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MEMORANDUM

Date: April 10, 2012

To: Parks and Recreation Department Commissioners

From: R.J. Cardin, Director 

Re: Director's Summary of Current Events

Listed below are issues that the department has been involved with since the February 14 2012, Director's Summary.

From the Desk of the Director

Board of Supervisors Approved Agenda Items

- ***Approval of the Vulture Mountain Regional Park Master Plan*** – The Bureau of Land Management, the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department and stakeholders worked together to develop four alternative plans
- ***Intergovernmental Agreement between Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department and the City of Peoria*** - To form a strategic alliance for economic development of portions of Lake Pleasant Regional Park and enhance recreation and tourism opportunities and support services
- ***Approve the Permanent Addition to Fleet of One Mule 4x4 for San Tan Mountain Regional Park*** - Will allow trail maintenance and repair in outlying areas of the Park
- ***Commercial Management Concessionaire's Agreement (CMCA) with Fly Fish Arizona Guide Service*** - To provide a commercial fly fishing guide concession in the park system

Budget

General Fund (100) – Agency 300 – On the expenditure side, the General Fund is currently reporting expenditures 10% or \$72,463 under the year to date (YTD) budget. There are no revenues collected within the General Fund.

Enhancement Fund (241) – Agency 305 – Enhancement Fund is currently reporting revenue at 11% or \$247,867 over the YTD budget. Enhancement Fund is currently 2.5% or \$59,838 under the YTD operating budget for expenditures.

Lake Fund (240) – Agency 302 – Lake Fund is currently reporting revenues at 1.4% or \$14,991 over the YTD budget. Lake Fund is reporting operating expenditures under budget at 7.1% or \$86,660.

Spur Cross (225) – Agency 306 – Spur Cross is currently reporting revenues at -21.3% or \$22,879 under the YTD budget. Spur Cross is reporting operating expenditures under budget at 18% or \$35,686.

Information Technology

The Continuously Operating Reference Station (CORS) project has been completed at San Tan. OET completed the installation with CORS team members onsite to test. This system monitors data consisting of carrier phase and code range measurements in support of three dimensional positioning, meteorology, space weather, and geophysical applications. Everything works great and they are transmitting data!

Human Resources

Open Enrollment Kick-off is underway. There will be 3 medical plans offered instead of 6 and some plans will have lower premiums while others may go up, but not more than \$10.

On the staffing side, news to note:

- Interviews for the Park Maintenance Worker position at Utery Regional Park were held and Todd Gunter was selected. Welcome Todd!
- The referral list for the Westside Regional Superintendent was forwarded to the Department and interviews were held. No decision has been made at this time.
- The vacant Park Maintenance position at Lake Pleasant was opened for external recruitment for a second time. The top two candidates both declined the position.

Finance Program

With Ken Mouw's upcoming retirement, recording and tracking of service on our Department's vehicles and equipment has been moved over to Finance.

Staff worked to complete the final purchases of carpeting and HVAC for Staff Support at Lake Pleasant.

Central Reservations

The Department has gone live with our Employee Discount Annual Pass Cards. We began testing with the Community Collaboration Constellation in early March and the program is off to a great start.

Volunteer Program

This year's Host Appreciation event was held at Surprise Stadium on Tuesday, March 6th. It was a warm and sunny day, perfect weather for a baseball game. There were 87 lucky people who enjoyed a day of awards, raffle prizes, snacks, and a spring training game between the Royals and the Padres. Many kudos were received from the hosts and staff about the event and volunteer coordinator Dan Wilson also surveyed the hosts about future events.

A new program was created: Staff and Volunteer Hiking Series. The first hike was held at Cave Creek and Ranger Sarah led a group of 8 people into the Clay Mine where they learned a little about the history of the mine, the people who made the claim, and the captive group even got to see some wildlife (a bat) who now utilizes the space today. The next hike is scheduled for April 6th at Estrella.

Our Volunteer Coordinator is a volunteer himself and helped run a kids station at the San Tan St. Patty's Day event and also assisted the volunteers and hosts at San Tan in planting 30+ trees and plants that were donated to the park.

Souvenir Fund

This has been a year of change with the Souvenir Fund and we continue to work out the wrinkles. Setting timelines for ordering and delivering product to the Parks have made this last month run smoothly. We have turned the order form into a communication tool that allows anyone to open it up and see the status of an order. Using the new process, 18 orders were placed this month.

Work has started on the FY13 order form and three more sections of the Barcode Book have been completed.

Superintendent Reports

Cave Creek Regional Park – The Park hosted 28 interpretive programs with a total of 782 participants, including 140 repeat attendees. A few of the programs included: Frontier Tour, History of the Cowboy, Spring into Wildflowers, Fitness, Ride with Ranger and Archery 101. There were also 6 docent led programs offered with 159 visitors in attendance and 24 repeat attendees.

One of our Park Hosts introduced two new programs to our visitors – Polliwogin' Story time and Birding.

On March 3rd, Hands on Greater Phoenix brought out 15 volunteers to help complete the Desert Tortoise Habitat. The Gabion Wall was completed and we are still working on a drip line system to the area. Thanks to our volunteers soon the tortoises will have a new home.

Desert Outdoor Center – The DOC Stargazing program had near-record attendance with 303 participants learning about the constellations and planets in the night sky.

Ten schools chose to participate in Archery 101 classes resulting in 419 students learning the basics of the sport.

Preparations have begun for the summer Aquatics Camp including interviews for temporary staff through the Boy Scouts of America.

Estrella Mountain Regional Park – The Park hosted 23 interpretive programs with 156 participants in the month of March. There was a total of 5,656 park visitors during the month who participated in either events, programs or hikes. The 9 picnic area ramadas have been full most weekends with group reservations.

The Hike for the Homeless through St. Joseph the Worker was held on March 4th and had over 500 hikers supporting the fundraiser.

The Tres Rios Nature Festival was held on March 10th and 11th with approximately 1,000 attendees each day of the 2-day festival. Families and children were excited to fish in the AZGFD's pond, participate in hay rides and nature hikes, watch various presentations including Archery, and visit with live animals.

The 1st annual Gladiator Rock-n-Run Mud Run and Obstacle Race brought over 2,000 participants and 1,000 spectators into the park. The turf area was filled with spectators watching the athletes maneuver a 5K run on park trails and being challenged by climbing walls, ropes, nets, crawling through trenches and mud pits.

The Three Rivers Historical Society has partnered with the Park on the Centennial Trail project. The momentum from the groundbreaking continues with meetings being held twice a month.

McDowell Mountain Regional Park - The Park's interpretive program attendance continues to increase over last year. In February there were a total of 704 participants compared to 416 last year, and 196 repeat attendees compared to 46 in 2011. Programs with the greatest increase include the Fat Tire 40 and the 13th annual Desert Classic Duathlon. The numbers continue to grow whether the event is a running, biking or equestrian event more and more park visitors are discovering McDowell Mountain Regional Park.

Over 300 hikers gathered for the 1st Hike for the Homeless through St. Joseph the Worker and we look forward to hosting this annual fundraising event next year.

The RPM McDowell Criterium road race participants had a 13% increase in participation. During the same weekend the Xterra Trail Run Arizona series staged at the Trailhead Staging Area with 301 runners.

The park hosted the 12th Annual Pemberton 50k run on the Pemberton Trail with 149 runners at the start and 138 crossing the finish line.

Fountain Hills Great Arts and Craft Fair had a record setting 355,000 people in attendance. The Parks booth was manned by volunteers from the McDowell Park Association and was busy all weekend.

During March, the campground was full with a few rare exceptions. The only possible time to get into the park without reservations was on Thursday nights when 1 – 3 sites were open.

American Competitive Trail Horse Association had 47 competitors that rode all morning before the winners were announced while everyone enjoyed a nice lunch.

The Grey Hawk Hiking Club bused in 110 hikers who began at the Trailhead Staging Area and hiked over the mountains, 13 miles back to their vehicles parked at the Gateway Trailhead in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

Approximately 65 family and friends turned out on the 24th of March to ride in memory of the mountain biker who suffered a fatal fall in early February.

The last Saturday in March, members of the mountain division of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, with some help from Lake Patrol, saturated the northwest corner of the park to check all park visitors for entry fees. During the fee enforcement period contact was made with 67 park visitors and just one citation was written for failure to pay the appropriate entry fee.

San Tan Mountain Regional Park – The Park offered 18 programs to the excitement of 425 park visitors. The highlights of the month included the Full Moon Hike, Movie Day at the Park, Mountain Bike Skills Clinic, Venomous Creatures and Snake Feeding.

With the help of Silver Rein Horsemanship, the park was able to successfully host our first Horses 101 program. Following the program, folks had the opportunity to ride with the ranger through the park.

The Park and Friends of San Tan hosted its fifth annual St. Patrick's Day activity. The special program attracted 225 youth and adults. Guests were treated to a plethora of fun stations such as face painting, desert trivia, bean bag toss, obstacle course, crafts, coloring and so much more.

The park hosted a Pioneer Trek along portions of the San Tan, Rock Peak Wash, and Malpais Trails. Trek members were dressed in traditional clothing, similar to that of early pioneers, to experience a glimpse of challenges pioneers faced. Teams hauled hand carts with their belongings for roughly 3 miles through the park, and continued on their quest outside of the park.

The San Tan Interpretive Ranger introduced a new program, Gold Panning at San Tan, to the excitement of 52 participants. Each person had the opportunity to pan for real gold flakes at our mock gold site inside the Visitor Center Parking Compound. Youths also had the opportunity to pan for gold nuggets (fake, of course) that they could take home.

The Aravaipa Running group held the second annual, San Tan Scramble, as part of the Desert Runner Trail Series and it brought in over 200 participants.

An Eagle Scout completed a plant identification garden along our Buddy Pond Trail. The scout acquired and planted various species representing the lower Sonoran Desert and installed rocks with plaque signage to help park visitors identify the plants commonly found in the area.

An Eagle Scout, along with 40 volunteers completed a successful removal of an invasive weed species, known as buffelgrass, from a section of the west side of Goldmine Mountain. The scouts worked furiously to remove this aggressive weed species that is able to out compete native plants in the area for water and other resources.

Another Eagle Scout, along with 35 volunteers completed a rehabilitation project along the Goldmine Trail. The Scouts did an amazing job planting 7 pounds of native plant seeds along an old jeep road within the park. Scouts used natural items and barriers found within the desert to provide protection for the seeds and hide the old road until it can be fully rehabilitated. The project will help minimize confusion for park visitors and keep folks on designated trails.

Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area - Spur Cross hosted 16 interpretive programs with a total of 327 participants. Some of the programs included: Elephant Mountain Fortress Hike, Ruins of Spur Cross, Desert Washes 101, Archaeology Expo Metate Trail Hike, Archaeology Expo First Mesa Hike, Dragonfly Trail Exploration Hike, Healthy Hiking and Wildflower Walk. There were also 7 docent led programs offered with 82 visitors in attendance.

The co-sponsorship agreements with Cave Creek Museum & Desert Foothills Chapter were completed and both agencies coordinated the annual Archaeology Expo held at SCRCA.

Usery Mountain Regional Park - In March, Usery Park hosted 110 interpretive programs, yoga classes, and outreaches totaling 2,645 participants and 1,119 repeat attendees.

"The Living Desert" movie night was a hit with both campers and neighbors. In addition to popular bird programs that support consistent numbers, the Bird Lady entertained 63 campers and park visitors with bird feeders at her host site.

Youth program attendance continues to increase with 25 – 50 in attendance at each program. Some of the popular programs include Kid vs. Wild, Toddler Cruise, Story Time and Desert Scavenger Hunt.

The popular progressive fitness hikes have resumed the spring series exercising an average of 40 fast hikers every Saturday through a 6-hike series progressing from Blevins Trail up to the final hike around Pass Mountain. A new series 'Dog Fitness Hikes' has been integrated and is gaining popularity.

The archery range in partnership with the Usery Mountain Archery Club has been hosting a number of tournaments every month. February had 100 shooters to the Warm-up to the Triple Leg, Cactus Cup and 240 shooters to the First Leg of the Triple Crown, Cactus Cup.

Archery 101 still remains a very popular draw and Archery 202 was offered in February for graduates of 101. Park staff is partnering with the archery coordinator from the AZGFD to design Archery 303.

Two memorial benches are to be installed in the park in memory of two park visitors who made Usery Park part of their everyday routine. One will be installed at the Wind Cave/Pass Mountain intersection and the other will be installed on the Blevins Trail.

Spring break programming this year had kids experiencing the park from one end to another in a Wild Animal Safari, Cat Cave Hike, Desert Scavenger Hunt, Story Time, Lizard Hunt, Outdoor Games and

Animal Flashlight Walk. Kids and families also utilized the Nature Center more this spring visiting the critters. Of particular interest besides Elvis, our entertaining king snake, are the new baby desert tortoises.

The March Special Speaker Series was quite successful with a new speakers presenting on topics including Exploring Archaeology w/ Gina Gage, Messages in Stone w. Niccole Cerveny, The Glorious Goldfields w/ Ted Tenney, The Birth of Rocks w/ AJ Lombard and The Tale of Two Deserts w/ Dr. John Alcock.

The interpretive ranger partnered with the Arizona Science Center for the March home school program "Beautiful Butterflies". Families were provided the opportunity after class to take their chrysalis' home to watch them move through the butterfly cycle.

Four park hosts met with Michelle Lee of the Arizona Republic for an article about volunteering in Maricopa County Parks system. The reporter and photographer participated in a Backyard Birding interpretive program with the Bird Lady, spoke with an experienced Nature Center volunteer and veteran Entry Station volunteers.

White Tank Mountain Regional Park – The Park's Interpretive Ranger hosted 5 outreach programs and 20 park programs and events for 1,785 excited visitors. Program attendance has increased 11% over last year.

Some of the month's program highlights were the Cowboy Campfire drawing in 350 visitors; the Mesquite Runner Series with 298 runners competing in several different races including the grueling 50km; the Civil Air Patrol trained 120 cadets out at the Willow Campground; and Luke AFB also hosted a hiking event to raise money for the families of fallen soldiers.

Director Cardin and County Supervisor Max Wilson led the Wellness Hike with the Honchos up the Waterfall Trail with county employees braving the 1.8 miles of trails while enjoying the program presented by our ranger.