

Flagstaff Regional Open Space Newsletter

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The City of Flagstaff, Coconino County and the Arizona Game and Fish Department are pleased to present our first Open Space Newsletter highlighting the great work many local organizations are doing to build and enhance a thriving open space system in and around Flagstaff.

Last Fall, community members participated in the 3rd annual Regional Open Space Symposium. The stories in this newsletter share exciting updates since that community meeting.

Enjoy!

Volunteers Make a Difference at Frances Short Pond

Each year, the City of Flagstaff partners with many local organizations to host the annual Make a Difference Day event.

This year, nearly 100 volunteers helped complete restoration projects at Frances Short Pond near Thorpe Park. Volunteers worked together to winterize the historic 1890s-era Veit Cabin, remove invasive weeds and debris, take out a chain link fence, improve the area trail system, and restore the pond habitat by controlling erosion and planting native cottonwood trees to improve wildlife opportunities.

This event was just one in a series of projects focused on improving the Pond area and making it a center for recreation and environmental education for the Flagstaff community. City staff is working with local nonprofits and teachers to establish plans for the area, including restoring the historic cabin for regular use as an on-site outdoor classroom. Willow Bend Environmental Education Center is developing comprehensive curriculum programs that address wildlife, water quality, and fish. Additionally, partners will be developing signs that provide information about the history of the Pond and Cabin. For more information, contact David McKee at 928-213-2474 or McKee@flagstaffaz.gov.

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Volunteers weatherize the historic Veit cabin.
Photo Credit: Bry Karakey



Volunteers remove a bollard from the cabin area.
Photo Credit: Bry Karakey



David McKee and Allen Haden address erosion issues.
Photo Credit: Tom Bean

City of Flagstaff Open Space Updates

National Trails Day at Picture Canyon

This year, the City hosted the regional National Trails Day event at the City's Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve. Over 100 volunteers and many community partners worked together to construct 1.5 miles of the Tom Moody Trail and naturalize 1 mile of road. Additionally, teams removed 50 abandoned tires and a substantial number of invasive species from 2 acres of riparian habitat during this annual celebration of trails. This volunteer event was critical in establishing a designated trail system at Picture Canyon.



Volunteers at National Trails Day. Photo Credit: Flagstaff Biking Organization



Cut trees ready to be hauled to the mill.

Restoring Observatory Mesa

The Flagstaff Fire Department has completed the first phase of forest restoration projects on Observatory Mesa Natural Area. This project reduced fire fuels and improved habitat diversity on 500 acres of the Mesa and was funded by the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project, a partnership between the State, City, and Coconino National Forest to reduce the risk of devastating wildfire and post-fire flooding.

In 2015, the City of Flagstaff received approximately \$120,000 in grant funding for open space projects.

Where's McKenzie?



McKenzie Jones meets her first llama.

McKenzie Jones, City of Flagstaff Community Sustainability Specialist, joined the City of Flagstaff in 2011 and worked closely with the Flagstaff community to build the City's open space program. She successfully managed the acquisition of 2,700 acres of designated open space including Observatory Mesa Natural Area and Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural

Open Spaces Commission adopts Strategic Plan

The Open Spaces Commission, responsible for advising City Council on open space related issues, has adopted their Strategic Plan, which was presented at the 2014 Open Spaces Symposium. The Plan describes conservation criteria for potential open space designation and prioritizes areas for conservation and public access, outlining the long term vision for a greater Flagstaff open space system.

Preserve. During her time at the City, McKenzie was actively involved in local policy development and long term open space planning efforts. With the creation of the Open Space Specialist position, she will no longer be directly involved with Flagstaff's open space

program, although she will continue to enjoy Flagstaff's beautiful open space areas. If you have questions about recycling or keeping llamas, McKenzie will continue to lead the City's waste prevention and food policy efforts.

In 2014, volunteers donated 1187 hours pulling weeds, cleaning up trash, and maintaining trails at City open spaces.

City of Flagstaff Open Space Updates

Flagstaff City Council adopts Picture Canyon Management Plan

On October 6th, 2015, the Flagstaff City Council unanimously adopted the first management plan for Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve. City staff consulted with local land management experts and affiliated tribes to draft the plan, which outlines natural and cultural resource management policies for the 478-acre Preserve. Additionally, the plan includes a detailed list of improvement projects to be completed over the upcoming years. These projects include trail construction, sign installation,

invasive weed removal, and many more. The City will utilize a mix of volunteers and contracted labor to complete these projects. Many of these projects will be funded by the Arizona State Parks Recreational Trails Program grant the City received to improve recreation opportunities at Picture Canyon. To view the plan, visit www.flagstaffaz.gov/PictureCanyon.

Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve received an estimated 8,000 visitors in 2015.



Orange tree blazes temporarily mark trails at Picture Canyon.



Volunteer removes invasive species from Picture Canyon.

Flagstaff Urban Trail System Sign Project

This past summer, the City of Flagstaff installed 413 new signs along 56 miles of Flagstaff Urban Trail System trails. Six different types of signs were installed, including trail-head, directional, trail blazer guidance, regulatory, boundary markers, and adopt-a FUTS signs. Directional signs were also installed where the Arizona and Flagstaff Loop Trails overlap with the FUTS system. A significant part of the sign project was funded through the Recreational Trails Program, a federal grant program administered by Arizona State Parks.



Betsy hiking in Denali National Park, Alaska.

Introducing the Open Space Specialist

The City of Flagstaff is pleased to announce Betsy Emery as the Open Space Specialist. Betsy will be overseeing management activities, maintenance projects, and planning efforts for the City's open space program. Betsy draws on her background in environmental policy,

resource conservation, and land management from her experience with the U.S. Forest Service and Centennial Forest. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Northern Arizona University. When Betsy is not looking at petroglyphs at Picture Canyon, she enjoys camping in the Southwest.



New directional sign for FUTS trail.

Interpretive Signs for Picture Canyon

The City of Flagstaff is working with Pilkington Advertising Design and local artist, Michael Hagelberg to complete Phase 1 of the interpretive sign project at Picture Canyon, which includes the installation of seven interpretive signs at the Outdoor Classroom and

Watchable Wildlife Site. These interpretive signs will provide information about a wide variety of themes, including botany, archaeology, wildlife, geology, wetland ecology, and the Rio de Flag. The signs will be installed in Spring 2016.

Coconino County Open Space Updates

Fort Tuthill Bike Park - A Community Effort

The Fort Tuthill Bike Park, a collaborative effort between Flagstaff Biking Organization and Coconino County Parks and Recreation opened in December of 2014. It is the one of the first mountain bike skills parks in Arizona, and was designed by professional bike park builders to incorporate options for every skill level. The Flagstaff community has shown substantial support for the project through the concept, fundraising, and construction stages, and continues to show support for additional phases.

Actively engaging members of the mountain bike and dirt-jump community in the project has reduced the proliferation of user created jumps and tracks by providing a high-quality



Visitors utilize one of the bike tracks at the Fort Tuthill Bike Park.

opportunity for riders. Local diggers have been enlisted as volunteers to help Coconino County Parks and Recreation maintain the Fort Tuthill Bike Park as well. The Bike Park is directly connected to the Fort Tuthill and Flagstaff Urban Trail systems and serves a great addition to the entire system of trails and recreation opportunities in the region. Check out this completely free addition to the open space system any day from dawn to dusk .

Improvements at Rogers Lake Natural Area

In 2010, Coconino County acquired 2,250 acres of open space at Rogers Lake, 10 miles southwest of Flagstaff. After completing an extensive forest restoration project on the property, the County is developing 4 miles of trails, which are near completion. The Arizona Republic recently featured the Gold Digger and 2 Spot trails for offering great wildlife viewing opportunities.

The County received nearly \$80,000 in grant funding to complete projects at Rogers Lake.

Additionally, the County is developing a number of interactive interpretive sites to demonstrate the importance of wildlife corridors, natural history, and cultural heritage to visitors. Some displays will focus on the historic logging industry while others focus on wildlife migration.

For more information, contact Scott Anderson at 928-679-8025 or sanderson@coconino.az.gov.



A boardwalk along trails at Rogers Lake.



Elk of all ages enjoy Rogers Lake.



Hannah Griscom, Urban Wildlife Planner, helps a child identify wetland species.

Bioblitz at Pumphouse Wetlands

On May 30, 2015, County staff conducted a Bioblitz at the Pumphouse County Natural Area in partnership with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. "Citizen scientists" were invited to participate with professionals in identifying and cataloging as many species as possible over a set period of time. Approximately 50

participants surveyed birds, wetland wildlife, and plants, identifying approximately 115 species to establish a baseline for future Bioblitz activities.

The County will use this data to monitor the health of the Pumphouse wetland ecosystem over time.

Other Open Space Updates

Friends of the Rio de Flag Watershed Planning Effort

The Friends of the Rio de Flag is initiating a planning effort for the Rio de Flag that will provide a vision for transforming the ephemeral river into a greenbelt amenity for the greater Flagstaff community and its visitors. The plan will incorporate public input and guide future restoration and improvement projects along the river and its major tributaries; such as access and trails, channel and vegetation restoration, and hydrology. The group is currently seeking funding to complete the draft plan in 2016.

Adopt-a-Reach of the Rio de Flag!

Through her internship with the Friends of the Rio de Flag, Chelsea Silva is developing an Adopt-the-Rio de Flag Stewardship Program. The program will unite local schools with local organizations to become dual stewards of a section of the Rio de Flag. Stewards will commit to conducting two clean ups per year along their stretch of the Rio. In addition, Chelsea is developing a stream assessment form. The form uses a citizen science framework where students collect data on the

health of the watershed and use it to assess the health of their section of the Rio.

For more information, contact the Friends of the Rio at deflagrio@gmail.com.



Chelsea Silva and Erin Young at Make a Difference Day.

Arizona Watchable Wildlife Experience Updates



Visitor looks for birds at Pumhouse Wash, a Watchable Wildlife Experience site.

The Arizona Watchable Wildlife Experience, a cooperative effort between Arizona Game and Fish Department, Coconino County, U.S. Forest Service, and the City, continues to coordinate and promote wildlife viewing opportunities at 30 locations in the greater Flagstaff area. This year, they have:

- * Created a Strategic Action

- Plan for wetland and riparian habitat improvements
- * Partnered with Peace Surplus to offer Wildlife Explorer Pack for rentals by visitors.
- * Hosted a series of wildlife viewing events at AWWE sites
- * Conducted a Feasibility Study for habitat improvements at Marshall Lake.

Check out their website at AZWatchWildlife.com

Many thanks to our partners for helping assemble this newsletter.

