

The Park Steward Post

CONTRIBUTING TO THE PHOENIX MOUNTAINS PRESERVATION COUNCIL

BY ANDY LENARTZ



Park Stewards have a wide range of backgrounds, interest areas, and activities we participate in. But one thing we all have in common is a dedication to Phoenix parks and preserves, and a desire to contribute to the well-being of our community. Park Stewards looking to increase or broaden their work to preserve and protect natural areas in Phoenix may be interested in opportunities available with the Phoenix Mountains Preservation Council (PMPC).

PARK PROGRESS

As the weather in Phoenix is cooling down, activity in our parks is heating up!

This month we'll learn more about some new volunteer opportunities and old opportunities that are back!

Andy and Carla would like to thank the PMPC Board Members for contributing to this newsletter. If you're inspired to learn more about the PMPC, email us to find out when their next meeting will be held at the North Mountain Visitor Center.

A big thanks to all the Park Rangers who contributed this month to keep us all informed about the parks!

The PMPC is seeking additional members and board members to aid in their organization's role to help protect the mountain areas in Phoenix. All that is required is a passion for nature and preservation, and a desire to contribute – something all Park Stewards already possess! Past Park Stewards have served on the PMPC board, which provides a great way to contribute in the hot summer months, as many of the PMPC roles are indoors. This includes attending city meetings, engaging in advocacy, and helping to develop policy. The group focuses on protecting parks and connecting with decision-makers, trying to make sure those interested in protecting these beautiful spaces have a say in what happens with land in and around our preserves.



Courtesy of Christina Estes/KJZZ

For those potentially interested in becoming a member or joining the PMPC Board, the time requirement is similar to the Park Steward role, where your contributions can vary based on the amount of time that you have available. The PMPC's work tends to be cyclical, as

issues present themselves such as threats to preservation of the Phoenix Mountains, the group tends to become more active and work ramps up. One example of the type of work done by the PMPC is taking a lead role to ensure companies contracted for construction projects fulfill obligations for access, landscaping, and restoration. This restoration work is included in the initial contracts, but companies on occasion attempt to skip this step after the construction work is complete in an effort to save time and money. The PMPC follows up to make sure these obligations are completed.

The PMPC is seeking any interested individuals to join, with a specific focus on identifying a couple new members with experience in social media and website design. They are also looking for individuals who can speak for and represent

a range of outdoor activities to make sure all interests are represented including hikers, bikers, mountain climbers, birders, photographers, and equestrians.

Carla and I had an opportunity to meet with the PMPC Board recently, and during our two-hour-ish discussion, I believe we heard stories about direct involvement in and knowledge of nearly every significant Arizona conservation project in the last 50 years. Anyone interested in joining or serving on the PMPC Board will have an incredible opportunity to work with a devoted, knowledgeable group of people, and will gain significant knowledge of the history of our beautiful city parks.

For more information or to join the PMPC, please visit www.phoenixmountains.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

The original plan had the pipeline running straight through the preserves in the map on the right. We would have lost the 22nd St access and seen much more damaged preserve land. Through letter writing, voicing opposition at meetings, and creating alliances, the PMPC achieved one of their goals to maintain the preserve land we have. The work is not complete here though. The PMPC will follow-up to ensure agreements are adhered to for mitigation and that native plants are used for required revegetation.

There will soon be a 473-acre housing development across the street from the Apache Wash trailhead. The developers will be allowed to build more houses per acre than you see in other nearby areas because they were able to successfully argue for the removal of the Desert Character Overlay for their site. The developer's website lists desert habitat stewardship as one of the benefits of this development (tangent - building a development in nearly the center of a preserve is being "environmentally sensitive"?). The PMPC will follow-up make sure they are true to their word.

Members voiced their opposition to the route of the 202 through South Mountain Park/Preserve because the impact on wildlife and the mountains. We may have lost preserve land in the western section of the park, but the PMPC is making sure agreements made by the state for land donations are upheld.

The water pipeline being installed in the Dreamy Draw area would have been much more destructive without the efforts of the PMPC.



THE PMPC IS LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO...

- Will write and send letters/emails of opposition or support
- Want to do public speaking at community meetings
- Have some legal or planning & zoning background
- Will help increase their social media presence
- Know what's going on in the area that may need to be addressed
- Are lovers of biking, hiking, and other outdoor things
- Are just like you!

Join us for a Free and Fun Community Event at the Salt River!

 **Date:**
Saturday
October 8, 2022

 **Time:**
8am-1pm

 **Location:**
Rio Salado Habitat
Restoration Area
2439 S Central Avenue
Phoenix AZ 85004

**Come early at 7am for
a Salt River Clean-Up Activity!**

FREE REGISTRATION FOR THE



**WALK
FOR THE
WILD**

AVAILABLE HERE*



***no registration is needed for the entire event or clean up activity!**

**Urban Wildlife
Conservation Day
----- 2022 -----**



Event activities include:

- Annual "Walk for the Wild"
- Audubon Native Plant Sale
- Hawks and Owls
- Nature Tent with Fun Presentations
- Kids ArtZone and StoryWalk
- Community Partner Booths
- An Urban Bird Treaty Signing with Phoenix Mayor Gallego

...and more!

Thank you to event sponsors...



ASU

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SOUTHWEST

 **RIO
REIMAGINED**



TRAIL ETIQUETTE

MAKING THE USER EXPERIENCE BETTER FOR EVERYONE

BY ANDY LENARTZ



The drop in temperatures provided by fall in the Sonoran Desert inspires many of us to get outside more frequently – along with a few thousand of our neighbors and friends. In order to ensure a good experience for a wide range of users as the preserves become more crowded, Park Stewards can help to promote proper trail etiquette. The following are examples of gentle reminders that park users may need as we enter the busier months.

SHARE THE TRAIL

The policy at City of Phoenix Parks and Preserves is that hikers and bikers yield to horses, and bikers yield to all other users. This is for both safety and civility, as we can have tens of thousands of people utilizing the same spaces on a busy weekend day. Mountain bikers in particular (a group I proudly consider myself part of!) seem to need reminders of this one from time to time. It can be helpful to share that the park rules are that bikers yield to other users, period. It does not mean slower users stay right (although this is a good idea in general), it does not mean others should jump out of the way when one races through screaming “On your left!”, and it does not matter that you are attempting to set a new Strava record. We can remind bikers it simply means you yield to all

other users. Slow down when encountering people and groups, and if you are not 100% sure of other user's intentions to let you pass, bikers need to stop. Safety over Strava records.

That said, other users can help make time on the trail enjoyable for everyone. Communicate clearly with bikers, runners, and other trail users. If hiking in large groups, break into several smaller groups to avoid impeding the trail. Stay to the right side and do not block the whole trail. Make sure to keep dogs on a leash, and small children close for their own safety as well as the safety of other trail users.

LEAVE NO TRACE

Respect our natural environment by staying on the designated trail and taking only pictures. Stewards can remind users to pack out their trash, and even a few extra pieces they find on the trail if feeling generous. Respect wildlife by giving the animals space. If animals are reacting to your actions, you are too close. Keeping areas natural includes noise pollution. Park Stewards can gently remind park users their music should not be audible to anyone else.

DON'T PUT OTHERS AT RISK

By utilizing “Take A Hike. Do it Right.” principles, users can avoid becoming a cautionary tale, and avoid putting rescuers at risk. Park Stewards can remind users about the need for proper footwear, realistically assessing one's ability, and bringing enough water for a desired hike. While the risk of heat exhaustion reduces a bit with the drop in temperatures, it is always present on trails in Phoenix. A good rule of thumb to share with park users is if your water is half gone, your hike is half done. Hiking with others and being prepared



with a map and plan for the area users want to visit are other good suggestions that Stewards can share with park visitors.

ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Focus on kindness first, smiles before miles. If the trail is more crowded than you expected, a monsoon is rolling in, or the temperature is starting to impact you – try a different day for that personal distance record. Choose an appropriate time for your activity. If you are mountain biking the Desert Classic Trail on a Saturday, settle in for a leisurely ride as that is not the time for setting a new land speed record. When Park Stewards encounter frustrated or overly aggressive runners, bikers, and hikers, try suggesting less busy times. At South Mountain Park, I recommend users are on the trail prior to 7 am or after 3 pm on the weekends, or that they try to utilize more weekdays to avoid crowds in the busier sections of the park. Park Stewards are a great resource for providing ideal times of use for their preferred areas and stretches of trail. Remember: there are no bad days on the trail, just bad attitudes on trail users.



PARK STEWARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

BY PARK RANGER CASSY CASTELLANOS

SCOOPER TROOPERS



The inaugural Park Steward-led Scooper Troopers have hit the trails! Scooper Troopers are dedicated to retrieving all things related to dog piles at South Mountain Park/Preserve. The Troopers hiked Telegraph trail looking for bagged and unbagged dog excrement left by irresponsible dog owners armed with industrial scoopers. In the near future, Troopers will address dogs off-leash by

providing owners with a slip-on leash and distributing dog waste bags. Removing unsightly dog waste benefits all community members by reducing storm water contaminants after heavy rains, minimizing plastic pollutants in soil, and preventing the ingestion of polystyrene microplastics by our local fauna.

BUFFELGRASS REMOVAL



Buffelgrass removals continued throughout the summer at South Mountain Park/Preserve. Desert Defenders removed buffelgrass from various locations including San Juan Road, Marcos de Niza trail, Corona de Loma trail and Dobbins Lookout. Desert Defenders implemented a restoration strategy by pelletizing (placing seed balls) in the removal sites. Removal sites are then mapped by Rangers using an ArcGIS app or mapped by Park Stewards with the iNaturalist app. If seed balls were used as a form of restoration strategy, it is noted in the app(s).

There will be more buffelgrass removals and seed ball making workshops as the “cooler” weather is now upon us.



Photos courtesy of Cassy Castellanos

THE SOUTH MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER IS BACK!

BY PARK RANGER PETER WHITE

When was the last time you visited South Mountain Environmental Education Center (SMEEC)? Well, it has been at least 3 years! The City of Phoenix Natural Resource Department has decided to reopen the center! I am most excited about this because this is where I started my Ranger career. The soft opening will be October 14th at 3 pm (tentative - check Samaritan). Saturday, October 15th will be the first day open. Hours of operation will be Thursday thru Sunday 9 am-3 pm. Shifts will be 8:30 am-12 pm and 12 pm -3:30 pm and will be staffed with Park Stewards and Rangers. In the near future, they will be hiring four part-time recreation



Courtesy of wildlifeformorrow.org

leaders that will be working 15 hours a week. The SMEEC will always have a Park Steward presence and will become the HQ for the Park Steward program. Some of the upgrades for the SMEEC are brand-new Audio-Visual Equipment in the conference center, updated AC units, an updated Pueblo Grande Display, and local photographs for

some of the wall space. The CCC Legacy Foundation has been contacted to help upgrade our CCC display, and we are currently looking for an organization on Arizona mining. As for programs, events, and projects - the possibilities seem limitless!

During the next few months, we will be preparing for a springtime

bustling with activity for all ages! Ideas include field trips serving south Phoenix schools, night sky events, interpretive hikes, science fairs, guest speakers on many environmental topics, and the Annual Park Steward Appreciation Dinner!

If you are interested in using your imagination at SMEEC with amazing ideas, join the crew. Watch Samaritan for scheduled orientations at the center (10409 S Central Ave Phoenix AZ 85042). Remember the center will be relying on lots of support from the Park Stewards! Our program has grown because of you. Let's grow the SMEEC and make this the education destination for visitors and Phoenixians!



Courtesy of visitarizona.com



Have you signed up to volunteer for the Phoenix Summit Challenge yet? This is a great opportunity to meet and cheer on like minded people while having fun and hiking yourself!

Available shifts are in Samaritan under Park Steward Special Events. There are still some great opportunities open!

Proceeds from this event are used to fund improvements to our trails.

CHOLLA TRAIL IS OPEN!

BY PARK RANGER JOSH CAIRNS



Change being a constant absolutely applies to the Cholla trail, much to the frustration of the people assigned with the maintenance of it. The elements take their toll on the trail's tread, hikers stomp it into dust, wind and rain rip that soil away, rocks succumb to gravity and roll to new resting places. It's a near constant struggle against this change. Maintenance is sometimes delayed, issues compound, and then the maintainers are forced to possibly radically alter the trail to "save" it. Nothing will "just stay as it was", no matter how much we'd like our projects to exist unaltered in perpetuity.

The recent wholesale changes to the trail by the maintainers came about because of a rain event. Too much rain loosened the soil and caused a large rock to slide off an upslope and pin a hiker to the trail. The trail's closure followed, and many changes to it were planned and enacted. A trail crew of Park Stewards and Rangers have spent more than two years, off and on, shoring up downslopes with rock retaining walls, widening corners and dangerous narrow sections, creating passing lanes, adding steps and other structures, cutting drains, etc. all in an attempt to make the trail safer, more sustainable, and to forestall...change.

We maintainers have witnessed other changes on the trail too. New Palo Verde trees sprouting in the middle of the trail tread. Some existing trees shooting up new growth out of exposed roots. All varieties of grasses and shrubs have sprung up, including the amazingly aggressive buffelgrass that threatens to overwhelm all other plant life on Camelback. Two years ago, buffelgrass was rare. Now, in places, it's the only vegetation, choking out our lovely cacti and other desert flora. It's a massive and frankly depressing sight. The calm of the closed trail did see a surprising and welcome change occur. Animal life has returned to the trail, at first slowly but now seems to be settled in. We have seen, and seen evidence of, javelina, coyote, and other small mammals. Our avian friends have appeared in larger numbers. Peregrines, various hawks, crows, roadrunners, etc. have all made their presence known. Those once glimpsed at dawn and dusk, on weekdays, whenever the crowds were not present, are now much more present themselves. For now. This will change as the hikers return. The animal life will again retreat to the heights and their borrows and safe spaces because of this change.

Life's only constant is also represented by the new trailhead alignment, bathrooms, lower trail section layout, plantings, and access point. These changes are welcome. These positive changes will make the trail much more accessible and, in some cases, more survivable for the hikers. Good change!



Sources:

<https://courbanize.com/projects/verdin/information>

<https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/>

<https://www.phoenix.gov/parkssite/Pages/take-a-hike-do-it-right.aspx>

<https://www.phoenix.gov/parks/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct-policy>

Five really wonderful PMPC members who volunteer their time to protect and maintain our preserves. Wonderful people!