



PHOENIX MOUNTAINS PRESERVATION COUNCIL LOOKOUT

Spring 2024 Newsletter



MONARCH BUTTERFLY

Monarch butterfly sightings around the valley will increase as spring arrives. The butterflies are migrating through from both California and Mexico, heading as far north as Canada. The adult butterfly life span is a short 2 – 6 weeks except for the last generation of the year. Those overwintering in California and Mexico live 8 to 9 months, slowing their metabolism in the cool temperatures which allows them to live longer. Once spring arrives, those long living monarchs reproduce. It is this generation that will head north.

The monarch butterfly is in trouble. Their populations are of such concern that they are on the waiting list for the Endangered Species Act. In December 2020, it was found adding them to the list as an endangered species was warranted but precluded by higher priority listings. Keep reading to find out how our partners are helping them survive and what the PMPC can do to help.

References

U.S. Forest Service. (2023). *Monarch Butterfly Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*. United States Department of Agriculture. https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/pollinators/Monarch_Butterfly/faqs.shtml

Western Monarch Advocates. (2024). *Monarch News in Arizona*. <https://www.westernmonarchadvocates.com/arizona>

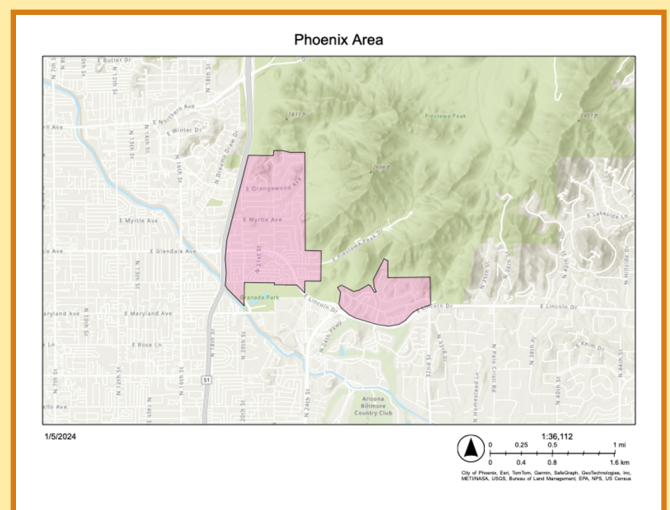
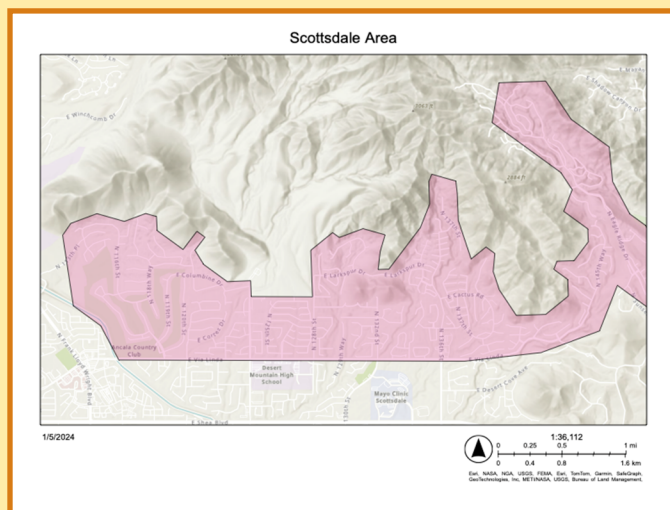
World Wildlife Fund. (2024). *Monarch Butterfly Facts*. www.worldwildlife.org/species/monarch-butterfly

CAZCA PLANT SWAP

Your PMPC board heard a presentation on January 8th by the Central Arizona Conservation Alliance (CAZCA). CAZCA is in the initial phases of an outreach initiative to educate private property owners about the negative impacts of fountain grass and offer to swap out fountain grass on their property with desert milkweed. Fountain grass has been used around the valley as an ornamental plant in landscaping. It was added to the Arizona Noxious Weed List in 2020 because it displaces native plants, spreads quickly, increases fire danger, and alters habitats for animals. The goals of this project are to educate people on what they can do to reduce the spread of invasive plants, reduce the spread of fountain grass into parks/preserves, and garner interest for expanding the plant swap program in the future.

They have chosen two project areas for this multiyear initiative. The first is neighborhoods adjacent to McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The second is two neighborhoods on the southern edge of Piestewa Peak Park. This year, the project team will develop and distribute outreach materials, set up in-person educational events, and start registration for the project. Education, registration, and distribution will be ongoing until 2026. In 2025, the team will start monitoring the project areas and watching for creep into the preserves.

CAZCA has asked the PMPC to be a partner in this project to help with education and outreach, inventory of fountain grass in the project areas, and any other support we can provide. Are you passionate about the Sonoran Desert? (Of course, you are! You're a member of the PMPC!) Do you know people in this area to help with the outreach? Are you interested in sharing this information to educate others? Let us know so we can get you connected with this project!



Photos and maps courtesy of CAZCA

DID YOU KNOW?

Fountain grass, a close relative of buffelgrass, is native to Africa. It was brought to the U.S. around 1880 as an ornamental plant. Some nurseries sell "sterile" fountain grass with the claim that the plant has been genetically modified, so the seeds are not viable. However, no variety is recommended for planting or landscaping.

Reference National Park Service. (2023). *Fountain Grass*. <https://www.nps.gov/sagu/learn/nature/fountain-grass.htm>





DESERT MILKWEED

Arizona is home to 29 species of native milkweed. For the CAZCA Plant Swap program, they will be working with *Asclepias subulate*, commonly known as rush milkweed or ajamete. This perennial likes to live in dry, sandy soils on dry slopes, mesas, plains, and desert washes. It has many leafless stems growing 24 – 48 inches tall from the root crown. Those stems are leafless until after rains.

The stems of all milkweeds produce latex that can be toxic to both humans and animals. Toxicity can vary by species, by season, its stage of growth, and where on the plant the sap came from. Rush milkweed only causes minor skin irritation. What isn't dangerous in the desert? At least it doesn't have thorns!

Between April and December, rush milkweed will produce clusters of cream-white flowers at the tops of the stems. These flowers are of special value to native bees, wasps, assassin bugs, and striated queen butterflies. Milkweed is the only plant monarch butterflies will lay their eggs and the only plant the caterpillars can eat. Monarch butterfly populations have declined as much as 90% over the last twenty years. Replacing invasive plants with the native milkweed will support monarch and pollinator populations while also protecting the surrounding landscape from the spread of invasive plants.



References

California Native Plant Society. (2023). *Skeleton Milkweed*. [https://calscape.org/Asclepias-subulata-\(Skeleton-Milkweed\)?srchcr=sc58020786d7dd1](https://calscape.org/Asclepias-subulata-(Skeleton-Milkweed)?srchcr=sc58020786d7dd1)

Desert Botanical Gardens. (2023). *Great Milkweed Plant Grow Out*. <https://dbg.org/partner-initiatives/great-milkweed-grow-out/>

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. (2023). *Asclepias subulate*. University of Texas at Austin. https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=ASSU

This past November, we had a fun and successful social event at Dreamy Draw. It was a wonderful opportunity to talk to other members of this organization and we had many members of the public stop by to hear about our work and sling

COMING SOON! PMPC SOCIAL EVENTS

shot seed balls into the preserves. Some of those curious park lovers even became new members of the PMPC to help us with our mission!



Courtesy of Carla Gunn

Due to this success, watch for other events in 2024. Planning has started for a Spring in the Mountains event on April 6th and another in the fall. If you're interested in helping with the planning, helping with promotion, or have ideas of how to make the next event engaging and interesting, please email us at pmpc@azgmail.com.

We look forward to seeing you there!



CLOUD 9

HIKING TO A HIGH HISTORY

Hiking to the summit of Shaw Butte along Trail 306 will have you breathing hard & focused on making it to the top. If you take the time to look around, you may see a concrete platform above you and an old, paved road. Welcome to the ruins of the Cloud 9 restaurant.



Courtesy of Douglas Towne



Concrete slab above the trail while on Trail 306
Courtesy of Carla Gunn

Back when the mountains were not protected preserve land (in 1957, not so long ago), Richard and Barbara Barker bought 40 acres of land to build a house high above the city. Using plenty of dynamite, an area was leveled, and steep roads created to meet up where 15th Avenue ended. The house was completed and a restaurant was added in 1961 after the family recognized the interesting site was drawing visitors. It was open from 5 pm to midnight, serving steak and seafood. A 50-foot neon "9" sign was installed, creating even more buzz around this already popular place to be seen.

The restaurant was along a 120-foot, semi-circle with great views of the city. The windows along the arc were salvaged glass tops from pinball machines. The restaurant also featured a fireplace, a waterwheel feature and a goldfish pond. Soon after opening, a second story was added for a dance floor. Diners had to take a shuttle up to the restaurant in a Land Rover or Mercury Voyager station wagon. Construction of an aerial tramway was started to avoid this sometimes scary ride up the mountain.

November 8, 1964 brought all this excitement to an end when a fire destroyed the restaurant. The family had already moved to a home in Phoenix, so Cloud 9 was not rebuilt. Enter the era of purchasing land for protection from development, coming into ownership by the City of Phoenix. Protected now, the ruins on this site remind us of a time gone by and the importance of protecting our preserves.



Remains of the restaurant seating area today
Courtesy of Carla Gunn

References

North Central News. (2017, March 4). *Wandering up memory lane*.
<https://northcentralnews.net/2017/community/wandering-up-memory-lane/>
Towne, D. (2009). *Cloud of Suspicion: Phoenix Files History*. Phoenix Magazine.
<https://www.neonmotel.com/download/cloud9.pdf>

PHOENIX GENERAL PLAN 2025

Phoenix residents will be asked to vote on a General Plan during the elections in November. This is an opportunity for citizens to have a voice in shaping the future of Phoenix. The General Plan is a roadmap for how the city will grow and develop over the next ten years, providing a guide for decisions on infrastructure and locations of parks. This plan started with PlanPHX Surveys, giving residents a voice in shaping the future of Phoenix.

During these PlanPHX Surveys, community members responded that parks are the number one asset they treasure in Phoenix. With such a high value placed on the parks of Phoenix, our preserves are front and center in the three Community Benefits and either the focus of, or incorporated into, four of the five Core Values. As quoted on page 100, "Phoenix's renowned Sonoran Desert backdrop, complemented by world-class parks, desert recreation areas and mountain preserves, stands as a testament to decades of visionary citizens dedicated to conserving this invaluable resource. Residents aspire to continue this legacy by enriching and expanding our existing parks, preserves, rivers and washes, recognizing their status as the city's most iconic features" (City of Phoenix, 2024). The PMPC has made significant contributions to the City of Phoenix and will continue to do so in the future with the strong support of the community.

To understand the General Plan and get a brief synopsis of the plan, go to www.phoenix.gov/pdd/generalplan2025 and watch the YouTube video under *What's the General Plan?*

References

City of Phoenix Planning and Development. (2023). *PlanPHX Draft 2025 General Plan 60-Day Review*. City of Phoenix. www.phoenix.gov/pddsite/Documents/121823_60-Day%20Draft%20PlanPHX%202025%20Update_11x17.pdf

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Your PMPC board members have been hard at work trying to organize decades of documents and pictures of all the work done by the group. In these found pictures, we see Perl Charles showing the beauty of the mountains to Charles Christiansen who is known for his preservation efforts working with the PMPC as the Parks and Recreation Department Director. Five years later, Christiansen is giving Paul Van Cleve a tour of the open space to be preserved.



Van Cleve is the author of *An Open Space Plan for the Phoenix Mountains*, the proposed plan for the Phoenix Mountain Preserves.



CONTINUING OUR WORK TO PROTECT THE PRESERVES

It's the 35th anniversary of the PMPC working with the City of Phoenix and Councilman Bill Parks to identify preserve boundaries by conducting land surveys. At the time, Councilman Bill Parks learned 10-feet of his property (including part of his swimming pool) was not his but belonged to the preserves. The publicity this received led the councilman to spearhead a survey to identify other lots that may have unknowingly built on preserve land. It was the PMPC that convinced the councilman to expand the surveys to all preserves in the city.

We know where the boundaries are today, but the PMPC still needs to work with those on the periphery to maintain the natural state of the preserves but also to expand protected land. The PMPC is interested in working with the current owners of 134 W Mountain View Road. The land cannot be built on and neighbors of the property would like to see it remain undeveloped. There is an opportunity to persuade the owners to donate the land to Save Our Mountains Foundation if it is truly on the boundary of North Mountain Park.

We're also paying close attention to the future of Mystery Castle near South Mountain Park/Preserve. After vandalization of the castle, the future of this landmark is in question. We will be monitoring to see if there's an opportunity for land adjacent to the building to be donated to the Save Our Mountains Foundation to eventually become preserved land.



The PMPC joined many other community members in a **VICTORY** to reject the rezoning of 1602 E Desert Cove Ave. The property owners planned to build a self-storage facility on the border of preserve land. The planning commission has now denied the rezoning request twice, listening to the public that our preserves are important and the natural state, even in surrounding areas, should be maintained.

NORTH MOUNTAIN PARK REMODEL UPDATE

The remodeling plan was updated after incorporating changes from the second round of public comments and input from the Historic Preservation Office. The Parks and Recreation Board has now approved the North Mountain remodeling plan. There will be park closures during the estimated 12-month construction period. NMVC will remain open.

TRAIL 25 UPDATE

The end is finally near with this long outstanding issue. All stakeholders now support this connector and survey work was completed at the end of 2023. An update was presented to the Phoenix Sonoran Preserves/Mountain Parks Committee and the City of Phoenix is now working on the trail easement from a legal perspective.



WILD FLOWERS ON THE WAY!

We have had such beautiful weather this winter, the entire country has been jealous. The heat is coming though, and the desert is getting ready to wake up for it. Here's some of what we can expect to start seeing at the end of the month and into March when spring blooms peak.

BRITTLEBUSH These gray shrubs will start turning the hillsides yellow as they bloom from February to April.


DESERT MARIGOLDS Don't confuse this one with brittlebush! The desert marigold flowers will be yellow but larger, about 2 inches in diameter. These can be found in washes and sandy soils.


LUPINES These annuals growing in sandy soils and disturbed areas have indigo, violet, or blue flowers. The plant only grows up to 15 inches, so they won't be large but the interesting colors will catch your eye (along with hummingbirds and bees).

MEXICAN POPPIES Not likely to be seen in large amounts in most of our preserves, these annuals bloom with orange petals that fade to yellow.



If you're out hiking, those unfamiliar with our preserves may need reminders on how to enjoy the blooms.

 We should all stay on trail. Our fragile desert needs us to stay off it to allow more flowering plants to grow.

 Take only pictures. If we pick the flowers, they die and can't produce seeds. We won't be able to enjoy them next year nor will future generations visiting the parks.

OWL-CLOVER

In March we should start seeing the variety of colors from this small (4-18") herb. Flowers are clustered with 5-9 linear lobes in hues of purple making it look like a paintbrush. One of its common names is exserted Indian paintbrush.

CHUPAROSA The red tube-shaped flowers will start to make these shrubs look like fireworks across the landscape where water is abundant.



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References

Case, J. (2023, February 4). *Field Guide to Arizona's Sonoran Desert Wildflowers*. Mountain Tripper. <https://www.mountaintripper.com/arizona-wildflowers-sonoran-desert/>
Sturla, E. P. (2022). *Southwest Desert Flora*. <https://southwestdesertflora.com/>





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Thank you for your 2024 PMPC Membership

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Please tell us how you heard about PMPC:

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