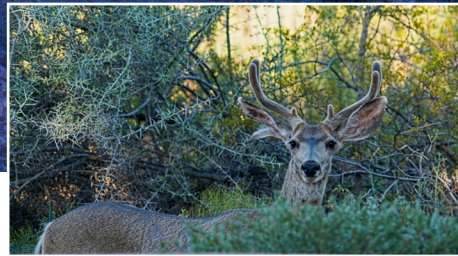


# A PICTURE OF EARTH DAY PRESERVATION

## HOW HARD WORK AND A VISION HELPED CREATE THE MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE

By David M. Brown



*“Let us approach our future gently, with careful regard for what it may be.”*

—A.B. Guthrie, Jr.

The land that is now the McDowell Sonoran Preserve could have been approved for more high-end homes, more storefronts, more asphalt, more left-hand-turn lanes, and more, and more, and more.

Instead, it's less, and, because of that, it's much more. It's less construction, less congestion and more conservation. And with Earth Day celebrations taking place this month, the preserve perfectly exemplifies what we can do, working together to protect our desert and our Earth.

For visitors, that means a place for Old Man Boulder, coyote and Harris hawk; terrain for tarantula and packrat, mule deer and foraging javelina; and views east to snow-crested Four Peaks. And trails, trailheads and an eco-sensitive trail center.

Amidst the landmark McDowell Mountains, where Native Americans lived centuries ago, here are also red cardinal, orange-and-black Gila monster, Brown's Ranch, Granite Mountain, and unobstructed postcard-stunning sunsets: pinks, teals, blues, vermilions and oranges.

Here, too, are chuparosa, zebra-tailed lizard, poppies, saguaro, lupines, wildflowers: as they've been for millennia, as they will be. All for our recreation and re-creation.

### PRESERVING THE SPIRIT OF THE PRESERVE

The triumphant result of four decades of visioning and knuckles-

down work by citizens and city, including the acquisition of more than a billion dollars of developable land, Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve encompasses 30,580 acres and 195 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails -- welcoming everyone interested in learning about and experiencing the Earth's most biologically diverse desert.

“Scottsdale is very proud of our residents' commitment to purchase the land surrounding the McDowell Mountains, now the country's largest urban municipal preserve,” said Guy Phillips, a Scottsdale city councilman.

Managed by the nonprofit McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and under contract with the city of Scottsdale, the preserve is stewarded by 650 citizen volunteers dedicated to preserving its natural state, including flora and fauna. Entry to the preserve is free, and it's open dawn to dusk.

“I am happy to say that many folks have hiked the trails and enjoyed the beauty of our desert preserve and most are very careful to obey our rules to keep our desert beautiful. Earth Day would be a perfect day to visit our preserve,” said Scottsdale Councilwoman Kathy Littlefield.

“With the preserve, Scottsdale has created a template on how communities everywhere can preserve lands that speak to their identity, and for Scottsdale that is the Sonoran Desert,” said Christine Kovach, a Scottsdale resident who chaired the original McDowell Sonoran Land Trust, now the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, in 1994 and again from 2004 to 2006.

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## DESERT EDGE: A BUILDING OF THE DESERT

THE PROPOSED EDUCATIONAL CENTER WOULD CREATE A MULTISENSORY EXPERIENCE OF THE DESERT

By David M. Brown

The proposed Desert EDGE (formerly Desert Discovery Center) in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve would be a place where people can learn and experience the desert from the inside looking out -- hence, EDGE (Encounters, Discovery, Global, Education). Originally envisioned in 1993, it would connect aesthetically to the current structures located at the main Gateway Trailhead in the preserve.

Requiring about five acres of preserve land and occupying 47,586 square feet, the concept calls for eight low indoor-outdoor desert pavilions, which, by blurring the line between indoors and outdoors, focus on relationships between the visitors and the desert.

The pavilions would be linked with interpretive courtyards. The approximate cost would be \$61.2 million, with possible funding sources coming from the existing bed tax, the preserve tax and private donations. An admission fee would also help defray costs and maintenance.

### POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT DESERT EDUCATION CENTER IN THE WORLD

"It is place, an experience that is focused on preparing you for your journey into the preserve by gaining a deep understanding of all that you can see and cannot see within the preserve. Its goal is to be perhaps the most important environmental education center focused on deserts and arid lands in the world," said John E. Sather, a partner with the Scottsdale-based Swaback Partners, an architecture and planning firm involved with the concept since 2010. "It would be a building on the edge. A building of the desert."

Three years ago, the city contracted with the not-for-profit Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale to continue planning and bring a final design to council, explained Executive Director Sam Kathryn Campana, who, after serving as the city's mayor, worked to raise money to build the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center in south Phoenix.

In turn, Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale has contracted with Thinc Design, The New York City-based firm that designed the National September 11 Memorial & Museum to create the multi-sensory desert experiences of the pavilions.

### OPPOSITION TO THE CENTER

While the proposal has brought praise for its innovative approach to desert education, some residents have been critical because, they say, it violates the terms and spirit of the agreements creating McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

As a result, Scottsdale city council is awaiting the results of a citizen initiative, due in July, to block Desert EDGE from being built in the Preserve.

Look for more coverage of the controversial plan in an upcoming issue.

For more information, see [scottsdalecenter.com](http://scottsdalecenter.com) and [vimeo.com/230191746](https://vimeo.com/230191746).

