



PHOENIX MOUNTAINS PRESERVATION COUNCIL LOOKOUT

Spring 2026 Newsletter

The poster for the Spring Event features a light green watercolor background. At the top left, the text "SAVE the DATE" is written in a decorative, green, serif font. To the right, "PHOENIX MOUNTAINS PRESERVATION COUNCIL" is written in a small, black, sans-serif font. The main title "Spring Event" is written in a large, elegant, green cursive script. On the right side, there is a smaller version of the PMPC logo. Below the title, the event details are listed in a black, sans-serif font: "LIBBY GOFF MEMORIAL SEED BALL TOSS + HIKE", "03/14/2026 @ 9AM", and "QUARTZ RIDGE TRAILHEAD". At the bottom, "THE 32ND STREET TRAILHEAD" is written in a smaller font. The bottom edge of the poster is decorated with a row of various cacti, including saguaros and cholla, in shades of green and red.

SAVE the DATE

PHOENIX MOUNTAINS PRESERVATION COUNCIL

Spring Event

LIBBY GOFF MEMORIAL
SEED BALL TOSS + HIKE

03/14/2026 @ 9AM

QUARTZ RIDGE TRAILHEAD

THE 32ND STREET TRAILHEAD

JOIN US FOR THE SPRING EVENT!

Please join us on Saturday, March 14th for the annual Spring Event. This year, we will celebrate the life of Libby Goff by hiking in one of her favorite areas. We will also throw seed balls so her impact on the mountain preserves will continue long into the future.

SEED BALL MAKING DAY!

On February 2nd, we met at the North Mountain Visitors Center to make seed balls! These seed balls combined clay, soil, and native seeds to toss out in the mountain preserves. As the balls land, the seeds will be protected until the rain dissolves the clay allowing the seeds to germinate.

A total of 1,647 balls were made at this fun event!

Make sure you join us at the Spring Event to help spread these seeds balls to promote the growth of native plants in our mountain preserves!



Photos courtesy of Sally Lakin and Jeannie Swindle



MEET YOUR BOARD

and new Secretary



Courtesy of Stacia Hurst

A Phoenician, conservationist, and steadfast advocate for the environment, Stacia Hurst is our new Secretary for the PMPC. She brings a multidecade commitment to stewardship, community engagement, and organizational integrity. Guided by a deep love of place and a dedication to preservation, Stacia supports the Council's efforts to safeguard Phoenix's Mountain Parks, Preserves, Public Lands, and Open Spaces through advocacy and community connection – advancing civic stewardship in service of our mountains and sacred lands.

In addition to serving on the Executive Board of the PMPC, Stacia is involved with the Surfrider Foundation, Sunnyslope Village Alliance, Sunnyslope Historical Society, Global Coral Reef Alliance, City and County of Honolulu Parks & Recreation Subcommittee, Central Arizona Conservation Alliance Desert Defenders, Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management, Phoenix LUV, City of Phoenix Parks & Recreation

Park Stewards, Honolulu Police Department, and TWU Local 556 AFL-CIO. She has worked for Southwest Airlines for 28 years and holds degrees from Arizona State University and the University of Hawaii.

Stacia brings a wide range of skills – and a whole lot of passion – to the PMPC. We congratulate her on her new position!

CITY REPRESENTATIVES UPDATES

Cynthia Aguilar was appointed Deputy City Manager in December 2025. She serves under City Manager Ed Zuercher, who returned to the position in November 2025.

Martin Whitfield is serving as the Interim Parks and Recreation Director. His previous roles with the City include Deputy Director in the Public Works Department, Management Services Administrator with the Phoenix Public Library, and Special Projects Administrator in the City Manager's Office.

Tony Moya is the new Chair of the Parks & Recreation Board. The position was previously held by Kelly Dalton, who has now stepped down from the Board.

Dorina Bustamante has also stepped down after 10 years of service on the Board.

The two open positions on the Board have been filled by Rick Naimark and Jessica Fotinos.



Martin Whitfield
Courtesy of City of Phoenix

"It's a privilege to step into the role of Interim Director and continue the important work of our Parks and Recreation Department. Our parks are the heart of the community, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside our dedicated team to provide safe, welcoming spaces and exceptional programs for all Phoenix residents."

- Martin Whitfield, Interim Parks and Recreation Director



STRANGE REGULATIONS

BY ANDY LENARTZ

Whether all City of Phoenix Parks users choose to follow the regulations or not, most are aware of common regulations at the parks such as mandatory leash laws, not littering, not defacing archaeological sites, and not adding your own artwork on rocks or structures. But there are other regulations people may not be aware of, some of which recall amusing or head scratching scenarios of what exactly led to the regulations being put in place.



Courtesy of Carla Gunn

For example, bathing in water fountains is prohibited. Being not entirely sure how that is defined, I've probably broken that one after a run or bike ride. However, there is also a nuisance law banning anything offensive to the senses, so not rinsing off when smelling like a wet dog seems like it would violate that ordinance? Kind of stuck there.

Consuming alcohol in city parks is banned without a permit, and only beer is allowed with a permit. Additionally, the use of bounce houses is also only allowed with a permit. I've made this joke before, but if combing the permits, I'd definitely like to be invited!



Some regulations are obvious, such as no fires or smoking devices of any kind. Given the drought, desert, and dry vegetation, this one is logical enough. As is the regulation banning being in a park after hours, given some of the issues which have arisen with that. But what about the prohibition on slip and slides, where exactly did that



Courtesy of groupebellonprestige.com

come from? Or somewhat disturbingly, it is illegal to bury a body outside a cemetery in the City of Phoenix, making park burials forbidden. I need to update my will, looks like I cannot actually spend eternity at South Mountain Park.

Finally, it is prohibited to operate watercraft except where permitted. Bit of a head scratcher as it seems fairly obvious which parks have bodies of water made for watercraft and which do not? Looks like my paddleboard adventure at Papago is out. And I need to rethink my funeral plans, as a midnight party with slip and slides, bounce houses, and a bonfire is apparently not going to happen.

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City of Phoenix. (2025). *An Ordinance Amending Phoenix City Code Chapter 24 Parks and Recreation to Align With the Parks code of Conduct and Improve Consistency in Enforcement. Attachment A - Draft Ordinance*. Phoenix City Code.

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PMPC

IS THAT A SAGUARO OR BARREL CACTUS?

Cacti dot the landscape on nearly every hike in the Phoenix Mountain Preserves. But how do you tell a saguaro from a California barrel cactus when they look so similar before the saguaro grows tall and begins to form arms? Fortunately, each has distinct characteristics that make identification easier.

Spines

The spines of the California barrel cactus are red when new, giving the plant a reddish tint. As they age, the spines fade to pink, white, or gray. A curved central spine points downward, surrounded by dozens of shorter spines. Together, these spines obscure most of the cactus's green stem.

Saguaro spines, on the other hand, have a white or yellow tint when new and quickly turn dark gray. They are always straight and rigid, aligned with the ribs. While the spines protect the plant from being touched—or eaten—the green stem remains visible.

Fruit

If you see yellow fruits forming a crown on top of a cactus, it's a barrel cactus. Barrel cacti reach maturity much earlier than the long-lived saguaro. Their flowers, which bloom in spring, are yellow or red. The resulting yellow fruits are tucked among thick spines and often remain on the plant from year to year.



A barrel cactus is on the left, saguaro on the right.



A baby barrel cactus is on the left, saguaro on the right.

Photos courtesy of Carla Gunn

Saguaros do not produce flowers or fruit until they are much taller than an average human. By the time they reach reproductive age, they are already easy to identify.

Leaning

Older California barrel cacti may lean toward the southwest. They grow faster on the shadier north or northeast side, causing the plant to tilt as it maximizes sunlight on its crown while protecting its sides from direct exposure.

Saguaros grow straight upward—or at least that's the goal. A mature saguaro can reach 50 feet tall and weigh up to nine tons. To support that weight, it must remain upright. How saguaros maintain balance once they begin growing arms is still being studied by researchers at places like the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix.

References

TWC Staff. (2025). *Carnegiea gigantea*. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – University of Texas at Austin. https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=cagi10

TWC Staff. (2025). *Ferocactus cylindraceus*. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center – University of Texas at Austin. https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=fecy



FROM THE ARCHIVES

On April 9, 1990, the PMPC won a major victory at the state level when Arizona Governor Rose Mofford signed HB 2218 into law. It is now Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) § 28-7047. The purpose of the legislation was to prohibit the establishment of a road or highway through city owned land designated as mountain preserve unless the road had been approved by a majority vote of city electors.

The PMPC had already played a major role in the passage of two city level initiatives that gave citizens the right to vote on any proposed change to designated mountain

preserve land, including the construction of a new roadway. Sponsored by State Senators Jackie Steiner and Doug Todd and State Representatives Chris Herstam and Nancy Wessel, HB 2218 elevated these Phoenix initiatives into state law.



Those in attendance at the signing, from left to right, were Glen Crough, Leslie James, Susan Nimphius, Millie Matters, Mike Goodman, Sen. Doug Todd, Rep. Chris Herstam, Gov. Rose Mofford, Rep. Nancy Wessel, Norris Norvold, Sen. Jackie Steiner, Dottie Gilbert, Ruth Hamilton, Larry Hatfield, Jim Colley, David Gironda, and Ben Avery.

WAIT?...

THEN HOW DID THEY BUILD THE 202 THROUGH SOUTH MOUNTAIN?

With ARS § 28-7047 on the books, how did AZDOT build the 202 through South Mountain without voter approval when the legislation says "this state or a political subdivision of this state shall not construct, lay out, open or establish a street, road or highway through a designated mountain preserve unless the construction of the street, road or highway is approved by a majority of the electors of a charter city voting on the matter"?

The above quote is from § 28-7047(A). Reading on in the legislation, § 28-7047(B) reads "this section does not apply to a state route that is proposed to be constructed within a designated mountain preserve and that is in the state highway system on August 15, 1990." The 202 project was in the State Highway System plan prior to 1990, exempting it from the required voter approval.

In 1983, this freeway was introduced as the "Southwest Loop Highway". In 1985, it was approved by voters as part of the freeway system through Proposition 300. In 1988, the route was approved by the State Transportation Board. There were multiple delays and studies required before construction began, but the origins of the freeway do pre-date 1990. The AZDOT reported that "records prior to adoption of the statute suggest a primary reason for the exception was to allow the proposed freeway to go through SMPP because the importance of the freeway to the region's economy and transportation system was clearly recognized."

References

Arizona Department of Transportation. (n.d.). Project History - Loop 202 (South Mountain Freeway). <https://azdot.gov/projects/central-district-projects/loop-202-south-mountain-freeway/project-information/project>

Federal Highway Administration and Arizona Department of Transportation. (2014). Final Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation. Chapter 5. https://apps.azdot.gov/files/projects/south-mtn/FEIS/smfeis_ch_5_section-4f-evaluation.pdf



DECOMPOSITION IN THE PRESERVES

BY ANDY LENARTZ

A common misunderstanding is that throwing organic waste to the side of trails is acceptable, as it will decompose. While technically anything will decompose if given enough time, even plastics, this is problematic for several reasons. First, while all materials, organic or not, will eventually decompose, this is a slow process for even organic materials in our dry desert climate. It will be months before many food items actually fully decompose. And in the meantime, the food waste is simply trash on the trails, no different than dog waste bags.

Additionally, trash seems to multiply. We all have seen that when dog waste bags or other trash are present, additional bags or trash appear nearby. The same goes for food waste such as orange peels, when people see those on the trails they tend to add to the collection. As this food waste is often dropped in specific areas where people congregate and rest on trails, this will lead to animals identifying a spot as a frequent food source. This leads to interactions which are harmful to both the animals and humans. One example is the aggressive squirrels at Grand Canyon National Park, who have gotten so used to food waste that they will attempt to snatch snacks from people.

To test the decomposition timeframe, we are going to run an experiment. Using a private yard, we are going to create a mesh enclosed space so animals cannot run off



with the food items. The enclosure is in a space that gets full

sun for a good portion of the day, and the items will be left on the ground as they would if tossed on the trail. The items included in this experiment are a banana peel, orange peel, apple core, tissue, and bell pepper core. The starting date of this experiment was January 17, 2026.

We will provide updates in each newsletter until the items have fully decomposed. Or until Andy and Carla have gotten bored with this and moved on to another topic – whichever comes first.



How long is it going to take? Andy and Carla have their guesses. Submit your own for a chance to win an REI gift card!

SUBMIT YOUR ESTIMATES HERE!

Photos courtesy of Andy Lenartz





DESERT GLOBEMALLOW

Spring brings the blooming of *Sphaeralcea ambigua*, the desert globemallow. When in bloom, they are easy to identify by their apricot to brilliant orange flowers, though some subspecies produce red, white, pink, or purple blossoms.

These flowers have five petals and attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

When not in bloom, the desert globemallow can be identified by its many silver stems growing in all directions, giving it the appearance of a rounded shrub. The leaves are broad, trilobed, and have toothed edges. In ideal conditions, the plant can grow up to 3 feet tall and 3 feet wide. Like many native plants, its stems and leaves are covered with tiny hairs. These small, star-shaped hairs help the plant conserve water, reflect sunlight, and give it a silvery appearance. These adaptations make full sun ideal for globemallow growth. Be cautious, though—these hairs can cause irritation if they get into your eyes. This is why the plant is sometimes nicknamed “sore-eye poppy” or “pink-eye poppy.”



Native to the Sonoran Desert, these perennials grow on dry, rocky slopes and along the edges of sandy washes. They are drought tolerant and require well-drained soil. They are not picky about soil type as long as it does not retain water. Globemallows are known to thrive along roadsides and at abandoned mine sites.

The globemallow is an early colonizing species, making it effective for seeding in disturbed areas affected by fire, construction, or even spider trails. Its moderate growth rate can help suppress invasive species. As it matures, the plant can spread by rhizomes—underground, horizontal stems that send up new shoots, allowing lateral expansion. This trait makes the globemallow valuable for erosion control and for limiting the spread of invasive plants.



Photos courtesy of GardenOracle.com

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Courtesy of Joe M Neely

DESERT GLOBEMALLOW BEE

If you find a globemallow plant in bloom and look closely at the flowers in the morning or toward evening, you may spot a bee resting inside. This is a male globemallow bee!

Globemallow bees are solitary. Males have no permanent shelter, so they use the flowers as a place to sleep for the night. The cup-shaped blossoms offer protection, and when morning comes, they're already at their only food source. Pollen from globemallow flowers is the primary food for globemallow bees.

Female globemallow bees, on the other hand, sleep underground in the nests they build themselves. They burrow tunnels in bare, hard-packed, sandy soils, usually near other females. Some of these tunnels have turrets ranging from 1–15 mm tall. The bees construct these turrets by backing out of the burrow until the tip of their abdomen reaches the top, then rotating around the entrance while vibrating their abdomens. This vibration packs the soil into a turret. The purpose of these structures is unknown to humans—but she clearly knows what she's doing.

Inside the underground nest, each egg has its own chamber (solitary from the very beginning!). The female collects pollen on the long, branched, feather-like structures—called plumose hairs—on her hind legs and carries it back to the nest. There, she mixes the pollen with nectar to form a food loaf for each egg. The larvae that hatch feed on this loaf until they metamorphose, eventually leaving the nest to continue the cycle.

Females do not build their nests under rocks or plants, but out in the open. This is one more reason to stay on trail when hiking in our mountain preserves. A future generation of bees could be right below the surface.



Courtesy of Arizona Highways

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Courtesy of Jim Boone

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Please tell us how you heard about PMPC:

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