

Topic:
**Background of Acquisition of Land for the Phoenix Mountains Preserves
And How
Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council (PMPC) was Able To Influence the
Land Acquisition Program**

By Susanne Rothwell, Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council, past president, March 27, 2014

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Introduction:

The history of the Phoenix Mountains Preserves is lengthy and detailed, and I would encourage anyone interested to make a more thorough research. This paper is an overview of some of the more important aspects of the timeline, concentrating on the earlier period as very significant. Issues such as the proposed 202 encroachment into Preserve land at South Mountain and huge cuts across its south east ridges being the most important issue today.

A quote from 1960 states “As cities grow together into Metropolitan complexes, people tend to lose identity with their community”. “Uneasiness, tension and violence are becoming increasingly characteristic of urban life, even in Arizona”. (From An Open Space Plan for the Phoenix Mountains).

A ground swell of public opinion was trending strongly toward conservation of open space.

In terms of the Phoenix Mountains Preserves, the big question is “**How did we get here**”? It has taken over 90 years of effort on the part of:

1. State and City Parks departments
2. PMPC and other likeminded citizen based groups through their activism and the ‘grand concept’ of an interconnected park and preserve system and
3. The public via the voting process. It is the Citizens that make an essential impact both in providing ideas and to support the government during the land purchase process.

History:

- Phoenix had a very early history of preserving land with 1924 marking the beginning with the acquisition during the Coolidge Presidency of 16,283 acres for South Mountain Park. The cost was about \$17,000 for the first 13,000 acres. Many of the original buildings, most still in use today were built by the Civilian

Conservation Corps (CCC) during the depression of the 1930's. South Mountain was considered a place "Of great recreational value" with its own fresh water supply.

- 275 acres of North Mountain had been bought by Maricopa County in 1955, and 388 acres of Squaw Peak was bought in 1958. After the City of Phoenix leased these lands they lands were transferred to the City by Maricopa County.
- During the 1950's a lot of development had taken place on Camelback Mountain, mostly in County land that was not controlled by any building codes. Barry Goldwater along with Lady Bird Johnson, working with many Phoenix residents and Council members, were able to convince Galbraith to donate the top 340 acres of Camelback Mountain as a Preserve. Today the Echo Canyon trailhead is on land bought by the City, and the Camelback Mountain hike is one of the most popular hikes in Arizona.
- **Dottie Gilbert**, a founding member of PMPC and a well-known writer, had been writing letters to Governor Paul Fannin putting pressure on him to set aside land for Preserves. Later, Dottie Gilbert and PMPC gathered petitions together for the Phoenix City Council. She wrote "Squaw Peak is a natural park of inestimable value to Phoenix and the citizens of Maricopa County. We urge you to make every effort to add as much land as possible to the present Squaw Peak Park".
- In the early 1960's there existed **mining claims** and petitions on 483 acres of BLM adjacent to Squaw Peak, land and it was patented to Phoenix in about 1970. Under pressure from Perl Charles and other PMPC members, BLM was forced to disallow existing mining claims, after which BLM sold the land to the City of Phoenix for \$1 per acre.
- A discovery and exploratory study of the Phoenix Mountains Open Space was undertaken by the Phoenix Planning Department in 1963, leading to the "Open Space Resolution" in 1966. The conflicts between private property rights and the inherent right of the public to protect and enjoy its natural environment, at least in part resulted with the death of this resolution. It was a question of LIVABILITY versus economic VIABILITY. There was formidable development pressure to develop the dramatic mountain slopes.

It was critical to the success of any preservation efforts that they be supported by the public. This then led to the **Open Space Plan**. The mountains are such a dominant feature of the Valley's landscape, and conservation of these features before it was too late, became a PMPC and valley wide issue. "The surrounding mountain slopes...form a dramatic backdrop to every vista within the City". It was becoming increasingly clear that the "open space if retained, would enhance the present and potential value of surrounding urban development, and would conserve significant natural, historical and manmade resources....and would enhance community identity".

- **1966 the City of Phoenix passed "An Open Space Plan for the Phoenix Mountains"**. In it is written "**It is essential that the program be motivated by the citizens and undertaken as a community project**". This plan proposed

that the Phoenix Mountains be preserved as open space with scenic parkways and drives, hiking and riding trails, and several recreation complexes. The plan was devised “with the basic underlying concept of preserving the entire undeveloped portion of the Phoenix Mountains as a 2nd wilderness park within the City”. The first being South Mt which officially became a Preserve by resolution due to PMPC pressure, in 1978. However the issue was revisited when the City Council attorneys claimed that the resolution did not protect the Mountain as preserve. With PMPC pressure the South Mt Park was adopted by ordinance, a permanent designation during the administration of Mayor Terry Goddard.

- The first official meeting of PMPC was August 1970, at a time when Phoenix’s Population was 700,000. With land under pressure from two development syndicates, one by Lyons Realty and the other from Chicago, PMPC approached the Nature Conservancy to purchase the North Mountains. The group’s aim was to set aside the Phoenix Mountains as a “Unique Wilderness Park”. At this meeting Perl Charles, Charles Christiansen (later to become the Parks director) and the Gilberts were present. The minutes reflect that Pulliam as publisher of the Arizona Republic and Gazette, was greatly interested in mountain preservation and gave the concept front page coverage. When Charles Christiansen first arrived in Phoenix, Dottie Gilbert and Perl Charles among others took Christiansen for a horseback ride in the Phoenix Mountains at Squaw Peak, and spoke to him of their dream of saving this land. “Struck by the pristine landscape and realizing that developers were also enjoying it, Christiansen talked the City Council into hiring a consultant to recommend what land should be included in a preserve”. This study resulted in the Paul Van Cleve Report, covering 14,000 acres of the Phoenix Mountain Range. He recommended saving another 9,000 acres.
- In the 1970’s, Dottie Gilbert, Margaret Hance, Ruth Hamilton, Maxine Lakin and others convinced Mayor Driggs to preserve the Phoenix North Mountain Ranges, what is now the Phoenix Mt Preserves. They again arranged a trail ride in the Squaw Peak area, with Mayor Driggs and Councilmen. In a quote from the MAG “An Open Space Plan”, it states “a local example of an organized space management effort is the Phoenix Mountain Preserves...with over 26,000 acres...the effort to protect the mountainous terrain began in the early 1970’s with a grass roots campaign that was motivated by scars created by roads and residential development on the mountain slopes. Another motivating factor was the potential loss of public access to these areas”. This was of course PMPC. In 1971 citizen pressure on the City Council advanced by PMPC was so great that a moratorium on all building not previously approved on 15 square miles of proposed preserve was set in to motion. **This was an unprecedented action**, and set Phoenix into the headlights of preservation movement nationwide. This was to await a Master Plan for preserving the mountains as a “Wilderness Park within the City”. Mayor Driggs was able to put together a viable political coalition

which backed a \$23.5 million bond election, which was passed by the citizens of Phoenix in May 8, 1974 for Mountain Preserve acquisition.

- The public voted to expand the Phoenix Mountain Preserves by 10,500 acres with the addition of the North Mountain Range, and 2,500 acres in South Mt. In February 1973 the Arizona Gazette wrote that the Phoenix Mountains Commission (a Mayor's Group) was "developing a sound financial plan for the acquisition of nearly 12,000 acres of open space in the Phoenix and South Mountains". "Left undeveloped, the land will be a priceless asset to a growing community. Total costs were split between a bond election of \$22.5 million and general city funds. If the City can retain its alluring character, all will benefit economically and esthetically".
- At this time, there was a bill about to be passed that said that the State Land Department had to put any land to be sold out to bid. This would have made the land for Squaw Peak Park very expensive. Just before this bill passed the City was able to take over this land. PMPC was instrumental in making this trade happen quickly, with behind the scenes pressure and support.
- By May 1977, in a letter to the editor of the Republic a PMPC member wrote "the money (from the bond issue) has been spent. The Council has reneged, their \$13.5 million not contributed...there is no integrity to the Preserve". This resulted in a change to the State Constitution to allow for more bonding capacity for parks, recreation and open space, and the development of a ten year financing program to complete the acquisition. The city was short over \$12 million and another 3,200 acres yet to be purchased.
- **The Paradise Valley Access Relief Road** was another issue for the PMPC board. From meeting minutes of February 21, 1974. Don Kunz (board member of PMPC) saw stakes "marching through the mountains", and he was told that they were to be for a water line. He later found out that they were also to be for the Paradise Valley Access Relief Road. He then attended numerous City Council meetings and warned that public hearings needed to be held before construction was to begin. Kunz later had to sue the City to prevent them from proceeding without public notification. The water line did go through the dessert, with a 120' wide swathe of land bladed for the purpose. This was to be Dreamy Draw Drive and now part of the State Route 51 between Glendale and Shea. The road was stopped for a period of time, with a lot of support from the Pulliam family and the Arizona Republic with the primary objector being PMPC.
- **Talley Industries owned about 314 acres north of Lincoln at 32nd Street** that PMPC really wanted for Preserve. Both the Parks Department and the Parks Board wanted the land to be purchased for the Preserve as well. Talley offered to sell 130 acres (land above the building zoning limit) to the city. The development proposed was dense 3 story high with tennis courts, club houses etc. Talley Industries owned another company at this time, Wes Clock (?), which imported what turned out to be malfunctioning clocks from China. Because they lost a lot of money on the deal, Talley could not afford to give up on the land it owned

north of Lincoln at 32nd Street. However, the Hillside Ordinance was already in place, and this valuable zoning tool was used to limit the amount of development that Talley could build on the remaining Hillside. The Hillside Ordinance, championed by PMPC is still a part of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance, and PMPC also was very instrumental in the adoption of the Edge Guidelines, now a part of the Zoning Ordinance. Together these two chapters control development for the protection of the Preserves.

- Save Our Mountains Foundation (SOMF), as a 501© 3 was founded at this time, and funds were raised for land acquisition for Preserves. SOMF is now the contractual partner with the City of Phoenix to operate the North Mountain Visitor Center. SOMF is anticipating a return to its original goal of raising money for future preserve land acquisition.
- A failed 1975 bond election resulted in a reduced boundary for the Preserves. The money slated for mountain land acquisition in the 1973 bond election had been siphoned elsewhere, and the voters became disillusioned. There was the question of about \$700,000 taken from the Preserve land acquisition budget and not returned. At this time the proposed acreage was reduced. All resulted in major efforts by PMPC to speak at City Council meetings, to write letters to the Council and in the Arizona Republic and Gazette newspapers. This effort continued into 1977, where PMPC members were regulars at City Council hearings, urging the return of the nearly \$700,000 that had been switched from mountain funding to other projects.
- Mayor Margaret Hance, mayor from 1976-1983 was able to support the Preserves with a \$12.3 million bond which enabled further land acquisition.
- August 7, 1981, **PMPC was the recipient of a Certificate of Appreciation** from the Governor's Commission on Arizona Environment. Since PMPC's inception in 1970, the PMPC "pursuit has resulted in the assembly of 7,071 acre unique wilderness park, and the leased Squaw Peak Park of 546 acres, Phoenix now owns 6,000 mountain park acres. In addition PMPC has added more than 1,000 acres to South Mountain Park". "Battling the vagaries of the political winds, the Council members served on commissions, attended numerous zoning hearings, public hearings and city council meetings, supported political candidates in sympathy with the cause and submitted many recommendations for action".
- **1985 marked the inclusion of Chapter 26 of the Phoenix City Charter.** A great effort by PMPC members, some of whom were involved in writing the draft, resulted in Chapter 26. There had been a great deal of speculation by the City and others, as to the validity of the Preserve boundaries and the intent and purpose of the land included in what we all thought was to be preserve land. Among others, some of the many questions that came up over the years regarding the use allowed within the preserve boundaries, included issues over the ownership of the land underneath the towers located on South Mountain, an extension into what was considered Preserve for the police training facility at South Mountain, and in the late 1990's the Washington School district plans to

build two schools partly on what was thought to be Preserve land. These issues were seen as dangerous threats and precedents to the future “ownership” of the Preserves.

- Due to the constant and ongoing efforts by the development community to return the preserve lands to the public, PMPC found itself diligently opposing these efforts with all means available. For example when preserve land adjacent to Mountain View Park came under assault, with the Washington School District wanting to use 40 acres of designated Mountain Preserve land, PMPC with the help of member and lawyer Jay Duschoff, who was assisted by Leslie Spencer-Snyder, threatened suit with the City. At a hearing the issue was resolved with a compromise that the school could use 10 acres for a ball park and 30 acres was to remain as Preserve. An ordinance was adopted which strengthened Chapter 26 as a result of this compromise, with an understanding to ensure that the Preserve was to remain as **natural open space**, and uses were not to be at the discretion of the City. It also ensured that the survey project was to be undertaken with **the boundaries surveyed and set in 1999**. The only way that the Preserves can now be sold or exchanged would be by a vote of the people. This ensured that the lands now specifically noted as within Preserve boundaries would be protected by Chapter 26, of the City of Phoenix Charter.
- **The Gosnell golf course:** In 1987 Ruth Hamilton, PMPC member, was named in a law suit brought against Gosnell to try and stop a trade by Gosnell for some South Mountain Preserve “flat lands” to Gosnell for some rugged higher elevation Gosnell land. This trade was grandfathered in at the time of the inclusion of Chapter 26. City Council approved the trade, and that is now part of the golf course on the north east slopes of South Mt. PMPC lost this issue. This case went to the Supreme Court of Arizona. Ruth Hamilton pushed a referendum that cut off all future trades in the Preserves and Mayor Goddard took a political beating over this issue.
- **The Thunderbird Golf Course:** A few years later the Thunderbirds wanted preserve land at 7th Street and Thunderbird for the Phoenix Open Golf course, and with enormous PMPC and other effort this trade failed to eventuate. The Thunderbirds Golf Course was planned for the Preserve area right where the North Mountain Visitor Center is built, Gosnell had planned for bleachers on the west side of North Mountain so this entire valley including 3 miles of the Trail 100 was to be golf course. PMPC members attended hundreds of meetings and forced an alternative golf course to be planned located on the east side of 7th Street, and the north side of Thunderbird. There is a stipulation on this golf course to this day, which states that if this golf course were ever to cease to be a golf course, it would revert to Mountain Preserve land. Trail 25 joins Lookout Mt with this North Mt preserve area, served by under road tunnels. PMPC had a huge influence on this immediate area, and its land use.
- In 1989 with a vote of 3 to 1, voters approved Prop 100 to prevent all future land trades within the Phoenix Mt preserves.

- **1998 marked the acceptance by Phoenix City Council of the Sonoran Preserve Master Plan.** The first committee was set up to study the concept of a future Sonoran Preserve in the North Phoenix area in 1989. The process to conclude just a Sonoran Preserve Master plan took ten years, with the involvement of hundreds of Phoenix citizens and thousands of hours of donated time as well as City effort. Unlike the Phoenix Mountain Preserves, the Sonoran Preserve was based on areas that function biologically, and were originally designed to be about 21,000 acres in the North Phoenix area. PMPC members were on the originating committee and most subsequent committees to support the ongoing purchase of the land at auction for this Preserve. Funds were made available through Phoenix Parks and Preserves Initiative and Heritage (lottery) monies.
- All of these efforts were inspirational in the light of the fast population growth of Phoenix. In 1990 M.C. census population was 2.1 million, and population was projected to be 4.1 million by 2020. In fact the 2013 census shows it to be 3.8 million.
- **The 202 issue:** The most important issue today for PMPC is the location of the South Mountain loop of the 202 that is planned to cut into the south west ridges of the South Mountain, in some areas over 100 feet, and involves a taking of about 40 acres of South Mountain Preserve under a grandfathered clause, for the purpose of this roadway. The destruction of one of Phoenix's most iconic landmarks, and the desecration of a sacred Gila River Indian Community Mountain, ensures that PMPC is adamantly opposed to this location of the freeway. The oblivious nature of ADOT's lack of concern for the decades of effort that went towards the preservation of all of this mountain, as the largest city park / preserve in the country is shocking. Who wants to hike a mountain with chopped off limbs, massive noise and air pollution concerns aside.
- **The Conservation Alliance:**
 1. The Citizen Science Project
 2. The idea of future sustainability of the Preserves
 3. The concept of Connectivity of all the Preserves and utilizing this connectivity to unite communities
 4. The idea of branding the Phoenix area as a destination Ecological Biking and Hiking City
 5. Spearhead the establishment of a website for all partners in this coalition. It should covers issues preserve related to each of us, and include a discussion aspect. Facebook, Twitter and other outreach opportunities might also be very useful to the partners.

The Conservation Alliance has brought all of these disparate government and private bodies together. Under their combined jurisdiction is the greatest park and preserve systems in the country. The Preserves provide untold advantages to the City, including economic, quality of life and flora and fauna sustainability of the fragile Sonoran Desert.

These land masses should be tied together with a system of **connectivity corridors**. This concept was in place from the very beginning, in the 1970's and could operate a lot more effectively. The CA can encourage more study of connectivity beyond boundaries of jurisdiction. What makes a significant animal corridor, how and where the water flows, what makes a significant wash, how much land it takes for a wash to work for flora fauna and human activity? Significant pathways along natural water courses, so that people can move around the city without being necessarily on a roadway.

The Phoenix Sonoran Preserve was designed from the "ground up" with the idea of being **ecologically sustainable**. It would be valuable to analyze the entire preserve system in light of sustainability.

Phoenix can be part of the hugely increasing **Eco tourism** trend, providing economic and lifestyle benefits. CA can be a significant part of its promotion.

With the '**Let Science lead you**' concept, the CA has started a Citizen Science project at North Mountain Visitor Center, cataloguing the flora of one specific area, with the help of many willing volunteers. This program could be expanded to include studies of animal life and be extended to other parts of the Preserve system, setting a **baseline** of animal and plant life for future studies and generations. It could also be of significant value with the maintenance of the earthen dams within the preserves, now being unnecessarily cleared of all vegetation.

Implement a **Valley wide educational program** about the value of maintaining open areas, achieving consistency between the groups. This program could lead to greater public advocacy for the implementation of a connected preserve system. First example of this cooperation is the "Drawing Us Together" exhibit, sponsored by Save Our Mountains Foundation and the Conservation Alliance.

The Future:

"It is a temptation to regard the battle as won, leaving details to the professionals". How providential these words were, written by Dottie Gilbert in June, 1973.

PMPC exists today as a very viable and busy organization dedicated to all aspects of the existing Phoenix Mountain Preserve, and the ongoing purchase of the Sonoran Preserve.

It is our desire to help the Conservation Alliance to identify areas of meaningful contribution and to work together to ensure the future of the larger preserve system.