

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING**
Regular Meeting of August 18, 2026

LOCATION:	Usery Mountain Regional Park
COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:	Megha Budruk, Jack Stapley, Eric Mears, Samantha Stelp, Shelby Scharbach
COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT:	John Crane, Isabel Chavez
STAFF PRESENT:	Jennifer Waller, Director; Betsy Pregulman, Deputy County Attorney

The official correspondence and staff recommendations contained in this Commission folder are hereby entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the August 18, 2026, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING

ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- The regular meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

ITEM #2 – ROLL CALL – Roll call was taken, and a quorum was present.

ITEM #3 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETINGS – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- Commissioner Budruk moved to approve the May 19, 2026, meeting minutes, seconded by Commissioner Stelp.
- With all others in favor, the motion to approve the minutes of the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting held on May 19, 2026, was approved.

ITEM #5 - DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Waller provided an overview of the Director's Summary.
- The Commission was introduced to new Senior Planner Marilu Garcia.
- Spur Cross Supervisor Kevin Smith retired, and Jason Booth, assigned to Hassayampa, departed in July.
- Blake Spanier was promoted to Supervisor at Cave Creek Regional Park. Usery Mountain Regional Park Supervisor Jimmy Gregson transferred to Spur Cross, creating a vacancy at Usery Mountain. Blake Spanier then transferred to Usery Mountain to fill the position, creating a supervisor vacancy at Cave Creek Regional Park.
- Target has participated in volunteer projects at Lake Pleasant for the past three years, with more than 60 employees taking part in a cleanup there in June.
- The Trail Ambassador Program continues to grow, with 43 active Trail Ambassadors currently participating
- Trades and Trails staff continue to provide support at Paradise Valley Golf Course, including mowing, trimming, and irrigation repairs.
- At Estrella, all parking lots were repaved and restriped in June.
- The Hassayampa Park Supervisor is working with arborists to conduct a comprehensive tree inventory.

- Also, at Hassayampa, discussions continue with The Nature Conservancy and the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management regarding fence replacement and creating defensible space for wildfire mitigation.
- Lake Pleasant staff met with the United States Bureau of Reclamation to discuss GPS points for boundary fencing of the North Conservation Area.
- Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) has agreed to grade event parking areas at McDowell Mountain Regional Park.
- Capital Improvement projects at McDowell Mountain Regional Park include upgrades to provide additional power to new campground sites.
- The Enterprise Technology and Innovation Department (ETI) conducted a walkthrough at San Tan Mountain Regional Park to plan for potential technology updates, including satellite-based internet service at the Goldmine entrance.
- San Tan Mountain Regional Park Supervisor Trevor Campbell began implementing the systemwide playground inspection program, starting with White Tank, Utery Mountain, and McDowell Mountain Regional Parks.
- Volunteers from the Central Arizona Council on Developmental Disabilities (CACDD) continue to visit Utery Mountain Regional Park weekly and contributed 40 hours of volunteer service last month.

ITEM #6 – FY26 NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM UPDATE – Juanita Armstrong-Ullberg, Natural Resources Specialist, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg, Natural Resources Specialist with Maricopa County Parks and Recreation, presented the FY26 Natural Resources Summary.
- Vision and goals include protecting and conserving Maricopa County Parks' open space and natural resources through planning, conservation, wildfire mitigation, and improving wildlife habitat and native biodiversity for current and future generations.
- In 2026, Desert Defenders removed 7,700 pounds of invasive plants covering approximately 90 acres.
- In 2026, Desert Defenders completed 93 invasive removals at 8 parks, with over 500 participants.
- Invasive plant removal data by species and park indicate that Stinknet, Sahara mustard, and London rocket represented the primary species removed.
- Contractors treated approximately 605 acres across five parks using herbicides. Drone spectral imagery is being used to monitor long-term treatment effectiveness.
- FY26 restoration activities included harvesting native seed, distributing 8,400 seed pellets, and sowing 15 pounds of loose seed across six parks.
- Desert Defender volunteers participated in 32 seed-harvest events, collecting more than 42 pounds of seed representing 77 native species.
- The greenhouse propagated 136 plants for seed gardens and nature centers and expanded propagation to saguaro and strawberry hedgehog cactus.
- Partnership efforts with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management to maintain fine-fuel breaks at Utery Mountain Regional Park were reviewed. Spring 2026 monitoring indicated the treatments were generally successful, with additional fountain grass treatment planned.
- Approximately 184 acres at McDowell were treated for woody resprouts and fine fuels. Monitoring identified returning fountain grass in some areas, with follow-up treatment planned for fall 2026.
- Riparian habitat restoration at Estrella included vegetation treatment and planting of more than 1,500 tall-pot trees over multiple phases. Continued work includes treatment of tamarisk resprouts and other invasive plants.
- Post-fire monitoring continues to show significant impacts to saguaros, with high percentages recorded as dead or in poor health following wildfires. Staff noted similar results between monitoring of the 2020 fires and the Diamond Wildfire.
- FY26 butterfly monitoring results and comparisons with five-year monitoring data were shared. The data continues to track butterfly abundance and species diversity across participating parks.
- Trail-camera monitoring recorded approximately 4,002 wildlife observations representing 93 species. Monitoring documented birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and amphibians across the participating parks.
- Uncommon species documented through monitoring included badger, coatimundi, spotted and hognose skunks, several snake species, and desert tortoise.

- Eco-Blitz results included over 78,000 observations with over 2,500 species.
- Commissioner Scharbach commended the Natural Resource Specialist for the thorough presentation and recognized the Natural Resources team's important work, noting that much of the behind-the-scenes work required to maintain and preserve the parks often goes unseen by the public.

Commissioner Budruk left the meeting at 11:01 am.

Item #7 – FY26 INTERPRETIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW - Steve DaCosta, Park Education Supervisor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- A total of 9,248 attendees participated in interpretive programs during FY26, with monthly attendance peaking in November, followed by April and January.
- Attendance declined in February and March because unseasonably high temperatures affected outdoor programming and participation during normally busy months.
- White Tank Regional Park recorded the highest park attendance at 2,037, followed by Lake Pleasant and San Tan.
- Animal programs accounted for the largest attendance category.
- The most attended individual programs included Full Moon Hike, Creatures of the Night Hike, Bird Walk, Scorpion Safari, and Meet the Critters.
- The Desert Outdoor Center reported 7,596 program visitors and 28,797 educational contacts.

Item #8– FY26 VOLUNTEER PROGRAM REVIEW – Bill Klewer, Volunteer Coordinator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- For FY2026, volunteers contributed 99,657 total hours, representing an estimated financial impact of \$3,337,513. This reflects an increase from FY2025, when volunteers recorded 93,644 hours with an estimated financial impact of \$3,136,138.
- Core volunteers, including park hosts, community volunteers, and trail ambassadors, contributed 91,340 hours in FY2026, compared with 86,488 hours in FY2025 and 86,816 hours in FY2024.
- Service volunteers contributed an additional 8,317 hours during FY2026 through 165 volunteer events involving 1,251 participants. Projects included litter cleanups, Desert Defender activities, painting, weeding, raking, trail maintenance, and both public and private service events.
- Service events were held throughout the park system, with the most at White Tank (44), Lake Pleasant (40), Cave Creek (23), and Estrella (20).
- Corporate partners included Banner Health, American Express, REI, Amazon, Walmart, and Target. Public and community partners included Boy Scouts of America, Just Serve–LDS Church, Ocean Conservancy, Luke Air Force Base, Arizona State University, and the Deer Valley and Peoria school districts.
- Mr. Klewer provided an update on the Community Restitution Program, which allows individuals on probation in the Maricopa County Superior Court to complete community service hours by volunteering in County parks under staff supervision.
- A new Intergovernmental Agreement with the Adult Program is being drafted, while the Memorandum of Understanding with Juvenile Probation was finalized in February 2026.
- Chair Stapley commented on the volunteer program's impressive financial impact and commended the Volunteer Coordinator for a job well done.

Item #9– CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT AND PROJECT UPDATES – Jeff Gruver, Project Manager Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Project completions in FY26 include the campground electrical renovation at Cave Creek Regional Park; the campground project at Estrella Mountain Regional Park; main waterline replacement at McDowell Mountain Regional Park; the Goldmine Trailhead project at San Tan Mountain Regional Park; and the Area 9 Ramada and Restroom 6 replacement.
- Presentation photos illustrated construction activity and improvements for each project, including utility infrastructure, campground development, trailhead facilities, shade structures, and restroom replacement.

- FY27 projects also included the repair of restroom 2 at Estrella Mountain Regional Park; the Pipeline South Evapotranspiration (ET) Bed project; and repairs to the 500K-gallon storage tank at Lake Pleasant Regional Park.
- Other FY27 projects include a new Salt River Project (SRP) utility line, main waterline replacement phase 3, and the Wildlife Trailhead project at White Tank Mountain Regional Park.
- Commissioner Mears asked about the performance of the prefabricated restrooms.
- Mr. Gruver reported that the prefabricated facilities are less expensive than site-built restrooms and are performing well, with no issues reported.

Item #10 – SET SEPTEMBER 2026 PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY MEETING LOCATION – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- The Commission discussed the September 2026 meeting location.
- Commissioner Mears moved to hold the meeting at the 500 Club. Commissioner Stelp seconded the motion, and with all in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

Item #11 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- No members of the public requested to speak.

Item #12 – CALL TO THE COMMISSION

- Chair Stapley shared his experience from a recent visit to an Arizona State Park in Jerome, noting the well-conducted tour and the park's cleanliness. He reflected that the visit reinforced his pride in being part of the Maricopa County Parks system and emphasized the importance of the work being done to support and maintain County parks.

Item #13 – ADJOURNMENT

- With no further business, Commissioner Mears moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Scharbach. The motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

Jennifer Waller, Director/Secretary

Jack Stapley, Chair