library, and Recreation Department.

Showcasing the new Visitor Center, the events will include guided hikes, the chance to see wildlife up-close, a rock climbing wall, plus displays from all the government agencies that are involved with public land issues.

Mark Your Calendar: Saturday, September 24th, from 9:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M., at the North Mountain Visitor Center located at 12950 N. 7th Street. Call (602) 495-5458 for more information.



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Invasive Plants Threaten Phoenix Mountains Preserve

The creeping damage of invasive plants within the Phoenix Mountains Preserve system is hard to spot until you know what the enemy looks like.

Once you recognize non-native plants, you don't have to look far to see they are gaining a foothold in portions of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve system.

In parts of North Mountain preserve for example, you can see hillside patches of non-native grass and trailheads flanked with the familiar fountain grass. With hundreds of seeds in each fuzzy tassel, fountain grass is a tenacious invader that can spread easily through neighborhoods and into the preserves.

While hillsides patches of non-native grass pose difficult eradication challenges, even the easier to reach patches of dense fountain grass can be difficult to successfully eradicate.

If preservation of the Sonoran desert ecosystem is a goal of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve system then the city needs to begin an effective eradication program directed at the most serious invasive plants.

Likewise, homeowner's and business bordering the preserves will have to join the battle by removing invasive plants from their yards to assure that the Preserves will not continue to be infected by nearby invasive plant species.

Initiative Strives to Conserve 694,000 Acres of State Trust Land

A coalition of conservation groups, educators, and other major stakeholders have released a proposed State Land ballot initiative they hope to have on the 2006 ballot.

The statewide initiative, "Conserving Arizona's Future" will approve a change in the state constitution that will allow conservation of some State Trust Lands. Approximately 690,000 acres of the states 9.2 million acres would be available for preservation. Beneficiaries (like education) of the current trust will be compensated.

Changes in how the State Land Department is managed and how future development occurs on State Trust land are also part of the ballot measure. About 183,000 valid signatures will be needed before July 6, 2006 to reach the November ballot.

With State lands bordering much of the metropolitan region the future of these Trust lands will affect residents near municipalities statewide.

Currently a slow motion train-wreck is occurring regarding the protection of open space. The Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) legislation that was part of the Growing Smarter legislation drew concern from the beginning. Yet, following API rules, communities rallied to raise tax dollars to purchase Trust lands near urban development.

Time and time again voters in Arizona communities have voted by large

majorities to raise the money needed to purchase over \$1.5 billion dollars of State Trust land.

Unfortunately, a small group has threatened to sue the State regarding the API legislation that allows communities to protect open space. This group claims they are concerned that the State is not getting *enough* taxpayer money for State Trust land.

Bowing to the lawsuit threat, State Land Commissioner Mark Winkleman suspended the API program last spring.

Since the API ended, open space advocates and conservationists have begun expressing concerns about the escalating costs of Trust land and the impossibility for communities to bid on land sales. They argue that the public will always lose to developers in an auction due to the requirements of taxpayer raised bond money.

While the idea of protecting mountain vistas and desert lands was pioneered in Phoenix in the 1920's the desire has spread statewide. The suspension of the API program has affected applications from Tucson, Flagstaff, and Prescott plus a many from the greater Phoenix region.

Today, a map of the Phoenix Metro region includes a new set of mountain vistas and wildlife habitat (Sonoran that need protection if our communities are to continue to be able to enjoy Arizona's unique desert environment.

The disposition of State Trust Lands has become one of the most significant land use issues that faces our state.

While disappointment in the promise of the Arizona Preserve Initiative is strong; reality is, the hard work by many to protect open space and intact ecosystems is still threatened by the desires of a few and the insatiable appetite of the growth machine.

This ballot initiative includes three land designations; Permanent Reserve, Provisional Reserve, and Educational Reserve. More cooperative growth planning between the land department and local communities plus a Board to oversee some State Land Department operations are also parts of the initiative.

This ballot measure starts with the support of educators and would accomplish changing the constitution to allow for the conservation of State Trust Land. Does it do enough, or too much, remains for voters to decide in 15 months.

To see maps and learn more details about the ballot initiative:

"CONSERVING ARIZONA'S FUTURE"

visit the Sonoran Institute at

<http://www.sonoran.org>

See - State Trust Land Program /What's New/'Initiative'



Current Issues of Concern:

Lincoln Drive and 40th Street housing development overturns deed restrictions that provided for a portion of the land to become Mountains Preserve and also threatens a reduction in public access.

Waterline bisecting a portion of the new Sonoran Preserve near Skunk Creek and the Carefree Highway in conflict with Chapter 26 that defines protections for Phoenix Mountains Preserve.

Edge Guidelines and the appointment of a citizens advisory committee to review and update guidelines covering new Phoenix Sonoran Preserves.

Abandonment by the City of Phoenix of unused street easements that border existing preserves. Result is larger lots for a few and more impacts to Preserves for everyone else. (See *article at the right for more details.*)

Let us know what is happening in the area you hike, ride, and bike.

Contact PMPC via e-mail at: **info@phoenixmountains.org**



Even after monsoon rains fire danger remains high in preserves. Non-native fountain grass (lower right) adds more fuel.

STREET ABANDONMENT WHITTLES AWAY at EDGE of MOUNTAINS PRESERVE

Last spring residents living near Shaw Butte in the North Mountains Preserve were surprised to learn that the City of Phoenix was considering a street abandonment application made by the owner of a steep undeveloped hillside lot.

At issue was a portion of a subdivision street that was never built due to the steep hillside location and because a part of the Saddle Rock Hills subdivision was never built. The unfinished part of the subdivision was included in the Mountains Preserve three decades ago. This unused street (about 50 x 200 feet) is contiguous with the preserve boundary.

During the city abandonment hearing the Hearing Officer stated that there had not been a written response regarding the case from the Parks, Recreation, and Library Department but that he had spoke to an unnamed person at that department and it was "OK" to abandon that portion of city land. In writing and at the hearing PMPC questioned approval of the abandonment since it would contradict previous city efforts to protect similar land. Leslie Spencer-Snyder listed PMPC's concerns regarding the abandonment and asked the Hearing Officer to postpone a decision so the case could be investigated in more detail.

Unfortunately, the Hearing Officer dismissed those concerns and approved the abandonment of city land to the nearby lot owner. The lot owner will have to pay the City of Phoenix ten cents per square foot to acquire this land if the City Council approves this street abandonment. Staff for Vice Mayor Peggy Bilstien have promised a review of this case so at this time it is still uncertain when this case will reach the Phoenix City Council.

After the hearing a Parks Department staff member stated that the department employee was in error for not opposing the street abandonment considering the contiguous location with Phoenix Mountains Preserve. Also he said a department review found about 100 more parcels with similar unused street easements that border other parts of the Phoenix Mountains Preserve system.