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MEMORANDUM

Date: September 5, 2013
To: Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission
From: R.J. Cardin, Director
Re: Director's Summary of Current Events

Listed below are activities the department has been involved with since the August 7, 2013, Director's Summary Report.

From the Office of the Director

Staff raises were issued in July and OMB requested we update our revised budgets to increase revenue and expenditure authority to match the allotted pay increases. Work was done to complete this process including review of staffing allocations between funds and other budgetary items. The increases were needed and appreciated, but without additional general fund revenues to cover any of the increases, we are putting added pressure on our revenue streams. Assuming revenues continue as projected according to historical trends, we should be fine. We will just have to be extra vigilant about monitoring revenues.

Administration

If you blinked your eyes, then you missed August. It's hard to believe, but we are already two full months into a new fiscal year (FY14) and are gearing up for our winter visitors. Administration has implemented several new programs and procedures, all designed to improve effectiveness and efficiencies. We are anxiously awaiting the arrival of our winter visitors to see if our new processes hold up under heavy fire! Here is the activity for August 2013:

Budget Status (through July close):

- ***Enhancement Fund (241) – Agency 305:***
 - Enhancement Fund reported revenue 4% or \$4,572 over the YTD budget.
 - Enhancement Fund reported expenditures 9% or \$31,223 over the YTD operating budget for expenditures.
- ***Lake Fund (240) – Agency 302:***
 - Lake Fund reported revenues 8% or \$11,756 under the YTD budget.
 - Lake Fund reported operating expenditures under budget at 17% or \$27,618.
- ***Spur Cross (225) – Agency 306:***
 - Spur Cross reported revenues at less than 1% under the YTD budget or \$146.
 - Spur Cross reported operating expenditures over budget at 1% or negative \$269.

Central Reservations:

- The reservation line remains relatively quiet through August. Calls continue to be slower due to the time of year with the exception of the first few days of the month when the campgrounds open for reservations in January.

Finance Program:

- With the Accounting Specialist position vacant, all staff is pitching in to keep the program running smoothly.
- Work is underway to set up a process where Tres Rios Golf Course (Estrella) can make electronic payments rather than sending in a monthly check. If successful, this could open other opportunities for this type of payment process.
- Fee revisions are also underway. The Cost of Service model for Fund 241, 240, 225 and DOC have been completed and fee benchmarking is underway. Proposed fee revisions will be presented to the Management Team starting in September.

Human Resources:

New Hires or Transfers:

- Congratulations to Bruce Zavoda, Parks Office Assistant, who is moving from Lake Pleasant to Estrella effective August 19, 2013.

Farewells:

- Farewell to Alix Larson, Accounting Specialist, who moved on to an accounting position with the City of Mesa as of August 19, 2013.
- Farewell to Doc (Bill) Talboys, Interpretive Ranger, who retired effective August 24, 2013.

Open positions and recruitments:

- Accounting Specialist – Under Recruitment
- Interpretive Ranger (San Tan) – Interviews pending
- Interpretive Ranger (White Tank) – Interviews pending
- Contact Station Assistant (Lake Pleasant – 2 positions) – Interviews pending
- The following positions are currently vacant and under review:
 - Temporary Contact Station Assistant - Lake Pleasant (2 positions)
 - Trails Technician (Trails)
 - Trades Specialist (Trades/7 Crew)
 - Maricopa Trail Manager (Planning and Development)

Information Technology:

- The mobile fee enforcement demo unit was provided to the Construction/Trails staff to field test. Although the usage is not quite the same, the unit may be able to meet the needs of both work groups.
- The County is exchanging out old handheld radios with new digital radios. Parks is one of very few departments whose count exchange was perfect.
- A POS/Reservation system manual has been completed for use at HQ (front desk).
- The RFP for Wi-Fi in the park campgrounds is currently in draft format and under review.
- A work order has been submitted to RDSA to install Faxination for Parks. Once completed, this will allow removal of stand-alone fax machines. Faxes will be received via a centralized mailbox so they are fully electronic. We currently have three parks without fax capabilities due to excessive backlog at RDSA.

Souvenir Fund:

- September has been busy in the Souvenir Fund. The parks are filling their shelves in preparation for fall and winter visitors. With several new products added this year, the parks will have some different merchandise to offer our visitors.

Volunteer Program:

- New Host applications have been flooding the park volunteer email account as well as the Headquarters mailbox. Lake Pleasant, White Tank, and Estrella still need new hosts, but all other parks are filled for the season.
- The department is partnering with HandsOn Greater Phoenix for future volunteer events including the September 11th National Day of Service at San Tan Mountain Regional Park. Volunteers from HandsOn Greater Phoenix will serve alongside regular and episodic park volunteers doing trail maintenance, general trash clean up, and other projects. The 9/11 day of service will be in honor of those who have served including fallen soldier Nathaniel Martens. A memorial display was built at San Tan in 2006 near the nature center in honor of Nathaniel.

- Host/Volunteer report for June 2013:

	July 2012	July 2013
Total Department Hours	2,460	3,275
*Monthly Financial Savings	\$54,016	\$72,514
YTD Total Hours	2,460	3,275
*YTD Financial Savings	\$54,016	\$72,514
* 2012 Value - \$22.14 per hr		

Planning and Development (Engineering) Highlights

- **White Tank - Water Supply System Upgrade Project:** This project will update and improve the potable well and booster pump station that services the park and the library. The contract has been signed and is awaiting approval by the Board of Supervisors.
- **White Tank - RV Dump Station Project:** This project will construct a new waste disposal (dump) station. Staff is finalizing the specifications. It is planned to advertise the project for bids in October.
- **White Tank - Installation of Individual Electrical Hookups at the Campground:** A new contractor has been selected and a kick-off meeting with APS was held August 21, 2013.
- **White Tank Master Plan:** The final public meeting for the Master Plan Project is scheduled for Saturday, September 7th, from 10:30 am to 12:30 pm at the White Tank Nature Center. The public will have 30 days after the 7th to submit comments.
- **System Wide:** Parks staff is analyzing the restroom assessment reports and working with Procurement to “package” together construction improvements. Staff has begun to review all playgrounds and is meeting with vendors for ideas on new playground equipment.
- **Trails Crew:** A public meeting for the draft Lake Pleasant Trails Plan is scheduled for Thursday, September 12th, from 6-8 pm at the Lake Pleasant Operations Center. A presentation to the Park Commission is tentatively scheduled for January. We are hopeful to begin breaking ground on the new trails in early 2014.
- **Trades Crew:** The 7-Crew is continuing to replace the water line at Cave Creek. The Crew has also recently repaired several water leaks not related to the water line replacement.

Park Operation Highlights

Cave Creek Regional Park

- In August, the park hosted 15 interpretive programs with 199 participants attending, which included 19 repeat attendees. One docent lead program was offered with 9 attendees. *Venomous Critters in the Neighborhood*, which is an outreach program, was the highlight with 95 people in attendance.
- Two new host couples have been interviewed; one will be stationed at Adobe Dam to fill the last position needed for the park and the other couple will be covering shifts at Cave Creek and Spur Cross. We also have two new community volunteers that will be assisting in the fall.
- The park office assistant has been busy ordering souvenir items for the nature center. She has also helped with interviews for the contact station assistant position at Lake Pleasant. In addition, she has helped with initial training of the new park office assistant at Estrella.
- Monsoon report: A few of the trails has some minor drainage issues from the heavy rains.

The Desert Outdoor Center (DOC):

- During the summer lull, while schools are not in session, DOC hosted several group retreats: AZ Game and Fish Wildlife Management Division award ceremony, AZ Game and Fish Field Operations Division supervisor retreat, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Commander's staff retreat, and Peoria Chamber of Commerce planning session. This time was also spent stripping and sealing dorm floors and assessing teaching supply needs. The bulk of school field trip reservations for the upcoming school year are made in August and by month's end there were only a handful of dates available.

Estrella Mountain Regional Park:

- August Programs and Hikes - Attendance for ranger programs was light this month, with just under 100 attendees for the 14 programs offered during the month. The highlight this month was the release of a juvenile Red Tailed Hawk that had been rescued from the park earlier this year. It apparently had been knocked out of its nest by a storm. Staff called in experts from Fallen Feathers, a local rehab organization, who rehabilitated the hawk and released it back into the park. Other popular programs were reptile feedings and scorpion night hikes.
- Monsoon storms have brought some much needed rain to Estrella Park.
- 26 new recycled plastic picnic tables have been assembled and are being placed on the parks 64 acre picnic area.
- Staff has been busy preparing for and creating locations and digging holes for 300 trees obtained from Maricopa County Flood Control. Most will go in the nature center and Centennial Trail area. Several will go out on the turf and picnic area. The Centennial Trail Committee is excited that the park has obtained some trees. Park Staff have planted 50 of the trees so far in the nature center area.

Lake Pleasant Regional Park

- During the month of August, the park provided 12 programs to the delight of 92 participants. The highlights of the month included two *Hike-N-Splash* activities and the *History of Water at Lake Pleasant* (a new program developed to provide background information on the Parks' water system) which was a huge hit with program attendees. Unfortunately, the scheduled *Full Moon Paddle* was rained out. Roughly 70 paddlers showed up for the program, but were turned away due to lightning and other weather/safety related conditions.
- The Lake Pleasant interpretive ranger assisted the Desert Outdoor Center with the two Cabela's *Beginner Flat Water Kayaking* programs. The programs attracted 67 participants to learn about the wonderful world of kayaking in a special, interactive setting. In addition, the ranger assisted the DOC with the *Get Wet* classes.
- An intergovernmental agreement with the City of Peoria's Community Services Department was approved by the Board of Supervisors. This partnership will provide and support recreational activities between the two parties.
- The Lake Pleasant interpretive ranger was featured on a Channel 5 News segment after being recognized through a Facebook video post that highlighted rattlesnakes being born under an air conditioning unit near the Visitor Center. The recent exposure and regular Facebook update posts are creating quite the positive stir and driving people to our Facebook account and websites.
- The Lake Pleasant park supervisor was awarded the Michael A. Ramnes scholarship through the Arizona Parks & Recreation Fellowship at the 2013 APRA Conference. The scholarship will help provide funding for the supervisor to attend the Revenue Development & Management School at Oglebay.
- Interviews are currently being conducted for a contact station assistant position.

McDowell Mountain Regional Park

- The first Saturday in August, Parks department staff members, interested local volunteers, and bike shop representatives met with Nat Lopes, a co-owner of Hilride Progressive Development. Hilride works with Specialized Bikes and has designed and developed many bike parks around the country. Hilride came to McDowell on a trip paid for by the Mountain Bike Association of Arizona to see and evaluate the McDowell site for the design of a bike park and with consideration that the same or a similar design could be used in Estrella Mountain Regional Park and White Tank Mountain Regional Park.
- The summer night ride series of mountain bike rides continued through August. On the second Saturday in August, a record 152 riders came out to McDowell to enjoy a slightly cooler desert ride and the joy of seeing other local riders. Two weeks later, the night ride series moved its ride to Friday night to accommodate those having to work on Saturdays and on that night the park had 110 riders.
- The interpretive ranger offered 19 programs in August and had 343 participants with 204 of those returning for more information.
- McDowell has had several monsoon storms roar across the park bringing rain, and at times heavy down pours, along with very strong winds. Park staff was busy remediating spots along the trail system where erosion had taken place and the park facilities suffered some damage from the strong winds.
- On Friday, August 30th, the south loop of the campground was reopened after being closed since late May. On the same day, the annual summer fire ban was lifted.

- Work continues on the installation of a new, larger pond behind the Visitor Center. A completed pond is expected in September.
- Park staff returned to the same photography locations along the north boundary of the park and re-photographed the landscape to document the one year change in vegetation. In 2012, an effort was made to reduce the fuel load along the north boundary.

San Tan Mountain Regional Park:

- During the month of August, San Tan provided 7 interpretive programs with 547 program participants. The highlight program for the month was the *Perseids Meteor Shower* which attracted over 400 participants alone.
- With the help of the Friends group and local community members, we have begun our final phase of renovations to the nature center at San Tan. The first phase included the upgrade of the classroom which was completed in July. The final phase will include the gift shop and main office area. Renovations will include painting the remainder of the visible cinderblock walls, sealing the floors and creating an overall cohesive and educational experience.
- The park supervisor met with the San Tan Historical Society to create a working relationship that will enhance our visitor's experience. The goals include creating a revolving archaeology/mining display that rotates artifacts on a routine basis and includes educational signage. A mini movie will be created to be viewed in the San Tan classroom highlighting key elements of the park's history.
- The park supervisor and volunteers worked on repairing areas of trails damaged by recent storms. In addition, they also restored the beauty of the pond and wildlife refuge area by removing overgrowth surrounding it and filamentous algae. The area has seen an increase in Sonoran Desert and Spadefoot Toad populations.
- We have several Eagle Scout projects set-up for the next few months. As the weather cools, we will begin our efforts to eradicate the buffelgrass, close and re-vegetate spider trails and work to add several educational stations to our new interpretive trail.

Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area:

- In August, the park hosted 8 interpretive programs with 74 participants attending. The program highlights included *Rock Art of Spur Cross*, *Friday Fitness Hikes*, *Full Moon Hike*, *Life on the Creek*, and *Ruins of Spur Cross*. *The Scorpion Hunt* had the highest attendance for the month with 29 visitors participating.
- Monsoon report: The interpretive ranger has checked Spur Cross Trail for possible monsoon damage and reported the trail to be in decent condition. He has also moved the plank bridges out of the creek channel in anticipation of possible flash flooding.
- The ranger has pruned trees and shrubs along the Metate & Towhee trails.
- Staff has completed the fence repairs in the parking lot area and by the entry gate; old t-posts have been removed and replaced.

Usery Mountain Regional Park:

- Usery Park offered 11 interpretive ranger programs in August totaling 422 participants and 2 docent lead programs totaling 91 participants.
- How dangerous are javelinas? How do they survive and thrive in our deserts? What do you do if you encounter one? Ranger B answered these questions and shared some amazing facts about javelinas to 65 guests in his one hour *All About Javelinas* brown bag presentation. Participants brought in their favorite snacks and enjoyed an evening education lecture in the nature center.
- Local geologist, AJ Lombard, presented his *These Rocks Rock!* presentation to kids seven and older in the nature center. About 55 rock lovers attended his talk. AJ shared the rock names, how they were made, what they are made of, and some cool things about the rocks you can find in Arizona.
- AZ Game and Fish set up four traps in our pond to get an accurate count of the endangered Gila Topminnows currently living in the protected habitat. AZ Game and Fish initially stocked the pond in October 2011 with 92 fish. Due to funding issues, they did not conduct monitoring efforts in 2012. Almost two years later, there are 793 Topminnows greater than 10 mm captured and 161 Topminnows less than 10 mm for a net total of 954 Gila Topminnows. The Gila Topminnows are flourishing at the Usery pond which will help reestablish fish into wild sites and increase public awareness of these native endangered fish.

- ASU researchers, Dr. Heather Bateman and her student Beau Rudd, finished gathering data for their study of the effects of trail use on reptiles in the county's regional park system. They will begin analyzing the results and will report back to the park on their findings.
- The Usery Mountain Archers finished their Thursday night archery league in August. The league was held every Thursday night and was open to all ages. The league ran for 13 weeks and had 286 participants, averaging 22 shooters per week.

White Tank Mountain Regional Park:

- The ranger had 13 programs with a total of 254 attendees. Ranger Bill "Doc" Talboys retired, leading his last adult moonlight hike on the Waterfall Trail on August 24, 2013. Actually, he had a flat tire just before the hike and the supervisor had to lead the hike, but he did join us before it was over!
- The parks planner and the park supervisor met one last time with the Stakeholders Group this month to look over the draft Master Plan update. The feedback was very positive. We will be conducting a public meeting on September 7th to present the plan for comments. We are expecting a good turnout and plenty of feedback.
- The family campground improvements continue to move forward. The entire outside loop has water faucets installed, but the inside loop (17 sites) still need to be finished. The Construction Crew will also be leveling sites to make the entire campground more RV friendly. We did have a setback this month by the theft at the family campground. Many tools and fittings as well as copper wire were stolen. Heavy equipment and vehicles were vandalized too.
- The maintenance staff and volunteers hauled dirt out on the Black Rock Long Loop in preparation for HandsOn volunteers coming back in September to continue its work on trail improvements. Volunteers from this group have already completed about a third of a mile of improvements and plan to do more this fall.
- A teacher from Phoenix College would like to do some plant research in the park this fall. We are in the process of creating a permit.
- Heavier than normal rains in the park this summer flooded the roads at the washes. No incidents occurred, but the waterfall has been running and the white tanks are full. As a result of the rain, we have had more visitors and increased revenue this August.

Vulture Mountains Cooperative Recreation Management Area:

- Staff continues to have discussions with The Nature Conservancy, including work on an operation plan.