

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING**

Regular Meeting of September 16, 2025

LOCATION: Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: John Crane, Samantha Stelp, Shelby Scharbach, Megha Budruk, Isabel Chavez

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT: Jack Stapley, Eric Mears

STAFF PRESENT: Jennifer Waller, Director; Angela Anderson, Executive Assistant; Kara Currie-Gonzalez, Finance and Administration Manager; Betsy Pregulman, Deputy County Attorney

The official correspondence and staff recommendations in the Commission folder are entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the September 16, 2025, Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission regular meeting.

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

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

- The regular meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

ITEM #2 – ROLL CALL – Roll Call taken - a quorum was present.

ITEM #3 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES AUGUST 26, 2025, REGULAR MEETING – Megha Budruk, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission

- Commissioner Chavez motioned for approval of the August 26, 2025, meeting minutes, and Commissioner Crane seconded. With all in favor, 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.
- The Buy One Get One (BOGO) program is back and will run from September 18 to October 31, 2025. This year will be open to Maricopa County residents only.
- An Arizona State University (ASU) intern is assisting Natural Resources with the Eco-Blitz and wildlife camera monitoring through the middle of December.
- The Parks Department and Flood Control District (FCD) are continuing to work together on segment 11 of the Maricopa Trail.
- The City of Buckeye hosted a re-grand opening on August 16 of the General Joe Foss Shooting Range at Buckeye Hills Regional Park.
- Natural Resources is collaborating with the Arizona Department of Forestry and Management (AZDFM) to create fire breaks within Estrella Mountain Regional Park.
- ASU professor, Dr. Stein, held a bird banding event at Hassayampa Regional Preserve.

ITEM #6 – FY25 NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM UPDATE – Juanita Armstrong-Ullberg, Natural Resources Specialist, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg provided an overview of the Natural Resources program.
- The Desert Defender program is a collaborative effort between Maricopa County Parks and several regional partners and organizations aimed at restoring and enhancing wildlands, parks, and ecosystems.

- In Fall 2024, two seed pellet-making workshops produced a total of 10,360 seed pellets. Over 70 pounds of native seeds were harvested in 2024.
- There was no measurable rain until February 2025, which decreased the number of winter plants, annuals, and perennials in the springtime. This caused the cancellation of several seed harvest and invasive species removal events.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg shared details surrounding the ecological habitat enhancement projects, including invasive species treatment by contractors and the riparian tamarisk project at Estrella Mountain Regional Park.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg described the partnership between Maricopa County Parks and AZDFM regarding fire breaks.
- Commissioner Crane expressed his appreciation for how native plant species are incorporated into the firebreak solution.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg provided data on monitoring the effects of wildfires on saguaros from 2020 to 2023.
- Parks teamed up with the National Recreation and Parks Association for the Parks For Pollinators Bioblitz and butterfly monitoring.
- Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg shared updates from the Eco-Blitz program and other upcoming projects.
- Discussion regarding the saguaro wildfire fatality rate and the importance of the Desert Defender program.
- Discussion regarding the pre- and post-emergent treatment of stinknet in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025.
- Director Waller and Commissioner Scharbach shared their appreciation for Ms. Armstrong-Ullberg's knowledge and dedication to the Natural Resources Program.

Chair Budruk welcomed Commissioner Stelp, who joined the meeting online.

ITEM #7 – FY25 INTERPRETIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM REVIEW – Steve DaCosta, Park Education Supervisor, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Mr. DaCosta shared data and analytics regarding the Interpretive Education Program.
- Total attendance at park interpretive ranger-led programs was 7,579 for fiscal year 2025 (FY25), representing a 300-attendee increase from the previous fiscal year (FY24).
- Mr. DaCosta shared the attendance data breakdown by park.
- White Tank Regional Park and Lake Pleasant Regional Park are the top 2 in program attendance.
- Having the White Tank Nature Center and the White Tank Library share the same building is beneficial for attendance and awareness of ranger programs.
- Mr. DaCosta shared how varying factors can affect program attendance and provided ideas to increase attendance and visibility of programs.
- In addition to the park programs, the interpretive rangers made contact with an additional 6,429 people through community events, such as the Arizona Game and Fish Expo.
- Mr. DaCosta shared data on which programs are most popular in terms of attendance.
- The Desert Outdoor Center (DOC) had 6,400 people attend programs at the facility. During school field trips, rangers typically teach an average of three programs to the students, resulting in a significantly higher number of actual teaching encounters.
- In addition to hosting school groups, the DOC also accommodates weddings, retreats, and meetings.
- Discussion on the correlation between park program attendance and park visitation.
- Commissioner Chavez shared her appreciation for the extra effort to create different opportunities for community engagement, such as visiting retirement communities and libraries.

ITEM #8 – PARADISE VALLEY GOLF COURSE UPDATE – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Waller shared that the golf course operator has decided to terminate their agreement in April 2026. Parks is working with the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors to navigate this change.

- Commissioner Crane inquired why they chose to terminate and if their decision was based on something we should be able to address before engaging with a new partner.
- Director Waller shared that it was solely a business decision by the operator and had nothing to do with Parks.

ITEM #9 – SOUTHWEST WILDLIFE CONSERVATION CENTER UPDATE – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Waller shared that the Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center (SWCC) had completed a feasibility study. Unfortunately, they will not be able to find the funding to partner with Parks on a combined Nature Center and facility.
- This planned facility is included in the Parks master plan for potential future collaboration.

ITEM #10 – PARKS MASTER PLANS UPDATES – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department

- Director Waller shared the context and rationale surrounding the preparation of the Parks master plans.
- Year one of the master plan updates for Cave Creek Regional Park, Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area, and McDowell Mountain Regional Park are in draft form. These will be made available for stakeholder and public input.
- Year two of the master plan updates will include Lake Pleasant Regional Park, Buckeye Hills Regional Park, and Estrella Mountain Regional Park.
- Year three of the master plan updates will focus on Usery Mountain Regional Park, San Tan Mountain Regional Park, and White Tank Mountain Regional Park.

ITEM #11 – CALL TO PUBLIC

- George Everland, as a citizen. Subject: Daisy Mountain Trails
 - Expressed concern about the preservation of Daisy Mountain and the lack of dedicated access points.
- Michelle Rugloski, as a citizen. Subject: Daisy Mountain Trails
 - Expressed concern about 13th Avenue being congested due to parking if any trails or changes are made in the Daisy Mountain Area.
- Jim Jensen, representing San Tan Shredders. Subject: San Tan Mountain Regional Park Master Plans
 - Shared his view that San Tan should be a top priority for the Parks Master Plans project due to current popularity and congestion.
- Curt Kempton, representing East Valley Mountain Biking. Subject: San Tan Mountain Regional Park Master Plans
 - Shared his appreciation for the explanation of the master planning process during the meeting. Expressed his hope that San Tan would be a top priority during the master planning based on current usage and infrastructure needs.

ITEM #12 – CALL TO COMMISSION

- None

ITEM #13 – ADJOURNMENT

- There being no further business, Commissioner Crane motioned for adjournment, and Commissioner Chavez seconded. With all in favor, the motion passed.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:22 a.m.