

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING**
Regular Meeting of March 17, 2026

LOCATION: Estrella Mountain Regional Park

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Jack Stapley, Eric Mears, Isabel Chavez, Samantha Stelp

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: John Crane, Megha Budruk, Shelby Scharbach

STAFF PRESENT: **Jennifer Waller, Director; David Jordan, Deputy Director; Kara Currie-Gonzales, Finance Manager; Candi Jones, Executive Assistant; Amber Gribler, Recorder; 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 March 17, 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 taken - a quorum was present.

ITEM #3 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING JANUARY 20, 2026 – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- Commissioner Chavez moved to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2026, meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Mears. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed.

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.
- Director Waller provided updates on items from the Board of Supervisors' Agenda, including the reappointments of Megha Budruk and Samantha Stelp to the Commission. Commissioner Budruk was reappointed for a term from January 28, 2026, to December 31, 2027. Commissioner Stelp was also reappointed for the same term, representing Supervisorial District 4.
- The monthly donation report from Parks and Recreation for November 2025, totaling \$1,749.88, was accepted by the Board of Supervisors.
- Solar was installed at the greenhouse at Cave Creek Regional Park. Over 200 diverse seeds were planted in pots and are beginning to sprout.
- Merkle Trail repairs at Usery Mountain Regional Park were scheduled from February 12 through March 12, 2026, with 14 culverts and several French drains installed to control water flow and erosion issues.
- Twenty-two staff members participated in Trails 101, a virtual training session that provided a broad overview of trail maintenance.
- Fifteen staff members participated in Trails 102, part two of the trail maintenance series, which offers hands-on training and real-world examples.
- The Hassayampa River Preserve Supervisor, the Estrella Mountain Regional Park Supervisor, and the

Maintenance team collaborated with the City of Phoenix and the Arizona State Parks and Trails Site Steward Coordinator to remove graffiti from a petroglyph panel.

- At Lake Pleasant, Bureau of Reclamation archeologist Jessica Axsom provided comprehensive training on cultural resource field practices to 20 staff members from Lake Pleasant, Desert Outdoor Center, Estrella Mountain Regional Park, the Westside Superintendent, and the Bureau of Reclamation.
- The Arizona Game and Fish Department will provide funding for signage and buoys in the coming months to support Bald Eagle Closure efforts at Lake Pleasant.
- The Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area 25th Anniversary Celebration was held on January 9, 2026, and was attended by approximately 150 people.
- The Prickly Pedal Mountain Bike Race was held on Sunday, February 1, 2026, attracting nearly 200 riders.

**ITEM #6 – JUNIOR NATIONAL GOLF CLUB AT ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN REGIONAL PARK
UPDATE – David Kass, Chief Executive Officer, Junior National Golf Foundation**

- Mr. Kass presented an update on the renovation to restore the course to its original desert-style design while improving playability, efficiency, and sustainability.
- Key improvements include new greens, renovated bunkers with fresh sand, improved contours and drainage, upgraded irrigation, and new pumps.
- Nearly \$1 Million in new maintenance equipment has been added, along with new GPS-enabled carts.
- Non-native, high-water-use trees have been removed, and native vegetation reestablished, resulting in an approximate 30% reduction in water use.
- Future plans include adding a second 18-hole championship golf course and a new two-story clubhouse with restaurant and youth space, with an expected opening in fall 2028.
- Over 13,000 free Junior Golf rounds have been played since Junior National started managing the facility.
- Junior National Golf programs and partners include PGA Junior League, PING Junior Interclub, Junior Ryder Cup, First Tee of Phoenix, US Kids Golf, PGA Firebirds, and AZ Junior Golf Association.

ITEM #7 – FY27 BUDGET SUBMITTAL – Kara Currie-Gonzalez, Finance/Administration Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Currie-Gonzalez presented the FY27 Operating and Capital Improvement Project budget requests, outlining funding allocations across multiple funds, including operating and non-recurring expenditures.
- New FY27 Capital Improvement Project Requests include campground reinforcement stabilization and road repair to the water tank on Cottonwood at Lake Pleasant, Irrigation water line replacement and restroom/shower improvements at Estrella, and Adobe Dam Central Arizona Project telemetry upgrades.
- FY27 Capital Improvement Project increase requests include an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) analysis for all parks, upgrades to the education building at the Desert Outdoor Center, repairs to parking lots at several parks, and energy-efficient improvements at the Parks Headquarters building.
- Requests to roll Capital Improvement Project funds for FY27 include installing a keyless/badged entry system in all staff-accessible park buildings, boundary fencing projects at Adobe, Hassayampa, and Lake Pleasant, improvements to drinking water and wastewater systems at all parks, White Tank Competitive Track enhancements, and the development of the new Vulture Mountain Park.

ITEM #8 – ESTRELLA POLLINATOR GARDEN AND RIVER CORRIDOR UPDATE – Juanita Armstrong-Ullberg, Parks Natural Resource Specialist, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg presented an update on natural resource projects at Estrella Mountain Regional Park.
- Riparian habitat enhancement at Estrella Mountain Regional Park included three phases.
- Phase I involved restoring 140 acres by masticating or cutting 80 acres of tamarisk and planting 1,400 tall potted trees.
- Phase II included treating tamarisk resprouts with herbicide and planting another 300 tall pot trees.
- Phase III involved treating 104 acres of tamarisk resprouts with herbicide, 118 acres with spot foliar herbicide treatment, and 22 acres with cut-stump invasive treatments.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg discussed using drones to monitor treatment effectiveness. The Normalized

Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is employed with drones and multispectral cameras to help scientists assess plant health and vegetation cover. This is highly useful in ecological restoration and in identifying invasive species. This method is a cost-effective monitoring tool that can also be used to evaluate recovery.

- Contractors treated 140 acres of stinknet (globe chamomile) at Estrella in 2024, with follow-up treatments for resprouts planned in 2025 and 2026.
- The Desert Defender program hosted workshops at both Estrella and Cave Creek in fall 2025, producing nearly 10,000 seed pellets. Pellets were planted at Cave Creek, Estrella, McDowell, Spur Cross, Utery, and White Tank.
- Desert Defenders organized 40 events across seven parks and removed over 200,000 invasive plants, weighing more than 3,000 pounds.
- At Estrella Mountain Regional Park, 14 invasive removal events were held, totaling over 69 hours. Approximately 63,000 invasive plants were removed.
- The pollinator garden and native seed garden continued production, with over 45 native plant species.
- From the potted plants produced at the greenhouse at Cave Creek, plants will be planted at several park nature center areas and at the 5-acre Estrella pollinator garden.
- Commissioner Chavez suggested that participants in the Junior National Golf program might be interested in volunteering for the Desert Defenders or other natural resource projects. She encouraged exploring ways to involve youth from such programs in volunteer efforts.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg introduced Adriana Ellwein, an intern from the Maricopa County Leadership and Education Advancing Public Service (MCLEAPS) program.

ITEM #9 – 100 MILES IN 100 DAYS 2026 RECAP – Candi Jones, Executive Assistant, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Jones provided a summary of the 2026 100 Miles in 100 Days program.
- The program was originally developed to celebrate Arizona's Centennial in 2012 and was first named "100 Miles of Hiking".
- The program runs from November 1 to February 8 each year. Participants are encouraged to walk 100 miles and visit at least three Maricopa County parks.
- Participants choose how to complete the 100 miles – hiking, trail running, mountain biking, ebiking, horseback riding, or a combination.
- A grand prize is awarded to one randomly chosen participant who completes 100 miles and visits three parks. The prize includes a Parks Annual Pass and a \$25 voucher for the nature center's retail store.
- This season, 2276 participants were registered, with over 600 completing the challenge.
- Over 840 registered participants were Parks Annual Pass holders, a significant increase from previous years.
- Participants made more than 17,217 park visits while trekking miles for the challenge.
- Participants covered a total of 147,796 miles, with hiking being the most popular activity, followed by mountain biking.
- The top three locations for miles trekked this season were Lake Pleasant Regional Park, White Tank Mountain Regional Park, and the Maricopa Trail.
- Over 600 souvenir T-shirts were ordered and distributed to those who completed the challenge. This year's T-shirt featured a new logo designed by Dawna Taylor, Communications Officer at the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.
- Participants of note include a family of seven who hiked over 100 miles together and a hiker who completed all 100 miles at age 88.
- Commissioner Stelp recalled that the 100 Mile in 100 Days celebrations were previously held in the parks at the end of the program.
- Ms. Jones said that the celebrations stopped in 2020 due to the pandemic, but there might be consideration of bringing them back.

ITEM #10 – SET MAY 2026 COMMISSION MEETING LOCATION – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- Chair Stapley led a discussion about possible locations and suggested holding the meeting at Utery Mountain Regional Park.

- Commissioner Mears made a motion to hold the May 2026 meeting at Usery. Second, by Commissioner Chavez. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed.

ITEM #11 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC

- Mr. Scott Burley addressed the Commission regarding the potential development of Arizona Whitewater Adventure Park at Estrella Mountain Regional Park.

ITEM #12 - CALL TO COMMISSION

- Commissioner Mears suggested discussing the water park concept at a future commission meeting.
- Commissioner Mears reported attending the 25th Anniversary Celebration of Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area and noted that it was a pleasure to participate in the event. He encouraged fellow Commission members to try to attend events held in parks in their respective districts, emphasizing that these events are worthwhile and deserve their time.

ITEM #18 – ADJOURNMENT

- With no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Chavez and seconded by Commissioner Mears. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 a.m.