

**American Society of Landscape Architects**

**Medal of Excellence Nominations**

c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

**Re: Nomination of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division**

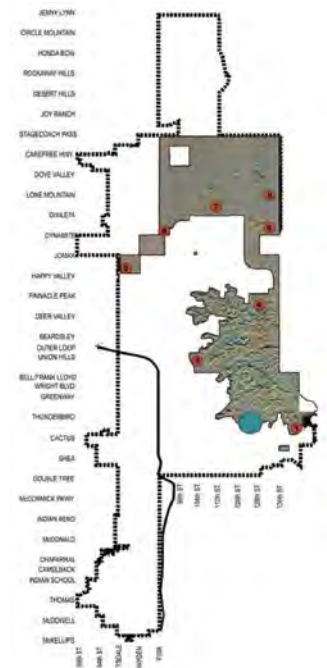
Dear Colleagues:

It is my great honor to nominate The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale Preservation Division (a joint nomination) for The Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence. These two exemplary organizations, working together through a non-profit public|private partnership, have been directly responsible for the preservation of more than 47 square miles (to date) of fragile Sonoran Desert – land that otherwise stood directly in the path of imminent development. The foresight of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale and their ongoing stewardship of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, stands as a model for the creation and management of our nation’s critical urban preserves.

**A Brief History**

In 1990, Scottsdale citizens, through the non-profit McDowell Sonoran Land Trust (now The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy), initiated the vision for what ultimately will be the preservation of approximately 36,400 acres of Scottsdale’s McDowell Mountains and Sonoran Desert. Over the past 20 years, the Preserve has grown to become the largest urban preserve in the country and when completed the McDowell Sonoran Preserve will encompass approximately one-third of Scottsdale’s total land area.

**Acquiring the Land:** The Preservation Division works directly with the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission and City Council to manage the process of acquiring the land for The Preserve. As initially planned, The Preserve consists of mountains, Sonoran Desert habitat, and important corridors linking to other natural open space in adjacent communities, the Tonto National Forest and the Maricopa County Regional Park. From the outset, the vision has been to create a large sustainable natural desert habitat for wildlife and desert flora. The areas identified for The Preserve were based upon: access potential, unique geological, historical and archaeological features; ecosystem & wildlife habitat; scenic quality; the potential for appropriate passive public use (i.e. hiking, biking, rock climbing, equestrian) and; corridors connecting natural open space areas.



**McDowell Sonoran Preserve**  
Nearly 1/3 of Scottsdale’s total land area is now permanently preserved as native Sonoran

In 1995, Scottsdale voters approved a .2% tax increase (by a remarkable 64%) to purchase the land within the 16,460 acre original Recommended Study Boundry (RSB). In 1998, voters approved using the sales tax to purchase land in the 19,940 acre expanded RSB. In 2004, Scottsdale voters approved an additional .15% increase in the sales tax for land acquisition and for access area amenities.

**Public Support:** In total, the citizens of Scottsdale have voted in favor of five separate initiatives involving the creation and funding of The Preserve. Each time the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy played an important role in informing and educating the public about the urgency and overall longterm benefits The Preserve will forever have on the quality of life for all of Scottsdale' residents and over eight million annual visitors.

For the first ten years of the preservation program, the city focused its efforts on acquiring private land in the planned Preserve boundary and on petitioning the State under the Arizona Preserve Initiative (API) to reclassify state land as suitable for conservation. As of 2007, all private land had been acquired or was in the process of being acquired. This step was both urgent and critical to accomplishing the overall vision of The Preserve, because the private lands within the RSB had already been zoned and planned for expansive private development that would have significantly disrupted most of this fragile ecosystem and blocked it forever from public access.

**State Land Reform:** As part of a broad based consortium of interests, the Preservation Division has been working for several years on critical State Land Reform that is creating the necessary mechanisms to assist Scottsdale and other Arizona communities in preserving appropriate State Trust Land within each community's boundary. In 1998 all of the State Trust Land in the original boundary - 2,762 acres, and 317 acres adjacent to the County Regional Park (submitted by Maricopa County at the request of Scottsdale) was reclassified as suitable for conservation under the Arizona Preserve Initiative (API). In 2001, 13,021 acres of State Trust Land in the expanded boundary were reclassified as suitable for conservation under the API. Of the total 19,643 acres of State Trust land in the planned Preserve boundary, 16,100 acres have now been reclassified as suitable for conservation under the API, which allows the City of Scottsdale to purchase the land for preservation as it becomes available for public auction. Significantly, these reform efforts have established new criteria and policies that will allow and encourage the permanent preservation of significant tracts of State Land elsewhere in the state.

These ongoing reform efforts have been critical to acquiring the areas within the RSB that connect the McDowell Mountains to the Tonto National Forest, thereby establishing a permanent wildlife corridor connecting these two open space preserves. The importance of saving these lands is underscored by Arizona Game and Fish, which considers the McDowell Mountains the most significant wildlife habitat in the valley outside the Tonto National Forest.

### **Stewardship and Education**

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) champions the sustainability of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve for the benefit of this and future generations. As stewards, the MSC connects the community to the Preserve through education, research,

advocacy, partnerships and safe, respectful access. The non-profit McDowell Sonoran Conservancy works in close coordination with the City of Scottsdale Preserve Division to manage the Preserve. This symbiotic public|private partnership is widely considered to have set the standard for urban preserve management throughout the country. No city could afford to properly manage, maintain and program this type of expansive asset by itself and it has only been made possible through the efforts of the 500+ well trained volunteer citizens that make up the core of the “McDowell Sonoran Conservancy Stewards” program.

**Research and Education:** The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy works with a variety of non-profit conservation organizations to promote programs that provide educational opportunities about the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, including ongoing stewardship, desert wildlife, native plant communities, the area’s cultural and ecological history.

In 2010 the MSC established The McDowell Sonoran Field Institute as the scientific research center of the Conservancy’s work. The Field Institute is dedicated to the study and preservation of the natural and human history of the Preserve. The Field Institute’s research is vital to the stewardship, management, and sustainability of the Preserve. A guiding principle of the work is to provide hands-on education for the community to promote the values of preservation, science-based management, and sustainability.

The Field institute has focused on two initiatives that are critical for sustainability. First, it initiated projects to establish a baseline record of the flora, fauna, and geology of the roughly 30,000 acres in the Preserve and to begin an assessment of human impact along trails and in boundary areas. Each project is led by the Field Institute staff in partnership with a Principal Investigator (PI) with established credentials in the field. Current projects involve PIs from Arizona State University, the Center for Native and Urban Wildlife at Scottsdale Community College, the Arizona Geological Survey, the Audubon Society, and the North American Field Herping Association.

The PIs are supported in the field and in their analyses by the Field Institute’s second major initiative, the Citizen-Science program. The Field Institute trains and deploys Conservancy volunteers, community members, and students on scientific projects, and uses the projects themselves and their results to provide educational opportunities for participants and the community. This program is unique for its scale, scope, and impact.



Through this research, the publication of its quarterly journal “Mountain Lines” and various educational programs, the MSC stewards are be able to effectively care for the preserve and share their knowledge and expertise. These activities will result in generations of citizens and visitors enjoying the Preserve in a respectful and informed manner. The MSC and the City of Scottsdale are currently leading efforts to finalize the program for the planned Desert Discovery Center that will be located at the Gateway Access Area. The Desert Discovery Center will provide opportunities for visitors to discover the story of the Upper Sonoran Desert, through exhibits and environmental experiences - presented in a natural setting. The center will

inspire learning about the desert through its programs which encourage preservation and instill a sense of harmony with and respect for the desert.

The Preserve Division coordinates all activities involving the McDowell Sonoran Preserve for City of Scottsdale and is responsible for, managing the process of defining what the Preserve will be for future generations. This is accomplished through hands on leadership and an uncompromising set of values in what it means to preserve our fragile Sonoran Desert ecology. On a day to day basis, this means managing both ends of the work spectrum, from their direct involvement in land acquisition and managing the designs of the award winning Preserve Access Areas, to leading volunteer groups in salvaging cacti and restoring old jeep trails throughout the Preserve. The Preserve Division believes strongly in what it is accomplishing and work tirelessly to ensure that the McDowell Sonoran Preserve sets the highest standard for what an urban Preserve can be.

**Field Work:** Perhaps the most remarkable demonstration of their ongoing Environmental Stewardship, is the tireless amount of “on the ground” sweat equity that each organization invests in the ongoing physical labor that is required to restore and maintain the Preserve. Throughout the year, the Conservancy volunteers and Preserve staff organize and lead volunteer groups into the field to perform a variety of difficult labor intensive tasks, the process of which has, in many ways, come to define the Preserve itself. These tasks include trail building, reclamation of previously disturbed areas such as old jeep trails and dump sites, and the salvage and relocation of literally thousands of cacti and native plants from sites throughout Scottsdale. This process goes well beyond the requirements for standard developments and requires the commitment of a large numbers of man-hours to accomplish. Without the untiring dedication of these organizations, this simply would not be possible.



### **Public Access**

Assuring appropriate access and passive recreational opportunities to the public was a critical component of securing citizen support for creating and financing the Preserve. Although the Preserve is intended to be maintained in as natural of a state as possible, it is also intended to provide public opportunities for passive recreational uses such as hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and educational field trips. To accomplish this, the City of Scottsdale developed a strict set of Access Area Guidelines to define where and how the access area trailheads would be developed. Working with a landscape architect led consultant team, the City defined a series of nine access areas throughout the Preserve and generating strict analysis, design and construction guidelines for each site. Each access area is intended to be a demonstration of how to appropriately and sustainably design and build in our sensitive arid environment.

**Leading Edge Design Standards:** The MSP Access Area Design Guidelines established comprehensive design and development standards including strict criteria for how any disturbance would be allowed within the Preserve boundaries.

These standards go well beyond the established City of Scottsdale standards for hillside development and native plant protection and are more specific regarding sustainable desert design than the USGBC's LEED certification process. As each new access area comes online, the City of Scottsdale works directly with the design team to adhere to the established design standards, while always exploring new ways to push the envelope of sustainable design practices and technologies.



**Access Area Design:** To date, the City of Scottsdale has completed construction of five trailhead facilities that provide public access to over 160 miles of trails throughout the Preserve. As intended, these facilities are each outstanding demonstrations of appropriate arid region sustainable design and have received international acclaim. The Lost Dog Wash Trailhead facility opened in 2006 and was recognized “as one of the most sustainable projects, we have seen”, by the ASLA award jury the following year. The Gateway Access Area, which opened to the public in 2010, set a new standard for projects of this type when it received LEED Platinum certification, along with numerous design and environmental awards. Each of the five access area projects are unique in both the specifics of their sites and their programmed uses, however, each area has successfully pushed the envelope of sustainable design and construction practices. This overall body of work has been recognized internationally for excellence of design and sustainability and is widely considered the standard for arid region design sustainability in general.



The work of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale is ongoing. Their creation, The McDowell Sonoran Preserve, is a testament to their dedication and commitment to both preserving this natural treasure for the enjoyment of future generations, but also to the importance that continuing research and education will play in ensuring the permanence of this invaluable public asset. For these reasons, I strongly encourage the Board of Trustees to recognize The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale Preservation Division for this prestigious award. I cannot think of a more appropriate or worthy recipient.



Sincerely,

Christopher Brown, FASLA

Partner

Floor Associates, Inc.

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March 4, 2014

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ASLA Board of Trustees  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Re: Nomination of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division

Dear ASLA Trustees:

On behalf of the Urban Land Institute Arizona District Council, I am writing to express strong support for the nomination of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division to receive the ASLA Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence.

More than three decades ago, concerned citizens of Scottsdale, recognized the fact that most, if not all, of the remaining undeveloped land that comprised most of north Scottsdale, was in the process of being planned for various types of development. Because of its natural beauty and close proximity to the city, this area was considered to be one of the most prime development parcels left in the entire Phoenix metropolitan area. Beginning as a grassroots effort, The MSC began a dialogue that influenced public officials, community opinion and the private sector to create partnerships where none had existed before, to preserve this amazing piece of fragile Sonoran Desert for the benefit of generations to come.

Remarkably, in a city best known for its resorts, golf and shopping, The MSC organized and lead the campaign to educate the public about this unique environment and to gain public approval of a dedicated sales tax to purchase this land and to create the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. The sales tax for preservation was approved by 64% in 1995. In order to finance future purchases to finalize the 57 square mile Preserve, the citizens of Scottsdale approved an additional sales tax in 2004 that also allowed the development of the acclaimed Trailheads areas that provide public access to the Preserve, as well as serving as demonstration projects for appropriate sustainable development.

The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division continue this mission of conservation, education and stewardship. In partnership with Scottsdale Community College, the "Preserve Steward" program trains volunteers to be caretakers of the Preserve and each weekend you will likely see Stewards throughout the Preserve, wearing their coveted blue t-shirts, leading hikes, building trails and repairing old jeep roads. The organizations continue to play a key part of the effort seeking a state Constitution amendment to facilitate the conservation of State Trust Lands - an important component of the final land acquisition needed to complete the Preserve and an effort which has far broader impact throughout the Phoenix metropolitan area.

**Staff**

Debra Z. Sydenham, FAICP  
Executive Director

Carrie Martin  
Manager

Stacey Haggerson  
Associate

The partnership between The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division stands as an exemplary model of innovative public private partnership that works successfully together to create a vision and fulfill its promise. The result is an amazing community asset which will benefit generations to come, creating a legacy for the future.

For all of these reasons, I am delighted to give my strongest endorsement to The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale Preservation Division for the ASLA Medal of Excellence.

Sincerely,



Debra Z. Sydenham, FAICP  
Executive Director



ARIZONA  
FORWARD

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March 6, 2014

ASLA Board of Trustees  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001-3736

Dear ASLA Trustees:

Arizona Forward is pleased to endorse the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy for the 2014 ASLA Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence. Formerly known as Valley Forward, our organization maintains a 45-year legacy of coalescing business and civic leaders around a sustainability agenda and took our mission statewide just last year.

The Conservancy has showcased community leadership in urban preserve management for more than two decades. It facilitates education and outreach to Valley residents and visitors alike about the environmental and archaeological significance of one of our state's greatest natural assets. It is a consistent voice and advocate for appropriate public access and a shared vision for the preserve in an ever-changing political climate.

Protecting the nation's largest urban preserve is a lofty responsibility. Sustaining this 1.8 billion-year-old treasure for future generations requires both technical expertise and community support. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy has done an exemplary job of fulfilling this role in partnership with the City of Scottsdale to ensure completion, management and public appreciation of the McDowell Mountain Preserve.

In 2005, the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy earned top honors – *the President's Award* – in Valley Forward's Environmental Excellence Awards program, Arizona's oldest and most prestigious competition focusing exclusively on sustainability initiatives. The President's Award is selected from among all first-place Crescordia recipients (a Greek term meaning, "To Grow in Harmony") and is the highest honor in the competition. The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy's scientific research center, the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute, was recognized last year for study and preservation of the natural and human history of the Preserve.

Arizona Forward applauds this nomination and the Conservancy for its stewardship of a resource enjoyed by more than three million people who live within a half-hour drive of these majestic peaks.

Sincerely,

Diane Brossart  
President & CEO

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY. YOUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

3800 N Central Avenue  
Suite 1010  
Phoenix, AZ 85012

CENTRAL 602.240.2408  
NORTHERN 928.286.8668  
SOUTHERN 520.284.1084

ArizonaForward.org  
Info@ArizonaForward.org





**Grand Canyon Chapter • 202 E. McDowell Rd, Ste 277 • Phoenix, AZ 85004**  
Phone: (602) 253-8633 Fax: (602) 258-6533 Email: [grand.canyon.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:grand.canyon.chapter@sierraclub.org)

March 6, 2014

Medal of Excellence Nominations  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
636 Eye Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001-3736

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

As the Director of the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter, I am pleased to provide my support for the nomination of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy for the Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence.

For the past 26 years, I have been working to conserve important lands in throughout our state and in the Maricopa County region. In 1997, I was fortunate to serve as the first executive director for the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy, helping to move them from a very effective all-volunteer organization to an even more effective conservation group.

Over the years, Sierra Club has frequently worked with the Conservancy to promote policies to protect the McDowell Sonoran Preserve and to keep it as a preserve rather than a more developed park or playland. There has been much work and planning on trail development, ensuring proper trail placement, trailhead placement, and ensuring adequate parking and facilities to minimize the impacts on the preserve, while maintaining the character of the area. The Conservancy's educational programs and hikes have helped many people better appreciate the Sonoran Desert and experience its wonders.

The McDowell Sonoran Preserve is a model preserve where people who live in the community, nearby communities, and visitors can experience our beautiful Sonoran Desert in all its splendor. Not long ago, I took a reporter to the area to see and smell the desert and to better understand its diversity. All too often our native vegetation is bulldozed and plants and buildings that are inappropriate to our desert take their place. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve keeps our desert lands intact and the Conservancy has helped ensure that.

I encourage you to consider the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy for this important award. The Conservancy has been instrumental in bringing beauty and opportunities for quiet recreation to people in the heart of Scottsdale, Arizona.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Regards,

Sandy Bahr  
Director, Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter

March 4, 2014

ASLA Board of Trustees  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001-3736

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**Re: McDowell Sonoran Conservancy/City of Scottsdale Preservation  
Department**

Dear ASLA Trustees:

As the former mayor of the City of Scottsdale, and having served on the City Council during the exciting years of establishment and acquisition, it is with pride and excitement I ask for your consideration of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) and the City of Scottsdale Preservation Department (COS) for your Landscape Architecture Medal of Excellence.

Working in symbiotic collaboration, the MSC and City created a public/private partnership and have conserved for posterity over 30,000 acres of mostly pristine Sonoran Desert. The McDowell Sonoran Preserve is now the largest urban preserve (larger than Washington, DC) and will forever be sustained for the future enjoyment and benefit of not only our 230,000 residents but also the 8.1 million visitors that come to Scottsdale annually.

## Desert Discovery Center Advocates



The unique funding mechanism that has FIVE times been voted on positively by the citizens of Scottsdale has allowed for acquisition. But the more critical component – the care and stewardship of the Preserve – had to also be taken into account. THAT is the unique partnership I hope you consider to be award-winning. No city could afford to maintain and responsibly sustain such a huge asset with city employees and resources. It was only with the promise from the MSC leadership and volunteers that we could dare be so bold. And for 20 years, they have not only met those commitments – they have far exceeded them.

Further, the establishment of the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute, a part of MSC, insures that the science of sustainability is at work in the long-term pursuit of a healthy Preserve. This was done with generous and visionary private donors and matched by a local family foundation whose mission aligned perfectly with both MSC and the City's goals.

I have joined 500+ well-trained, enthusiastic citizens and winter visitors in becoming a Steward. The ongoing training, education, and fun events keep me engaged and on the trails. The recently completed (and mostly privately funded) fully accessible trail is a joy for my twin grandsons and me to hike often. They know every interpretive node and delight in the hands-on learning that ensues.

Having established the City's Sustainability Office, I know and appreciate what LEED standards bring to a project. To have them instituted for the Preserve is a unique and fulfilling vision. I established the National Audubon Society's state office -- and got to appreciate the partnerships MSC and the City have established with many other conservation and preservation organizations to achieve an amenity that will be with us for generations, really forever.

We are now working to establish the Desert Discovery Center as the interpretive and research/education institution for the Preserve. It has been a pleasure working with MSC and COS to make this dream a reality.

The Medal of Excellence that the American Society of Landscape Architects bestows is the most prestigious in the country. I nominate the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale's Preservation Department jointly to receive this honor. With sincere appreciation for your thoughtful consideration, I thank you and urge you to select this unique and most effective partnership.

Warm thanks,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sam K. Campana". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Sam Kathryn Campana

Scottsdale City Council 1986 – 1994 and Mayor, 1996 - 2000



March 6, 2014

ASLA Board of Trustees  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20001-3736

**Re: Nomination of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and City of Scottsdale  
Preservation Division**

Dear ASLA Trustees:

It is my great pleasure to express my support for the nomination of The McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale Preservation Division to receive the ASLA Medal of Excellence. What the City and the Conservancy have been able to accomplish is perhaps one of, if not the greatest planning and conservation achievement in the Phoenix metropolitan area in the past twenty years.

The strong partnership between dedicated and professional staff and passionate and strategic citizens of the Conservancy envisioned a preserve encompassing some of the most important and beautiful desert lands that eventually would include almost one third of Scottsdale's total land area: 36,400 acres, of which over 30,000 acres have already been protected. These critical lands connect other large conservation areas already protected by Maricopa County, Tonto National Forest and the City of Phoenix, creating a network of open space that is preserving and defining the character of the area.

Under the partnerships combined leadership and management, the preserve properly balances resource conservation with appropriate recreational access. Citizens and visitors are welcomed into the preserve through award winning, innovative and site responsive trailheads and trail networks that follow extensive design guidelines.

This partnership and the citizens of Scottsdale properly recognized the importance of these lands to Scottsdale's future, for recreation, conservation and tourism. They exemplify the best



of public/private partnerships that have tremendously improved the life of thousands and protected critical lands.

I have had the pleasure of working with many of the individuals involved in both organizations. I cannot think of a greater honor to celebrate their commitment to Scottsdale and Arizona. I wholeheartedly support this ASLA Medal of Excellence nomination for the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and the City of Scottsdale Preservation Division.

Sincerely,

James D. Coffman, RLA, ASLA  
ASLA Trustee, Arizona Chapter  
President, Coffman Studio  
Faculty Associate, Arizona State University