

A RECREATIONAL GEM FOR WEST-CENTRAL ARIZONA

Introducing Hassayampa River Preserve at Vulture Mountains Recreation Area

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Arizonans and tourists alike will benefit from a new partnership between The Nature Conservancy (The Conservancy) and Maricopa County's Parks and Recreation Department which combines the Hassayampa River Preserve with the Vulture Mountains Recreation Area. The partnership expands educational and recreational opportunities while preserving the conservation values of the Hassayampa River Preserve.

Why are The Nature Conservancy and Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department interested in a long-term partnership connected with Hassayampa River Preserve? The Conservancy's Hassayampa River Preserve (Preserve), with its flowing river and lush riverside habitat, is a special place in Arizona that the Conservancy will continue to protect. The 770-acre preserve will become the gateway to the 71,000-acre Vulture Mountains Recreation Area, managed by Maricopa County's Parks and Recreation Department (County) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Animated reactions by Nature Ranger sisters Taylor and Hannah (last name) when they see their first tarantula. The hairy-legged spiders are often spotted on the preserve during the monsoon. Credit: BB Photo

Mountains Recreation Area. As part of this effort, Parks would bring additional resources to enhance education and protection of this special place and the Preserve would provide an opportunity to expose the public to information and education about desert riverside habitats and the upland Sonoran Desert habitat of the park.

What are the public benefits of a more integrated preserve-park system?

The partners involved in this proposed effort – Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, the BLM and The Conservancy – each bring resources to the project that will improve public recreation, expand environmental education, and protect natural resources all while supporting land and water conservation.

The Conservancy has a long history of collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations and private landowners, crafted with long-term protection of sensitive natural areas as the primary goal. The Vulture Mountains Recreation Area will provide a long-term buffer of open, protected and managed land between the Preserve and an expected population surge that will occur with future development south and west of the recreation area.

What will the partnership involve? In 2012, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors approved a plan by which the Conservancy would partner with the County in ownership and management of the Hassayampa River Preserve. The Conservancy will initially retain ownership of most of the Preserve, but will transfer ownership of its visitor center, a portion of the river channel and Palm Lake to the County, approximately seventy-seven (77) acres. The Conservancy will put a conservation easement over the property that is transferred to the County. An easement is a land protection tool that ensures its natural values are forever protected. In addition, the Conservancy and County will enter into a long-term lease agreement that will allow the County to integrate management of the Preserve with the Vulture Mountain Regional Park.

► Hassayampa River Preserve at Vulture Mountains Recreation Area

What protections for the Preserve will be built into the conservation easement? The conservation easement will protect the Preserve's historic character by limiting site enhancements to those that have been agreed upon by the Conservancy (detailed in the site plan) and the jointly adopted management plan. Additionally, the conservation easement will protect the river and riverside habitat by restricting off-road vehicles and other incompatible uses.

Does Maricopa County have experience managing preserves? Maricopa County Parks and Recreation has a proven track record of managing conservation areas such as the Spur Cross Ranch in the Town of Cave Creek, the Agua Fria Conservation Area and Morgan City Wash at Lake Pleasant Regional Park. Included in the county's regional park system is the highly regarded Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant which provides environmental education programs to youth. In total, the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department manages more than 120,000-acres of Sonoran Desert open space in a system that rings the Metropolitan Phoenix area.

Why does any Preserve acreage need to be transferred? The County can only operate or make improvements on property that it owns or leases. The land transfer solidifies the commitment that both the Conservancy and the County are making to the long-term management and protection of the area.

What changes will we see on the Preserve? The Conservancy has agreed to the site design plan for the Preserve, which will protect its natural and historical characteristics. The changes will enhance the property with wildlife viewing platforms, picnic tables along the river and lake features. Additionally, an amphitheater and small group areas will be added to increase outdoor education opportunities. A nature center/library may also be built for additional environmental education classes. This will boost the number of activities offered by the Preserve and further increase efforts to connect kids to nature. Preserve design enhancements are expected to evolve over time in several phases, as County funding allows.

Will laws governing County park operations and infrastructure require big changes to Hassayampa River Preserve? The Conservancy, in its management of the Preserve, currently observes most of the Federal, State and County rules and regulations that apply to any County park. Additionally, the County has flexibility in how it maintains natural areas. At times, the County has limited park visitors to specific areas within a park in an effort to preserve, protect and restore an area it manages.

What about our Preserve staff, volunteers and Friends of Hassayampa? The County and the Conservancy recognize the value of our staff and volunteers, and their experience and familiarity with the Preserve operation. The Preserve staff will remain with The Nature Conservancy through the transition period. Conservancy staff and volunteers are important in the transition and the Conservancy hopes that roles and opportunities for staff, volunteers and friends will grow and evolve. Maricopa County Parks and Recreation is very reliant on "Friends" and volunteers in their other parks and have extensive experience working with them. They believe committed volunteers are what make the County's parks truly special places.

What is the anticipated timeline for the transition? The Nature Conservancy and Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department have agreed upon a two-year transition period. The County will assume management of the Preserve by January 2016. The conservation easement and cooperative management agreement will ensure the Conservancy has perpetual involvement in the Preserve.

For more information about the proposed cooperative agreement, please contact the Preserve at (928) 684-2772 or Maricopa County Parks and Recreation at (602) 506-2930.



The Vulture Mountains Recreation Area encompasses 71,000 acres of Sonoran Desert landscape near Hassayampa River Preserve. Credit: Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department