

McDowell Sonoran Preserve Access Areas Report



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McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission
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Planning Committee of the MSPC

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Access Areas Report

INTRODUCTION

Initial planning identified a 16,460 acre area of the McDowell Mountains and adjacent high Sonoran Desert for preservation to be called the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. In 1995 Scottsdale voters agreed to raise the sales tax .2% for acquisition of land for the Preserve. As part of the planning process, the McDowell Mountains Task Force and subsequently the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission identified the location and types of areas to accommodate appropriate public access to the Preserve.

In 1997 the Desert Preservation Task Force submitted a report to City Council recommending an additional 19,940 acres of natural desert and mountains be added to the planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The City Council added this land to the area desired for inclusion in the Preserve, and Scottsdale voters in 1998 authorized the City to use funds generated from the 1995 sales tax increase to purchase land in the 19,940 acres. Combining the two areas desired for preservation, the planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve encompasses an area of 36,400 acres or nearly 57 square miles. The Desert Preservation Task Force and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission assessed the access needs in the expanded area and identified locations and types of access areas. The purpose of this report is to update and consolidate access area plans into a single report.

Contents of the access area report will be included in the Master Plan for the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The access area report will also be a stand alone document to assist public and private decision-making and to serve as a public information tool.

PRESERVE ACCESS AREAS

The planned McDowell Sonoran Preserve covers an area nearly 57 square miles of mountains and high Sonoran Desert. Public opinion polls consistently indicate the highest priority is for the mountains and desert to be maintained in a natural condition to sustain habitat for wildlife and desert vegetation and to protect historical and archaeological resources. Some parts of the Preserve may not have access due to sensitive or hazardous conditions or to protect natural and cultural resources.

Respondents also identified opportunities for appropriate public recreation as important. Access should be provided where appropriate, however, providing public access and passive recreation should not conflict with the primary objective of preservation. Access areas are the means to provide for public entry into to the Preserve. Access areas will be located at strategic locations on the periphery of the Preserve and will vary in size and in the amenities provided. Experience with mountain preserve or park facilities throughout the Valley has indicated that multiple access areas with adequate parking and staging facilities are critical to prevent overuse of areas where public access occurs.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ACCESS AREAS

The following general guidelines were developed to aid in planning for and implementing Preserve access areas. Guidelines are based on recommendations initially contained in the Report of Recommendations to City Council submitted by the McDowell Mountains Task Force in September 1993. The Planning Committee of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve both initially developed the guidelines in 1994 and updated them in 1998.

The objective is to create enough properly placed and maintained public access areas, with facilities for diverse user groups, to limit the impact on any one particular area. By concentrating appropriate amenities in selected locations, maintenance and management costs will be reduced. Access areas should be planned to avoid the problems of overuse and resource degradation experienced in other communities. Where possible, access areas should be located on already disturbed areas, on locations with limited intrinsic value or scenic features, or in areas that will be unobtrusive to the adjacent residents.

The following issues should be considered in determining an appropriate level of public access for the Preserve.

- a) Access areas should be located and designed in a manner that will most effectively accommodate appropriate public use of the Preserve.
- b) The location and character of planned access areas should be appropriately publicized and should be coordinated with the Scottsdale General Plan and other policy documents.
- c) Access areas should be of sufficient size to accommodate the projected level of use in an environmentally safe manner and to be adequately buffered from surrounding land uses.
- d) Access areas should be planned so the Preserve respects the needs for privacy of local residents and, when possible, limits impact upon adjacent private property.
- e) Public access should be controlled in order to prevent the over use of sensitive areas or natural and cultural resources.
- f) Four types of Preserve access are needed in addition to the existing access to the Preserve provided in the Maricopa County Regional Park. The four types of Preserve access areas include: a gateway, a number of major and minor community access areas, and numerous local access points.
- g) Access areas should be planned to utilize the existing and planned transportation system.
- h) Access areas should be planned to provide public access to existing and planned trails and to key Preserve destinations, as appropriate.
- i) Any local access needs to be consistent with the trails and access plan for the Preserve. The intent is to discourage spider trails, or other non-planned trails in the Preserve.

TYPES OF PRESERVE ACCESS

Four types of Preserve access are needed to accommodate the public. Access areas differ based on size and type and the amount of amenities provided. The type of access area designated for a particular area is based on projected public use and the specific character of the area from an environmental perspective, the amount of land area available for the access area, and the type and proximity of existing and planned adjacent land uses. The provision of access area amenities will be phased in over time.

The four types of public access areas inside the Preserve are described below. There will be additional access locations outside the Preserve that can provide the public with access opportunities to the Preserve or to other recreation and open space amenities.

- **Gateway to the Preserve**

DESCRIPTION: The largest and most strategically located access area is identified as the Gateway to the Preserve. There will only be one Gateway. The Gateway will serve a broad range of needs and users. It will be a visible statement of Sonoran Desert preservation and provide an entry into the heart of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. It will serve as a major passive recreational and tourist experience, a major staging area for exploration into the Preserve, a focal point for educational facilities and programs, and a linkage to the citywide trail system.

A well designed general use area is needed to avoid the problems from overuse and overcrowding experienced in other regional open space areas. Some potential users will not be able to enjoy the Preserve unless some facilities are available on relatively flat or gently sloping desert terrain. A high priority is placed on gaining a general use area on the western boundary of the Preserve to better serve the existing and future community. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

SIZE: 100-200 Acres

PARKING: 500-600 Spaces, including buses and horse trailers. Additional parking will be provided off-site.

AMENITIES: The broadest range of public amenities within the Preserve will be located in the Gateway to accommodate the various needs of the public using the Preserve. In addition to parking for a mixture of vehicles, the Gateway may include a transit stop, picnic areas, ramadas, a visitor center, displays, an amphitheater, Preserve offices, restrooms, drinking fountains, telephones, concessions, maps/signage, displays, trail heads, ADA trails, and a Preserve gate. Picnic and ramada areas may be provided to accommodate corporate picnics and other large user groups.

ACCESS: The Gateway should have access from a major collector or higher classification street. The proximity of the Gateway to a future freeway interchange should also be considered.

The Gateway will also be accessible by various non-motorized modes of transportation including foot, bicycle, horse, or wheelchair. In addition, every effort will be made to provide shared off-site parking facilities.

- **Major Community Access**

DESCRIPTION: Major community access areas will provide opportunities for public use of and access to the Preserve for the entire community. They will serve as staging areas for access to popular public areas in the Preserve. The objective is to provide sufficient and convenient access on the periphery of the Preserve. Major access areas will experience considerably less use than in the Gateway, but will contain more amenities and a higher degree of public use than Minor community access areas. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

SIZE: 30-60 Acres

PARKING: 200-300 spaces including horse trailers

AMENITIES: Major community access areas will generally contain public parking, including horse trailer and bus parking, a transit stop where feasible, multi-use trail-heads, maps and signage, restrooms, picnic areas, ramadas, drinking fountains, telephones, interpretative and educational displays, and limited visitor information.

ACCESS: Access should be from a minor collector or higher classification street and includes foot and/or bicycle/equestrian access.

- **Minor Community Access**

DESCRIPTION: These areas will be similar in function to major community access areas but smaller in size. These areas will accommodate a variety of users but they will be in locations where public demand is not anticipated to be as high as in areas where major community access areas are planned. The size of and amenities included in these areas will be dependent on the character of the surrounding area and the level of public use. Structures and parking areas will probably use natural materials and be carefully located to preserve natural vegetation and to visually blend with the desert terrain.

SIZE: 10-30 Acres

PARKING: 50-100 spaces and limited trailer parking

Note: A minor community access area designated as "Minor Community Access with Additional Parking" is an area that may contain more than 100 parking spaces if necessary to accommodate users and if feasible given the character of the area. Amenities will be the same as for other minor community access areas.

AMENITIES: Minor community access areas will generally contain public parking, limited horse trailer parking, multi-use trail-heads, maps and signage, and, potentially, restrooms, picnic areas, ramadas, drinking fountains, and telephones.

ACCESS: A minor collector or higher access street is desirable.

- **Local Access**

DESCRIPTION: These sites provide for limited use only and may be located within neighborhoods and developments as approved through the planning or development review process. Most local access areas will be provided by developers. The specific locations of these access areas will be coordinated and consistent with overall planning for the Preserve.

SIZE: 0-1 Acre (access may be an entry point providing appropriate public access along the Preserve boundary)

PARKING: No parking provided

AMENITIES: Amenities will be limited to a trailhead and possibly directional trail signage and maps. Access will be for hikers and, in some locations, equestrians and mountain bikers.

ACCESS: These locations will be on a local residential street.

LOCATIONS: Locations are to be determined through the project review process or through City-neighborhood planning efforts.

- **Additional Access Areas**

DESCRIPTION: These areas are outside of the planned Preserve. These areas will work in conjunction with Preserve access areas providing additional parking and trail access to the Preserve.

DESCRIPTION OF PLANNED LOCATIONS FOR ACCESS

Specific access areas were identified using the general guidelines and the descriptions provided above. Extensive field work took place to identify general locations for access areas and to match the level of public access that could be accommodated in a particular location.

Ten locations within the Preserve were identified to provide Preserve access. These locations include a Gateway, three Major Community Access Areas, five Minor Community Access Areas and one location identified as a Minor Community/Major Community Access Area (the size of which will be based on user demand and other factors). These ten Preserve access areas are described below and are shown on the map- Planned Access Areas Map. The need for an

additional access area along the east side of Pima Road, between Dynamite and Stagecoach, will be evaluated in the future based upon the needs of Preserve users and on whether other access areas become overused or overcrowded. Additional access areas may be identified in the future.

GATEWAY TO THE PRESERVE

Location- in the Bell Road and Thompson Peak Parkway vicinity

Rationale-

- Satisfies "General Use Area" recommendation in McDowell Mountains Task Force Report.
- Provides entire community with vital western access.
- Located near center of range with views of significant mountain features.
- Provides access to major proposed trails and some of the most significant archaeological, historical, scenic and natural features in the Preserve.
- Provides high visibility which will enhance the community's sense of ownership and enhances public support.

MAJOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS

1. In the general vicinity of 128th -132nd streets on the north side of the McDowell Mountains

Rationale-

- Provides important northern access to northeastern mountains, County Regional Park and City land.
- Area is important to many different user groups including rock climbers, equestrians, hikers, cyclists, bird watchers and botanists.
- Offers access to many important features such as Tom's Thumb, Wingate Overlook, Gardiner's Wall, Sven Slab, Mesquite Canyon and the Windmill Trail.

2. In the general vicinity of Lost Dog Wash near Cactus Road and 124th Street

Rationale-

- Provides access needed for rapidly growing Shea corridor area.
- Provides opportunity for linkage to preserve lands and trails donated by Suncor and Newhall/Herberger.
- Gives access to several scenic areas, including Lost Dog Valley, Taliesin Saddle, and Taliesin Wash.
- Topography will provide the opportunity to locate parking so it can be screened from adjacent land uses.
- Provides opportunities for linkages to east and southeast end of the mountain range, and to Fountain Hills.

Provides on-site outdoor educational opportunities for students from the adjacent elementary, middle and high school.

3. Granite Mountain area near 136th Street and Lone Mountain Road alignment

Rationale-

Provides community access to very scenic mountainous area north of Lone Mountain Road with lots of saguaros and boulder outcrops. Adjacent Preserve land provides an opportunity for a wilderness type experience while still in the City.

Area is important to rock climbers, equestrians, hikers, and cyclists. Provides views to Verde River Valley from east-side of ridgeline and linkages to forest, county, and powerline corridors.

136th Street provides good existing street access to area.

MAJOR OR MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREA WITH ADDITIONAL PARKING

1. Pima Road and Dynamite Boulevard area

Rationale-

Area already disturbed by parking and powerline corridors. Currently serves as prime staging area for mountain bicycling. Proximity to saguaro forests and powerline corridor trails.

MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS

1. Eagle Ridge area at Via Linda extension. **The City of Scottsdale will work in cooperation with Fountain Hills and the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.*

Rationale-

Provides access to important southeastern features including old mines, scenic canyons and peaks and ridges in eastern portion of the Preserve. Proximity to Via Linda and Shea corridor.

2. Fountain Hills at County Park boundary in 144th Street area. **The City of Scottsdale will work in cooperation with Fountain Hills and the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.*

Rationale-

Offers southeastern access to City Land and County Regional Park.

Provides eastern link to east-west trails.
Location convenient for access to several heritage sites including Dixie Mine, Windmill, and petroglyphs.

3. Brown's Mountain area north of Dixie near Alma School alignment

Rationale-

Alma School provides good street for public access.
Parking can be placed out of view of future homes.
Access in the heart of the Preserve and can serve to link trails.
Preserve land provides users an opportunity for a wilderness type experience while in the City.

4. Fraesfield Mountain area near Dynamite Boulevard and 128th Street

Rationale-

Excellent location for visitors to pull off Dynamite to begin exploring desert.
Parking can be placed on land previously disturbed by grading and wildfires.
Provides access to north-south trail system and connecting corridor.

MINOR COMMUNITY ACCESS AREAS WITH ADDITIONAL PARKING

1. Desert Foothills Scenic Drive on Scottsdale Road near Happy Valley Road (Note: A Minor Community with Additional Parking may have more than 100 parking spaces to accommodate user demand)

Rationale-

Desert Foothills Scenic Drive on Scottsdale Road near Happy Valley Road
Location is great for tourists and visitors travelling along Scottsdale Road.
Facilities should include bus parking, restrooms, tourist information and Desert Foothills Scenic Drive information.
Provides access to powerline corridor trails.
Provides linkages to Phoenix trails and open space.

ACCESS LOCATIONS OUTSIDE THE PRESERVE

In addition to planned access areas in the Preserve, there are existing and planned parking areas and trail-head locations outside the Preserve that will provide additional access opportunities for the Preserve and linkages to other amenities and the citywide trail system. Grade separations should be provided at major roadways for trails or paths linking these additional access locations to the Preserve. Access areas outside of the Preserve are described below:

1. Parking in the vicinity of 136th Street and Shea Boulevard on City land

Rationale-

Location was proposed in Settlement between City and Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community

Existing underpass at Shea provides good linkage for trails.

Access in this area can link Preserve to Shea Boulevard and any future Saddleback Mountain trails.

2. Trailhead at 136th Street adjacent to Scottsdale Mountain

Rationale-

Existing City trailhead providing access to existing and planned trails.

3. Trailhead parking east of public schools on McDowell Mountain Ranch Road

Rationale-

Existing paved parking provides access to dedicated trails through McDowell Mountain Ranch to Preserve and to Westworld.

4. Westworld parking areas west of Thompson Peak Parkway

Rationale-

Parking around Brett's Barn and stables provides good staging area for equestrian and other trail users.

Linkages to Reata Wash and planned open space corridors.

5. Community Park in DC Ranch adjacent to Thompson Peak Parkway

Rationale-

Links to Wingate Pass, Reata and Beardsley Wash corridors.

Underpass will be provided under Thompson Peak Parkway for regional trail connections.

6. Pinnacle Peak

Rationale-

A lease of State Trust land will allow construction of trailhead parking.

Parking enables the public to view this landmark and use the existing trail and climbing areas.

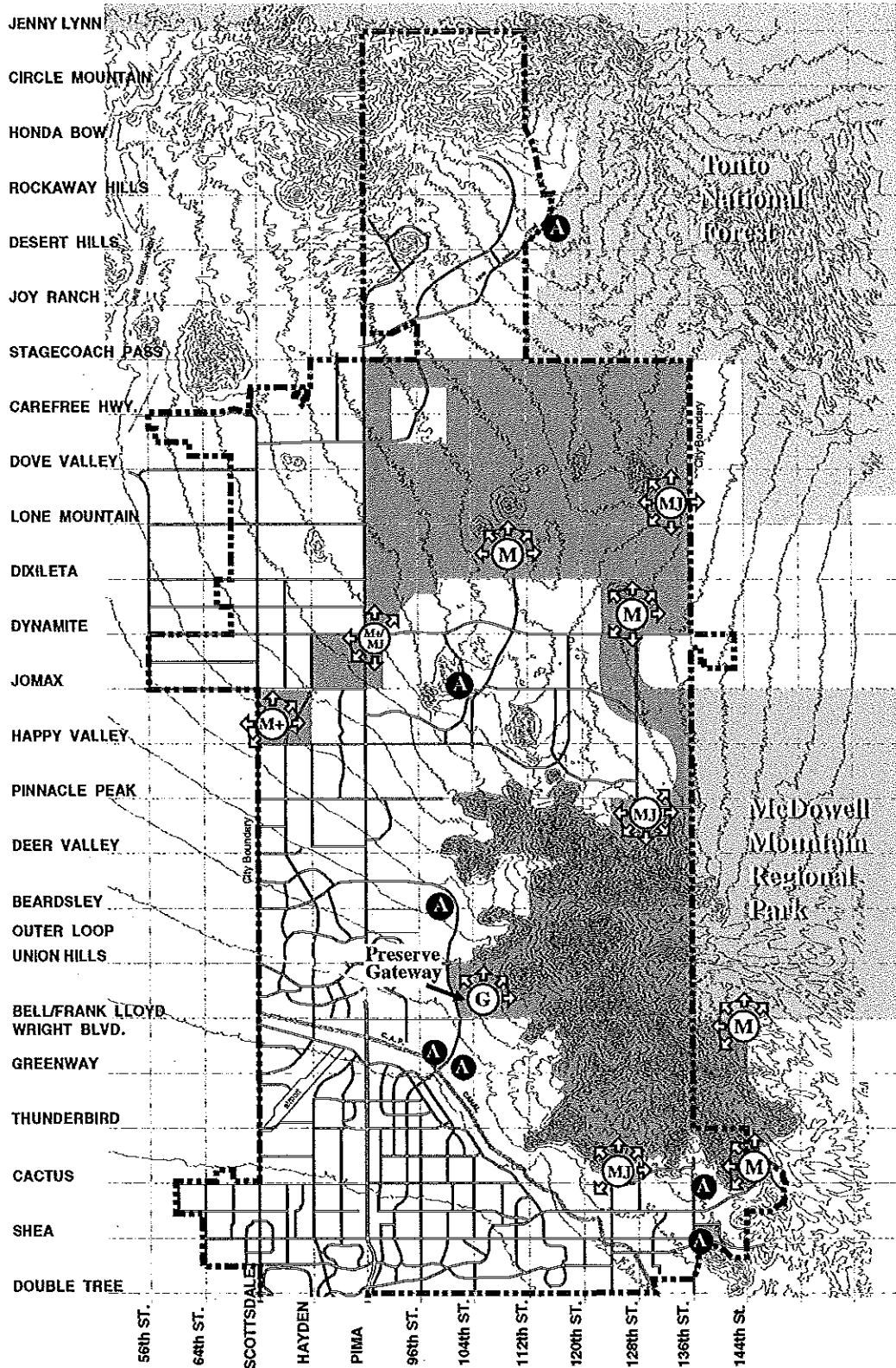
7. Carefree Ranger Station in Tonto National Forest at Cave Creek and Bartlett Dam Roads


Rationale-

Ranger station provides staging area, trail information and a rest stop.



PLANNED ACCESS AREAS FOR THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE



 Recommended Study Boundary for the McDowell Sonoran Preserve: 36,400 Acres

 City Boundary



city of scottsdale, arizona

Note: Map is for illustration purposes only and is not to scale.
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Planned Preserve Access Areas

G = Gateway Access

MJ = Major Community Access

M = Minor Community Access

M+ = Minor with Additional Parking



Additional Planned or Existing Access Locations Outside Preserve