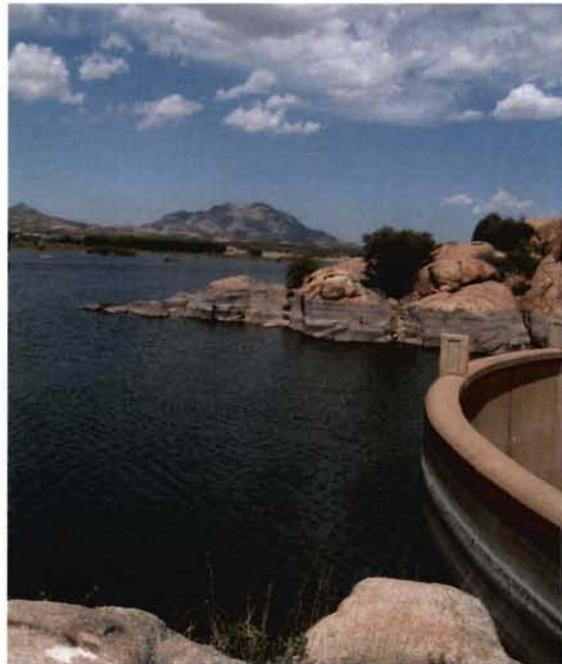
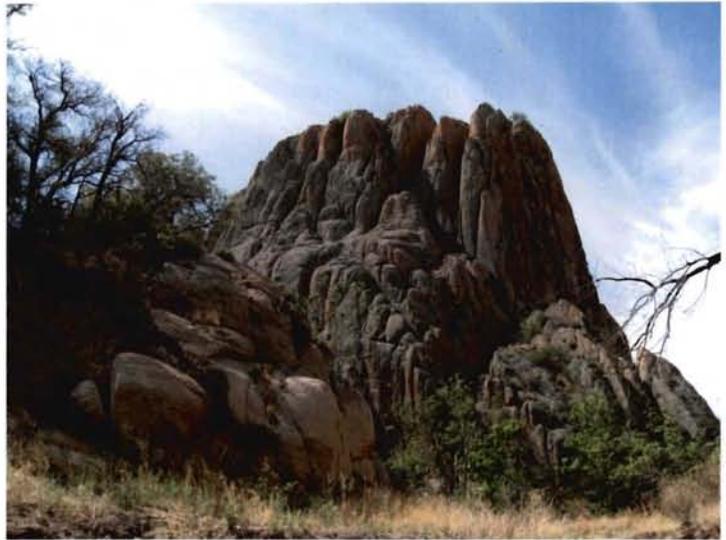


City of Prescott Open Space Master Plan September, 2008



—preserving Prescott's natural resource heritage—

CITY OF PRESCOTT OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN 2008

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September, 2008

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Executive Summary

OPEN SPACE IS A VITAL PART of the small-town character and unique natural environment of Prescott. It has long been recognized as a key issue for maintaining a high quality of life for those living in or visiting our community. The Prescott Open Space Master Plan was prepared by the City of Prescott Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC). This plan is a product of intensive volunteer effort by OSAAC committee members over the course of a year. It was partially based on the City of Durango's Open Space Master Plan, as Durango has many similarities to Prescott with respect to natural amenities and open space needs.

The citizens of Prescott passed an initiative in 2000 to fund open space purchases with a portion of sales tax monies. Public forums in 2002 helped clarify priorities and suggest potential open space sites. Mayor Rowle Simmons assembled the Advisory Committee in 2003 to advise the City Council on strategies for open space acquisition and stewardship. With the 2007 adoption of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP), OSAAC offered this plan as an expansion of the open space portions of the PRMP into a more detailed and prescriptive document.

The committee has identified key issues, most related to rapid population growth, expanding development, loss of potential open space resources, and insufficient regional planning. Preservation of open space has become a top priority of the citizens and City Council, and this plan is the guide to that end.

This Open Space Master Plan describes a number of potential and existing open space properties and defines the values and criteria under which acquisition decisions should be based. It further suggests potential partnerships and strategies by which open space might be secured. It provides a detailed action plan and open space policies. This plan recognizes that the ongoing acquisition program must be complemented by clear management responsibilities, which it defines.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Adopt the Open Space Master Plan as an element of the Prescott General Plan.

Recommendation 2

Replace the current Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) with a permanent City Council-appointed Open Space Commission (OSC). This commission serves at the Council's request. A commission must always be in place and given authority to function effectively according to its designated responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

Establish an Open Space Funding Task Force, in conjunction with or as a work group of the Open Space Commission, to pursue immediately the creation of a permanent funding source for all open space acquisitions and management operations.

Recommendation 4

Create a position on the City of Prescott Development Review Committee for one member of OSC. This will help insure that this committee will consider open space in all development reviews. As part of future annexations and planned developments, require the dedication of effective open space areas that have high value to the open space system. Develop specific criteria for evaluating areas as additions to the City's open space system, including City-owned lands that have natural values as open space. Pursue the protection of those lands and their public uses subject to specific conditions and criteria.

Recommendation 5

Continue to participate with federal and state agencies in planning the management of public lands within their respective jurisdictions within or near Prescott. Seek to develop a Regional Urban Interface Plan with all affected agencies, as well as with Quad-City governments.

Recommendation 6

Review and revise City ordinances to increase incentives for open space preservation. These ordinance guidelines will be directed toward conserving open space and/or minimizing project impacts to open space values on hillsides, watersheds, and wildlife.

Recommendation 7

Report at least annually to City Council and the public on open space losses, gains, concerns, and opportunities.

Recommendation 8

Update and maintain the Open Space and Trails map system as a planning tool and public information resource.

Recommendation 9

Develop programs to increase public awareness of the tax and estate planning benefits of donations of land and conservation easements. Enlist aid of Arizona and national non-profit land trusts in the effort.

Recommendation 10

Conduct an analysis of requirements and costs vs. benefits of setting up Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transferable Development Credits (TDC) systems to preserve open space. Implement if feasible.

Recommendation 11

Review and update the Open Space Master Plan within five years of its adoption.

Recommendation 12

Hire a full-time Open Space Manager to be responsible for continued development of the Open Space Program and management of open space properties as acquired. Assign or other wise provide management staff for this program.



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

...the ephemeral creeks or riparian areas that cross our city provide valuable wildlife habitat and recreational opportunity...

Open space, a vital part of the small-town character and unique natural environment of Prescott, has long been recognized as a key issue for maintaining a high quality of life for those living in or visiting our community. Prescott's 1999 Open Space Plan defines open space appropriate for preservation as having outstanding or significant characteristics: biological, geological, scenic, riparian, recreational, cultural and/or historical.

The City's boundaries adjoin land under the jurisdiction or management of Yavapai County, two incorporated towns, an Indian reservation, the State of Arizona, and the federal government. In addition to being the county seat and service center for the region, Prescott draws visitors to numerous camp facilities, lakes, trails, parks, open space preserves, and greenways.

The City of Prescott, at an elevation of approximately 5,280 feet, lies within a highland basin cradled by ancient mountains and hills. The eastern gateway to the city presents a dramatic backdrop of wooded mountains, highlighted to the west by the city's iconic Thumb Butte. A system of nine creeks from the two flanking mountain ranges—the Bradshaws mainly to the south and the Sierra Prieta to the west—feeds into Granite Creek and ultimately into the Verde River.

Ecosystem diversity is remarkably high, ranging from montane forests of Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, and white fir at elevations as high as 8,000 feet down to short-grass prairie around 4,500 feet. The wooded hills surrounding the city at mid-elevations consist of evergreen and deciduous oaks, piñon pines and junipers, and interior chaparral. Lakes and massive granite outcrops as in the Granite Dells add further structural diversity and abundant niches for native plants and animals. For example, wooded areas are inhabited by mule deer, elk, peccary, mountain lion, bobcat, and wild turkeys. To the north within the broad stretches of open grassland, pronghorn maintain a tenuous existence within encroaching residential development. Waterfowl are abundant in winter on the lake system within the city, and both resident and migratory species add to local diversity. Wildlife in the broad sense is both an economic and an aesthetic resource.

Prescott National Forest surrounds the city on three sides, providing abundant opportunities for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding and motorized travel. Nevertheless, because of historical factors, such as mining claims, a significant acreage within and bounded by national forest is privately owned, and many of these forest in-holdings are being developed for residences and are restricting public access.

In addition to our forested lands, the ephemeral creeks or riparian areas that cross our city provide valuable wildlife habitat and recreational opportunity. These vital linear ribbons are continually threatened by private development.

Open space is clearly a valuable amenity for residents and visitors, but the values are by no means strictly intangible. Tourism (and its more responsible sister, ecotourism) can provide significant economic value to a community that protects open space, has attractive and accessible trail systems, and protects wildlife habitats. Once open space is acquired, it costs very little to maintain it relative to the potential economic benefits. The City can use open space as an enticement for visitation and as a destination virtue, which, together with historical and cultural amenities, can encourage longer stays and higher quality visitor experiences.

1.1 What is Open Space?

We define “Open Space” as land with conservation values that qualify it to be preserved permanently from development. In contrast to intensive recreation facilities (e.g., parks, ball fields), open space implies land that is preserved in a natural, or near-natural, condition where most activity is passive and on trails (e.g., hiking, running, bicycling and horseback riding). Supporting recreational facilities in open space areas are typically limited to trails, picnic areas, interpretive facilities, restrooms, and parking lots.

Open space is undeveloped land. Undeveloped land, however, is vulnerable to development unless protected in some fashion. While all undeveloped land contributes to a sense of openness, some of it is more valuable as open space than others because of riparian qualities, wildlife habitat, historic and cultural values, scenic viewshed, or recreational potential. As the City grows and development expands, demand for open space and for recreational opportunities grows accordingly, even as options for preserving these opportunities become more limited. This document will identify and focus on land deemed most important as open space for current and future generations.

1.2 Why We Need a Plan

Since public land (Forest Service, BLM, etc.) surrounds Prescott, many people assume that the City’s open, natural backdrop will always be there. In fact, some of that backdrop is in private ownership, and even public land could be converted to private ownership through auction or land exchange. The result is that several key areas of Prescott’s current open spaces are “at risk.” Open space that the community takes for granted will disappear unless the City takes specific actions to preserve it. Determining acquisition priorities, identifying key parcels that meet open space criteria, and examining the full range of protection options must be pursued as soon as possible.

Land purchase is just one of many different options available to preserve open space. Preservation often can be accomplished at a lower cost by donation of easements, utilization of tax and other incentives to donate land or easements, and implementation of development practices that preserve open space. Public agencies within Yavapai County with jurisdiction over land can also play a strong role in open space preservation. An Open Space Plan will help coordinate the various public and private efforts and will assure that community resources are used most effectively in open space preservation.

1.3 How the Plan Was Created

In August, 2003, Mayor Rowle Simmons appointed members to the Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) to advise the City Council on strategies for open space acquisition and stewardship. The committee, set up to exist for the term of the sales tax extension passed in May, 2000, was composed of citizen volunteers, with representation by council and City staff. The committee was given specific responsibilities:

- ❖ Develop and adopt criteria for size, composition, policies, and procedures used by the committee.
- ❖ Create a timeline for reporting procedures, staffing, and measurement of the City’s progress toward achieving the goals of open space acquisition and management.
- ❖ Recommend procedures for acquiring specific properties.
- ❖ Collaborate with other entities and volunteer groups to plan and recommend contracts

The City invited public participation to gain insights about general perceptions on open space, including the identification of specific areas deemed of high value by the public.

2.1 Public Meetings

In May, 2000, voters approved extension of the existing one-percent sales tax to December 21, 2015. The money accruing from the tax is dedicated to two programs: The Assured Road Program for street improvements and Open Space Acquisition. There were no guidelines within the approved measure that allocated a specific division of the tax revenues, but the amount for open space was capped at \$40.7 million. Prior to the approval of the tax, City Council passed a conditional resolution that approved the Assured Road Program and identified eleven specific open space areas for potential acquisition (See section 3.1).

The City of Prescott conducted a series of public forums during the summer of 2002 to gain public support for the program and develop, from public input, a ranking of the eleven identified potential open space areas. The workshops brought the importance of these eleven areas into focus for the public and established a tentative value ranking of the areas.

The increasing level of real estate development, loss of critical habitat for pronghorn, and encroachment of development into Prescott's creek areas have changed the dynamics of open space preservation since those forums.

2.2 Key issues identified:

- ❖ The Prescott area has critical wildlife habitats, including corridors for wide-ranging animal species, such as the pronghorn and mountain lion. The maintenance of continuous corridors is necessary for their continued existence in these areas. The leapfrog development of State Trust Lands within and beyond city limits threatens those corridors.
- ❖ Open lands in and around the City contribute to the "rural" or "small town" character of Prescott. However, open space lands within city boundaries are quickly being acquired for private residential development. Given the rate this community is developing and the limited amount of developable land available, virtually all privately held land likely will be proposed for future development.
- ❖ New development has the potential to encroach into the Glassford Hill and Badger (also called "P") Mountain backdrop that contributes to Prescott's unique identity and separation from the adjoining town of Prescott Valley. These two areas are mostly State Trust Lands and had heretofore been classified under provisions of the Arizona Preserve Initiative as suitable for conservation. The conservation status for both areas has expired.
- ❖ Potential for public lands to be exchanged or sold may allow development in areas previously assumed to be protected.

It is important to protect key parcels of open space and take prompt action, as the cost of purchasing such sites will continue to escalate, and much or all of the remaining potential open space sites will be developed.

Many areas deserve consideration for open space preservation. This section identifies those areas and the criteria for acquisition.

3.1 Potential and Preserved Open Space Areas

The September, 1999 Open Space Plan and a City Council resolution in February, 2000, identified certain potential open space areas. The descriptions are general in nature so as to not compromise ongoing negotiations with private landowners. There are also other properties that could be significant additions to the economic, scenic, historic, and recreational resources available to the citizens of Prescott.

The following areas were identified, and the descriptions are modified with information relevant as of 2008:

Badger (a.k.a. “P”) Mountain

This area, comprised mainly of State Trust Land, covers 1,557 acres of relatively undisturbed open space along the eastern edge of the Prescott basin. It occupies a dominant position in the landscape, visible throughout the Prescott community, contrasting sharply with the rapid urbanization of the area.

Under provisions of the Arizona Preserve Initiative (API), this area was designated as suitable for conservation purposes. The API designation expired in 2005 and was not renewed. The area is vulnerable to private purchase and development. In 2002, the firm of Dufresne-Henry prepared a coordination plan for the proposed preserve, which should be consulted in possible acquisitions or used as a model for other preserves when they are established.



Badger (“P”) Mountain defines east Prescott skyline.

Glassford Hill

A dominant natural feature, this extinct volcano rises to over 6,000 feet on the west side of Prescott Valley, forming the eastern skyline of the City of Prescott. The two municipalities jointly planned a process to protect this area as a visual buffer between them (draft completed in April, 2001). An area of about 1,860 acres of State Trust Land was reclassified under API as suitable for conservation purposes, but that classification expired in 2003 and was not renewed. Like Badger Mountain, this site is vulnerable to sale and development. Its potential open space values include geological, historical (prominent military outlook and heliograph signal post), aesthetic (scenic vista), and ecological (e.g., habitat for pronghorn, deer, eagles, and other wildlife).



Glassford Hill viewed from Willow Lake Trail. Watson Lake and Granite Dells in foreground.

Gill Hill (a.k.a. “the hill east of Thumb Butte”)

The City of Prescott acquired this 32-acre property in March, 2001, for \$2.1million. This prominent steep, boulder-covered hill is vegetated with chaparral and mixed pine-oak. Despite its relatively small size, it hosts considerable wildlife, including deer, peccary, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, and more. A remarkable 75 species of butterflies were recorded within a small area at the edge of the preserve, an indicator of high biological diversity. The area overlooks the Prescott basin and is located just east of Thumb Butte.

Granite Dells: Its Streams and Lakes

The Granite Dells area, in addition to its spectacular geologic formations, encompasses two major drainages, Granite Creek and Willow Creek. Much of the open space within these



OSAAC representatives explore potential trail corridor in lower Willow Creek

valuable stream courses is important wildlife habitat but has great potential for low-impact public recreation. Much of the area is in private ownership. The City seeks to acquire certain parcels within these riparian corridors to protect the physical integrity of sites within lower Willow Creek and Granite Creek from development and ultimately to create a contiguous “greenway” system of natural areas for public use. The City of Prescott already owns Watson Woods Riparian Preserve along Granite Creek upstream from Watson Lake. Subsequent to the

purchase of both Willow and Watson Lakes, the City purchased an additional 25-acre parcel (Ericksson) in 2001 for \$325,000. In 2005, the City purchased in fee simple 28.26 acres of private property (Payne parcel) for \$187,500, and a conservation easement (now held by the Central Arizona Land Trust) was placed on the parcel. Prescott is currently attempting to secure additional properties that will protect the riparian resources of lower Willow and Granite Creeks upstream from their confluence.

Watson and Willow Lakes currently provide the most important economic and recreational resources in this area, and the greenways will significantly enhance recreational possibilities in this highly scenic Granite Dells area. Public uses at the lakes already include boating, fishing, birding, natural history education, hiking, picnicking, and camping. The lakes host thousands of migratory waterfowl, as well as eagles, shorebirds, and nesting colonies of herons and cormorants. The creeks below them have exceptional habitat for Wood Ducks, raptors (e.g., Zone-tailed Hawk, Common Black-Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Great Horned Owl), numerous mammals, and many songbirds, and the Granite Dells formations offer sensational rock-climbing and scenery.

Granite Dells: Wildlife Corridors and Geology

From the start of the prioritization process, State Trust Lands consisting of rough, wild granitic formations of Granite Dells were recognized as potentially vital wildlife corridors between Watson Woods and Glassford Hill. Small streams, some with permanent pools hosting aquatic vegetation, create oases for wildlife within this labyrinth of spectacular geologic features. Deer, mountain lions, peccary, and other native wildlife are rarely disturbed by humans in this rugged landscape. If the corridor can be preserved, they may be able to persist as viable populations. Land adjoining State-owned property is proposed for development and also remains vulnerable. However, the open space significance of this area may eventually create an opportunity to achieve important conservation goals that will complement protection efforts in other Granite Dells areas.



Watson Lake cove

Indian Hill – State Trust Land

Located on Prescott's northwest side, this hill commands scenic views of much of the Prescott basin. Immediately adjacent to Pioneer Park, it contains significant archaeological resources. If it is eventually sold by the State Land Department, the City's objective will be to negotiate a conservation easement or to purchase development rights in order to manage the area as a complement to Pioneer Park.

Dalke Rock Formations and Petroglyphs

The area on Prescott's western boundary is now under development as "Enchanted Canyon Estates." The area has significant archaeological resources that include a large boulder inscribed with petroglyphs and a number of burial sites and pit houses considered to be related to the prehistoric "Prescott Culture" that existed here from approximately A.D. 850 to 1025. The faunal resources include mule deer, peccary, and an occasional elk or mountain lion. Typical of much of Prescott, rocky outcrops and a north-trending canyon support vegetation transitional from ponderosa pine forest to piñon-juniper, evergreen oaks, and chaparral species. The city is negotiating with the developers to designate at least 25 percent of the area as open space with a marked trail and to protect and secure as much as possible the significant archaeological sites.

Community Nature Center Open Space Preserve

The City purchased an eighteen-acre site for \$1.8 million in December, 2006. . The Prescott Unified School District had owned the site and leased it for many years to the Highlands Center for Natural History, which operated it as a center for nature study for children and adults. The City has converted the old cabin to a visitor center and will provide maintenance services and management as an open space preserve and educational facility. This pocket of natural landscape is adjacent to two schools and easily accessible within the urban area.

Klein Mesa

South and west of Glassford Hill is the broad butte of Klein Mesa, an important part of the scenic eastern skyline and gateway vista of the City of Prescott. It provides grassland habitat for pronghorn, though its value as a wildlife corridor is rapidly being compromised by nearby development. Sundog Ranch has held a grazing lease from the State Land Department on these state lands. Its value as open space would be enhanced if it were protected in conjunction with the Watson Lake Wildlife Corridor and Glassford Hill.

Prescott Greenways

Having made significant progress in the last ten years in securing public easements along sections of Granite and Miller Creeks, the City of Prescott plans to continue negotiating with adjacent property owners to create a continuous public corridor within these two creek drainages. Trails, gates, and bridges open to cycling and hiking have been constructed within existing easements.

Other Open Space Acquisitions

Over the last few years, a number of other sites are now within the City's open space program, though they were not purchased with dedicated open space funds. These include White Spar Creekside Preserve, Boyle/DeBusk Open space Preserve, Thumb Butte parcels (the "Scar"), and the Hill above the Village at the Boulders.



Bench & historic wall, Granite Creek Trail

3.2 Open Space Values and Characteristics

Open space helps define Prescott's identity, contributes to overall quality of life, and attracts many visitors to the area, some of whom become residents. Open space also provides refuge from the accelerating pace of day-to-day life, in-town experience of the natural world, and hands-on educational opportunities for students of all ages. It retains important biological diversity within the community and provides a legacy for future generations. It also provides significant revenue potential through natural services and tourism expenditures.

3.2.1 Values

The Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee identified the following community values in preserving Prescott's open space:

- ❖ Economic, including significant tourism potential
- ❖ Social welfare
- ❖ Historic and prehistoric culture
- ❖ Community desirability
- ❖ Water and watersheds
- ❖ Wildlife habitat
- ❖ Community / human connection to nature
- ❖ Peace, tranquility
- ❖ Sense of spaciousness
- ❖ Outdoor recreation

3.2.2 Characteristics

Using the above open space values, the Committee designated characteristics that can be used to compare potential open space areas and develop acquisition priorities:

- ❖ Ecological
 - Riparian or streamside habitat
 - Wildlife habitat and movement corridors
 - Grasslands
 - Wetlands
 - Unique geological features
 - Other ecological concerns/values
- ❖ Hydrological (Water)
 - Watersheds
 - Surface and subsurface water
- ❖ Cultural and Historical
 - Traditional
 - Archaeological
- ❖ Physical (e.g., buffers)
 - Community boundaries
 - Neighborhood identification

Potential incompatible land uses
“Neighborhood” open space
Inherent local value (e.g., Community Nature Center)

❖ Scale

Scenic vistas
Visual backdrops
Connectivity of isolated open space
Extension of existing open space

❖ Recreational Potential

Hiking, biking, horseback riding, photography, birding, fishing, boating

❖ Aesthetics

Significant visual resources include views of the mountain backdrop that surrounds the city.

Prominent landforms, such as Thumb Butte, Granite Mountain, Glassford Hill, Granite Dells, Badger (or “P”) Mountain, and the Sierra Prieta.

Greenways represented by the various creeks that flow through the city. These provide a diversity of vegetation and wildlife that contrasts with the surrounding developed or natural landscapes.

In general, areas visible from multiple locations are more important to preserve than areas visible from one or two locations. This should not, however, rule out unique areas or landmarks that are only visible from a few locations.



Pronghorn near Chino Valley

❖ The Natural Environment

Prescott is located within the Central Arizona Highlands, an area of high biological diversity at the intersection of several life zones and topographic features.

Vegetation: The Prescott area holds a mixture of vegetative communities that include ponderosa pine, piñon pine, oak, juniper woodlands and grasslands.

Riparian corridors hold a variety of deciduous tree species, including cottonwoods, willows, ash, Arizona walnut, box-elder maple, and netleaf hackberry.

Wildlife: The Arizona Game & Fish Department, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy list certain threatened, endangered and sensitive species as present in the Prescott area: Peregrine Falcon, pronghorn, and Wood Duck. Large mammals in the Prescott area include mountain lion, elk, pronghorn, and mule deer. These require movement corridors and large, contiguous blocks of habitat that are rapidly being diminished by development. The Arizona Game & Fish Department has done generalized habitat and population mapping in the Prescott area for migration corridors and potentially significant habitat for pronghorns.

❖ Topography

Prescott is blessed with several lakes, streams, geological outcrops, rolling grasslands, grassy ridges and bluffs, all of which give the area a rugged, “real West” character.

3.3 Open Space Areas Important to Human Welfare

Permanent and ephemeral stream channels within Prescott’s watershed collect runoff and channel it to Granite Creek and ultimately to the Verde River. Major creek channels within and adjacent to Prescott include Granite, Aspen, Banning (Bannon), Butte, Manzanita, Miller, North Fork of Granite, Spence, and Willow Creeks. These areas are important to protect not only for their drainage functions, but also for wildlife habitat and aesthetic values. Creeks typically support larger trees with higher density and diversity of wildlife. Many of these valuable riparian ribbons are on private property that is subject to flooding.

Prescott has been susceptible to flooding from spring runoff as well as intense summer thunderstorms. Areas subject to flooding are indicated by floodplain designations on Flood Insurance Rate Maps adopted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In addition to the federally designated 100-year floodplains, other, more frequent flood occurrences (10-year, 25-year floods) are not usually mapped but can be significant.

An Open Space Plan can facilitate the preservation of lands not suitable for development because of their potential for flooding but that are nonetheless important drainage conveyances. Preservation thereby contributes to the health, safety and welfare of Prescott residents.

3.4 Areas of Prehistoric and Historic Cultural and Recreational Importance

Several of Prescott’s historic sites are related to their role as government centers (e.g., Sharlot Hall Museum Governor’s Mansion, Fort Whipple Veterans’ Hospital) and mining communities of the late 1800s. There are also numerous archaeological sites throughout the area, some of which could function as open space areas.

A number of potential open space areas may simultaneously have cultural, recreational, and wildlife habitat values. However, certain recreation developments, such as trails and parking lots, may negatively impact sensitive wildlife and use-sensitive habitats, such as wetlands and riparian areas. In open space preservation, care must be taken to assess accurately the purposes for, and eventual uses of, open space to assure that our plans do not create unintended impacts. The Open Space Plan may be one additional means of permanently preserving Prescott’s historic and cultural context while providing additional recreational opportunities.

3.5 Relative Importance of Open Space Parcels

Many of the open space parcels previously identified have more than one justification for preservation as open space. Section 3.2.2 lists open space characteristics that may be present on each parcel. The characteristics attributed to each parcel are not intended to be exclusive; other factors may be present, and some of the characteristics indicated may not be as significant as presumed here. Nevertheless, this comparison of characteristics provides a general guide to some of the values that may be present in the general vicinity of the identified areas. It also suggests those areas that have multiple open space characteristics (and therefore have a higher value than those with only one or two features). Note that this is a general consideration only. There may well be individual parcels that have only one characteristic but that have such a unique or critical nature that the property is far more important to preserve than another property with numerous open space values.

3.6 Existing Protection of Open Space

Some of the undeveloped land in and around Prescott may be considered “already protected” by existing legal constraints to development, hence not in need of further public action to preserve it. These constraints, however, offer varying degrees of protection. For example, City parks are permanently protected from commercial or residential development. Designated floodways are also well protected by federal and city regulations (any changes to the floodway would require a flood study approved by the City and FEMA), but flood fringe areas may be developed. Some federally owned lands are not permanently protected, as they may be developed for mining, logging, or road access or may be transferred to public or private parties in exchange for private land to be preserved elsewhere.

State Trust Lands

There are blocks of State Trust Land in the Prescott vicinity (e.g., Glassford Hill and Badger Mtn. , a.k.a. “P” Mtn.). Other State Trust Lands alternate in checkerboard fashion with private lands to the north of Prescott (e.g., in the Dells and Big Chino Basin). State Trust Lands were set aside by Congress to allow each state to auction these lands to benefit public schools, prisons, hospitals, etc. Consequently, they all could be sold and developed as subdivisions, shopping centers, or other commercial uses. Many of these parcels have been leased in the past for grazing, but most states are becoming more aggressive in encouraging development that will increase state revenues, especially in high-value land near growing municipalities. It must be assumed that State Trust Lands are always at risk of development.

Federal Lands

Most of the federal lands in the immediate Prescott vicinity are under the jurisdiction of the Prescott National Forest (PNF). Federal lands are generally protected against traditional development. However, they can be subject to less-intensive kinds of uses. For example, PNF lands are managed under “multiple-use” guidelines, meaning they may be used for recreation, mining, logging, wildlife management, and mineral extraction. Federal lands may also be traded to private parties or leased or sold to local governments for “Recreation and Public Purposes” (R&PP), which generally includes some form of construction of public facilities. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) owns a portion of Pioneer Park in Prescott, which it leases for joint management by the City of Prescott and Yavapai County.

Dedicated Open Space

This category includes land that is committed to open space through some form of binding legal constraint, such as a dedication made on a subdivision plat, a conservation easement, or purchase of development rights. An example of land preserved through a conservation easement is a parcel in the Granite Dells area purchased from the Payne Family Trust. Also, on Prescott’s west side, the City is reviewing two private development plats that will include significant areas of dedicated open space.

Regulatory Constraints

Occasionally, regulatory constraints, such as zoning, hillside ordinance, floodplain regulations, etc. will preclude or restrict development. Several important regulatory constraints are described below.

Floodways, floodplains

Areas subject to 100-year frequency floods are identified on Flood Insurance Rate Maps prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Based on these maps, the

City imposes development restrictions, and FEMA provides flood insurance. Floodways, the channels where floodwater is projected to move with higher velocity, are generally precluded from most types of development. However, land outside the *floodway*, but still within the 100-year *floodplain*, can be developed subject to specific engineering restrictions. Thus these restrictions only partially protect these areas, and the FEMA maps do not apply to many lesser washes or creeks.

Hillside Development Ordinance

The City has specific development restrictions for hillside areas intended to minimize damage to slopes and to regulate lot size relative to degree of slope (i.e., larger lots on steeper slopes). Prescott also has set development limitations on certain ridges, particularly limiting building height to no more than 26 feet above the ridgeline elevation. Some cities (e.g., Lafayette, California) have specifically identified “hills and ridges within the city that constitute significant natural topographical features and impart a sense of identity and image to the City” and do not allow housing within a certain distance of the ridgeline, with open space thus functioning for human recreation and wildlife corridors, as well as viewscape protection. The City should examine its development codes for hills and ridges to see if they could further enhance the identity or image of the City while preserving open space attributes through the tools identified elsewhere.

Other City Ordinances

Planned Area Developments (PADs) in Prescott are currently required to set aside 25 percent of the gross land area as open space. Since the PAD brings much greater flexibility to development and creates natural area amenities for the neighborhood, it can be an effective incentive for the creation of open space. Private open space can have restrictions on the amount of public use permitted. If officially designated as Natural Open Space, the area is under greater City control, which would prohibit some uses that might otherwise occur. The ordinance is intended to designate truly functional open space (rather than alleys and waste strips), but assuring this takes some oversight. Cluster development can also be effective in protecting open space; the City codes do promote clustering.

Wetlands

Wetlands had a high degree of protection through regulation in the Clean Water Act by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE). The regulations do allow limited development, but only with mitigation. With the US Supreme Court Rapanos Decision in 2006, wetlands, ephemeral and intermittent waterways such as those found in the Prescott area may no longer be covered under the jurisdiction of COE in coordination with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Wetlands are not typically mapped on a regional scale, though they are mapped and/or known in some detail in the Prescott area. Thus regulatory impact is only identifiable on a project-by-project basis. Since creeks and small streams are considered wetlands in the Prescott area, they and the areas adjacent to them should be considered for protection.

3.7 Summary: Degrees of Protection

The constraints described above are summarized below in three relative *categories of protection*. These categories are intended to reflect the *relative* degree of protection (or potential for development).

High – highly unlikely to be developed.

Dedicated open space

Major creeks

PNF Urban Interface Lands

FEMA Floodways

Medium – may be developed, but usually at high cost or at a relatively low level of development.

Federal lands (PNF)

Hillside slopes over 30%

Low – constraints to development are modest, and although restricted, some level of development is likely.

Skyline areas and hillside slopes of 10% to 30%

State Trust Lands

Wetlands, including floodplains

3.8 At Risk Areas

Only a few of the areas described in Section 3.1 fall under the High or Medium levels of protection, suggesting that those parcels (e.g., Glassford Hill) will require some form of public action to protect them in perpetuity. Many other land parcels in the greater Prescott area have multiple open space values (often the more *desirable* land) but do *not* have existing protection. The key at-risk lands include the privately held lands to the east and north of Watson Lake, private parcels within the lower Willow Creek drainage, and other parcels east of Willow Lake. Perhaps the most significant at-risk areas are those within the Granite Creek riparian corridor north of Watson Lake dam and south of Watson Woods Riparian Preserve to the Yavapai Tribal Reservation.

3.9 Identifying Specific Areas for Open Space Preservation

The foregoing analysis illustrates a *general* approach to identifying and evaluating open space parcels. It is not intended to identify or prioritize specific properties for acquisition. Now that a formal Open Space Program has been created and resources for preservation are available, it is necessary to institute a process to evaluate specific parcels of land. Decisions will depend on the properties that are available, their relative threat from development, and the tools that can be applied to protect them.

If the number of properties deemed important to preserve exceeds the preservation resources available from dedicated sales tax resources, then choices must be made. Choosing among sites is fundamentally a subjective process. However, decision-making is greatly aided by a systematic evaluation and ranking process that enforces a degree of consistency. There are two basic considerations for the preservation of any parcel, and both must be considered in any acquisition:

Its **physical characteristics** as defined in **Section 3.2.2**. They were ecological, hydrological (water), cultural and historical, physical (e.g., buffers), scale, recreational potential, aesthetics, natural environment, and topography.

“**Acquirability**” and urgency

Circumstances that affect a property's cost and relative ease of acquisition include the following:

Can the property be acquired relatively easily? Are the terms favorable? Is there a potential to leverage funds?

The ability to acquire a parcel without adversity, and with partners, will lower the net cost and enable limited resources to be spread further. The disposition and motivation of the landowner are important. Cases where the landowner is interested in conservation will generally result in a more affordable project.

Is there urgency?

Sometimes the threat of development or the loss of an opportunity makes one parcel more important at a given time than another.

Is the parcel part of the Open Space Plan?

A parcel that will fill in a key part of the plan may be more valuable in the long run than another parcel that cannot be connected to the system.

Is there community support for conserving the parcel as open space?

Parcels that have demonstrable community support for preservation as open space should be considered strongly, particularly where such support might lead to opportunities for public-private partnerships for conservation and management. Community partnerships are essential for obtaining many types of funding, particularly grants.

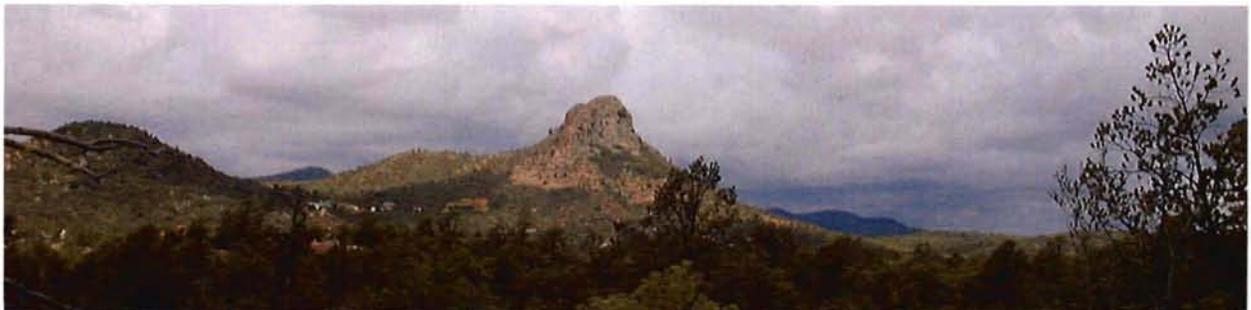
Are there other City programs or service areas or activities that may coincide with open space objectives?

Other activities of the City (e.g., land disposition or acquisition, road or utility installations) may bring certain open space issues or opportunities into discussion at opportune, but unexpected, times. The City should establish an internal mechanism to take advantage of such opportunities.

Does the parcel present any unusual maintenance or development costs?

Unusual costs may stem from the presence of environmental contaminants or from the need for drainage or other improvements. Parcels with such characteristics should be evaluated in light of the additional costs.

The foregoing criteria are intended to provide a general framework for evaluation and consistent discussion of the merits and potential of each parcel.



This section outlines the strategy and tools available to protect Prescott's open space.

4.1 Prescott's Open Space Strategy

A number of steps that must be taken to implement an Open Space Program for Prescott:

4.1.1 Build/test public awareness

Though the initial tax measure was popular, public meetings and opinion surveys indicate that there is only modest knowledge of the City's open space efforts and moderate support for the pace of acquisition through the Open Space Program. Recent landuse opportunities, such as the Nature Center, and lost or diminished opportunities, such as at the Dalke property, have raised awareness of open space issues. Open space is a community concern, and much more needs to be, and can be, done—not only to make the public aware of the implications of potential open space losses, but also to increase awareness of opportunities and tax advantages of donations of open space lands.

4.1.2 Seek a perpetual funding source

The most successful open space programs across the U.S. have a dedicated ongoing source of revenue, usually in some form of tax. Prescott does have an ongoing funding source for *acquisition* of open space in the form of a portion of sales tax revenues until 2015. This revenue should be used soon and wisely; however, provisions for future funding for both *acquisition* and *management* must be found.

4.1.3 Creatively utilize multiple resources to protect open space. Directly purchase open space only when necessary

Even with a perpetual funding source, the amount available will be small, relative to the need. Acquisition alone will not achieve the open space objectives defined above. Direct purchase of land should be a last resort, when all other options have been exhausted or when the degree of threat and the importance of the site dictate that form of action. This suggests the City must exercise a high degree of creativity and work with as many partners as possible to utilize all available resources.

It is important also that private property rights be respected in any open space program. The only appropriate preservation approaches are those that compensate landowners fairly. Preservation Tools (section 4.2) outlines ways that open space can be preserved. The non-purchase options will allow property to be preserved at little or no cost (or at least acquired at prices favorable to the taxpayers), while still compensating the landowners fairly. These options include voluntary donations, regulatory incentives (density bonuses), purchase of easements instead of fee title, and purchase structuring that is favorable to the tax and estate conditions of the sellers.

It must not be forgotten that sometimes direct purchase is indeed the most effective and justifiable approach, one that would require the fewest compromises and the greatest level of protection. Often overlaying a conservation easement on city-owned land could provide an additional level of protection.

When purchase is the only option, strategic purchases should be considered first and foremost. These are purchases that might, for example, preserve a key parcel (around which other strategies can be used to tie in adjacent parcels) or to provide matching funds for public or private grants. Several of the tools can be used in combination with others, increasing the benefit to both buyer and seller.

4.1.4 Consolidate open space responsibilities in one individual who can effectively coordinate the efforts of other departments, other agencies, and the public

From the outset, with or without a perpetual funding source, it will be advantageous to have a single point of contact and coordination to assure that there is minimal overlap and that opportunities don't "fall through the cracks" through miscommunication. This responsibility should be placed with an Open Space Manager. This is a proposed new position to address the current deficiency of day-to-day management and monitoring of the City's Open Space Preserves. Ideally, a staff person would be recruited that possesses formal education and experience in Natural Resources. This staff person would possess the skills to accomplish all required administrative and field work. Eventually, if the City embarks on an aggressive open space program, there will be numerous new responsibilities and needs to assure cost-effective management.

4.1.5 Work with landowners to find win/win solutions

Often, by engaging landowners early in the process and flexibly exploring a variety of options with them, new ways or new combinations of ways can be found to meet the objectives of the public and the landowner. In many cases, the options available and their implications are not known by landowners. For example, a below-market sale can generate tax credits that might be extremely valuable to a corporate seller. Estate considerations can be very significant to others. Even the designation (without purchase) of open space will increase the value of the remaining land in a subdivision.

4.1.6 Work with partners whenever possible to leverage other resources

Within the City, opportunities exist for interagency action (such as among Planning, Community Development, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works) to acquire a parcel or an easement jointly.

Many agencies and organizations in Prescott have interests that could be coordinated to achieve many open space objectives. These cooperative actions can range from intergovernmental agreements to working with land trusts and conservancies—to provide "bridge" financing and to help negotiate complex transactions. See Appendix 1 for a list of potential partners.

4.1.7 Prioritize protection efforts using the open space values, characteristics, and factors relating to acquisition

It will be important to focus on the most important opportunities and urgencies in any given budget year. The use of a standard set of criteria, as identified in this plan, will go far to reduce subjectivity, help the public understand the basis for decisions, and create continuity from year to year.

4.1.8 Make acquired open space permanent

Lands acquired for open space should be permanent, especially those procured with public funds. This might be accomplished by conservation easements held by a cooperating organization or by ordinances or recording of restrictive covenants and the establishment of specific policies and procedures regarding the change of use of open space. Such security will also assure landowners that a donation of land will be permanent.

4.2 Preservation Tools

Listed below are means that can be used to protect open space. Relatively few involve outright purchase of land. Some utilize incentives related to development regulations or tax law. Many of the tools can be used in combination.

4.2.1 Conservation easement

A conservation easement is a voluntary and permanent agreement to restrict development of one's land in order to preserve conservation values. The easement can be donated by the landowner (usually with a tax benefit for the value of development that is precluded) or purchased by a public or non-profit entity. The landowner retains ownership of the land and the uses that are not restricted in the easement. The purchaser/recipient is required to make periodic inspections to assure the conditions of the easement are being applied. Like all easements, a conservation easement applies to future owners of the land. It can be very flexible, limiting development as much as the landowner desires. Since the easement restricts future development, it reduces the value of the land and can therefore be an effective means of reducing estate taxes.

4.2.2 Cluster development

Instead of spreading development evenly across a parcel, cluster development results in smaller lots grouped on one portion of the site, leaving the rest of the land undeveloped. For example, on a ten-acre tract of land zoned for one unit per acre, rather than ten one-acre lots, cluster development might result in ten half-acre lots, leaving five acres of open space. Cluster development can be implemented through zoning requirements or incentives (more units if they are clustered). Usually site plan criteria are established so the open space protects the most valuable resources: agricultural land, wildlife habitat, visible hillsides, etc. The open space is usually protected by a permanent conservation easement granted to a public agency or land trust.

4.2.3 Deed restrictions/covenants

For landowners who prefer not to deal with government or non-profit entities but still wish to set aside land for open space, a deed restriction or covenant may be more acceptable. Since deed restrictions and covenants are enforced by the other parties to the agreement (adjacent landowners), not by the government, enforcement is not assured and as a last resort must be done through the court system, which makes it less likely. Also, the restrictions are not perpetual and do not provide tax benefits of charitable deductions, as do easements.

4.2.4 Reserved life estate

Allowing landowners to continue to use the property during their lifetimes and/or the lifetimes of immediate family members may remove a barrier to a sale or donation by making it possible to take advantage of the income while still enjoying the property.

4.2.5 Cash purchase

Cash purchase at fair market value is one of the most common transactions between landowners and a public entity. Cash purchases can be made in several ways:

- ❖ Annual budgeting – from the annual income of the entity
- ❖ Installment sales
- ❖ Bond issue – from bonds sold to raise a large amount of capital, repaid from annual income over multiple years.

The purchase of open space can include a variety of considerations to respond to the financial/tax circumstances of the seller.

Bargain sale

A bargain sale is a combination of sale and gift to a government or non-profit entity. It enables the seller to realize income and tax benefits from a charitable gift for the difference between the fair market value and the bargain sale price.

Charitable gift annuity

For property owners who have held land for a long time with a substantial appreciation in value, there may be significant tax advantages in donating the property to a public entity in exchange for an annuity payment for retirement program.

Installment purchase

An installment purchase is a purchase in multiple payments, usually over a number of years. This can benefit sellers by placing them in a lower tax bracket, and it usually benefits purchasers in allowing them to spread their acquisition over more properties. An interest rate is built into each payment. If the purchaser is a public entity, the interest may be exempt to the seller.

Rolling option

Another means to extend a purchase over a number of years is to purchase it through a series of options. An option is the right, but not an obligation, to purchase property at a specified price before a specified date. It may be used, for example, by a city that is prohibited from entering into contracts (such as an installment purchase) that would bind future city councils. A rolling option purchase is implemented when the property is divided into multiple options. The purchasing entity initially pays for all the options (usually for a token price) and then exercises one of the options each year, while renewing the options on the remaining parcels. Usually, the options specify that the parcels be purchased in sequence from least attractive (for open space purposes) to most attractive, so there is incentive for the purchasing entity to complete the entire purchase and not leave the landowner with an unusable parcel at the end.

Bridge financing/land trust

Sometimes a land trust, especially a larger one such as the Trust for Public Lands, will acquire land for a public entity and then resell it to the public entity at favorable terms. Often, the purchase price is set below market value, the difference being designated as a tax-exempt donation by the seller to the land trust and/or the public entity.

4.2.6 Donation or gift

Other than public-spirited citizens, landowners in special financial/tax circumstances may find charitable donation particularly advantageous for tax and estate planning purposes.

4.2.7 Land exchange

Public entities occasionally have properties that are of suitable size and location to make them attractive to be traded for private lands desired for open space. Land exchanges are generally done on the basis of appraised value rather than size. Land trades can be time-consuming and complex but can be beneficial to both the seller (no tax for an equal exchange) and the purchaser (no cash required).

4.2.8 Purchase of development rights (PDR)

PDR may be attractive to a landowner who desires to retain ownership and use of the land, but who does not wish to develop it. PDR is a means of compensating an owner for relinquishing the development potential of his/her land. The development potential (right) is purchased by a public entity and extinguished. The value of a development right is the difference between the value of land as farmland (or vacant land) and its value for development. For example, if a ten-acre tract of farmland (without development potential) would sell for \$30,000 and the same ten-acre tract of land with development potential could sell for \$100,000, the difference (\$70,000) would be the value of the development rights. Furthermore, if the zoning of the land (say one unit per five acres) allowed two units to be built, these two development rights would have a value of \$35,000 each. As a general rule, the value of development rights ranges from 30% to 80% of the fair market value of the land, usually in direct proportion to the closeness of roads, utilities and other services that allow development. When development rights are purchased, the land is usually restricted from future development through a deed restriction or conservation easement granted to a non-profit organization.

4.2.9 Transferable development rights (TDR)

TDRs are similar to PDRs in that the seller can be compensated for relinquishing development potential, but instead of being purchased and extinguished, the development rights may be purchased by private entities and transferred to other parcels of land. To be sure the TDRs are placed in acceptable locations, some communities formally designate "sending" and "receiving" sites for TDRs. The "sending" sites are areas desired to remain as open space; the "receiving" sites are areas that are suitable for higher development densities. Because of the difficulty in establishing appropriate values for the TDRs, and of matching buyers and sellers, the most successful programs have been the result of establishing a public "bank" to buy and sell TDRs. A TDR "bank" usually requires significant capital to initiate. To be able to sell and purchase development rights requires the creation of a formal system to record and track the transactions. Once implemented, a TDR program can be an effective means of preserving open space at little public cost, though it does require a well-managed effort to maintain the system.

4.2.10 Estate planning

The combination of state and federal inheritance taxes can create obligations of 55% or more of the value of the property. Often, inheritors are required to sell the inheritance to pay the taxes. A surprising number of landowners are not knowledgeable about inheritance taxes and are unprepared for the consequences to their estate. Land trusts and other public agencies seeking to preserve open space should actively encourage landowners to seek

proper assistance in estate planning. In this process, landowners will be more likely to become aware of the advantages and opportunities for charitable donations to reduce estate taxes.

4.2.11 Land preservation development

A recent innovation is a special not-for-profit organization that achieves open space preservation objectives through limited development. They typically acquire a property and do limited, carefully planned development to recover the costs of the land. This approach requires specialized expertise and initial funding. Although it does result in some development, it has been found to be effective in preserving key parcels in areas where other open space tools are not workable.

4.2.12 Intergovernmental agreements (IGAs)

IGAs are a form of cooperation between governments or agencies. Prescott and the BLM could enter into an Urban Interface Plan, a form of IGA, to protect the foothills abutting the city. Topics that could be addressed in IGAs include appropriate land uses on lands that have high value for open space, continuity of trails and coordination of trail heads, common open space objectives and priorities, reciprocal review of development proposals, annexation considerations, etc. The City and the County are currently initiating discussions on a land-use planning IGA.



SECTION 5

OPEN SPACE POLICIES

Public domain organizations, such as cities, have to develop and follow formal policies, often thought of as “decisions made in advance.” By addressing recurring issues, policies allow decisions to be made without debate or discussion whenever something comes up. They help remove bias and bring predictability to an organization’s operation.

To resolve any potential conflicts that might arise concerning open space resources and public use, the City will have to develop and follow formal policies regarding open space. The following are policy suggestions, which surely will be refined and amended as Prescott’s Open Space Program matures. These are not intended to be fixed and inflexible; rather, they will help decision-makers realize that a decision to depart from “policy” will only be made consciously and with good justification.

5.1 Purposes and Uses of Open Space

5.1.1 Open space is defined as land that is in a natural or primarily natural state, contains significant natural, visual, or cultural features that warrant protection, and shall be permanently protected.

5.1.2 Open space in Prescott is intended to promote or permit certain types of nature-based recreation, such as hiking, rock climbing, running, horseback riding and bicycling to the degree compatible with the protection of native vegetation, sustainable wildlife populations, and cultural resources. Recreational facilities in open space typically should be limited to trails and supporting picnic areas, interpretive facilities, restrooms, and parking lots.

5.1.3 Development-intensive uses, such as playground equipment, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, and swimming pools, are not appropriate on open space land. This is best left to the City of Prescott Park System. However, open space could be located adjacent to active recreation facilities to provide a physical buffer from other uses, such as residential or industrial development.

5.1.4 The City will not dispose of, or convert to another use, land acquired as open space. If it is necessary to acquire a total property when only a portion of the property is desired for open space purposes, and when this situation is identified prior to acquisition, the City may dispose of the undesired portion of the parcel. The City shall reimburse the open space fund by the higher of the sale price of the undesired portion or the original pro-rata cost of the undesired portion.

5.2. Acquisition and Protection of Open Space Land

5.2.1 Open Space Commission

- ❖ The Open Space Commission (OSC), proposed herein, will evaluate potential acquisitions conscientiously according to identified values, physical characteristics, acquirability, and urgency as outlined in this document (Section 3.9). OSC will then provide recommendations and supporting documentation to the City Council for possible action.

- ❖ The Prescott City Council will base its decisions on acquiring open space on OSC recommendations and supporting data and on the directions and policies of the Prescott General Plan. Acquisition procedures are subject to all applicable federal, state and local statutes, ordinances, and regulations.

5.2.2 Public Open Space

- ❖ The City will pursue strategies to preserve areas of outstanding scenic and/or natural beauty, including greenways along major creeks and a green belt around the City consisting of a network of public and private lands.
- ❖ Open space acquisition will include preservation of mineral and water rights associated with, or of benefit to, a parcel of land.
- ❖ The City will assess potential acquisitions for possible hazardous waste problems. Acquisition documents will delineate clean-up responsibilities.
- ❖ The City will work cooperatively with other public and non-profit groups and private property owners to help establish a green belt and trail system around the City consisting of a network of public and private lands.

5.2.3 Acquisition Strategies

- ❖ The City will utilize a variety of means to protect open space, including, but not limited to, fee-simple acquisition, donations, intergovernmental agreements, acquisition of whole or partial-fee interests (easements, development rights, etc.), and zoning and development guidelines. Fee-simple acquisition is often the best strategy; however, the fee simple approach to open space acquisition should only be used when no other approach that will meet open space objectives is possible.
- ❖ The City will work cooperatively with other public and non-profit groups and private property owners to preserve open space (see Appendix 1).
- ❖ The City of Prescott will outsource services of specialty consultants for areas in which there is no qualified City staff. The City should not be suggesting potential contractors when services require bidding.
- ❖ Establish the Open Space Manager position who will establish procedures for negotiating with property owners.

5.2.4 Private Open Space

- ❖ For land having open space values, the City will encourage the clustering of dwellings on a portion of development sites where the remainder of the site can be reserved for open space. Within Planned Area Developments (PADs), the City will work with the developer to maximize functional open space and enhance connectivity of open space with adjoining parcels.
- ❖ The City will encourage open space buffers around development areas to provide recreational opportunities and visual amenities and to protect ecological systems. Open spaces, greenways and green belts should be used as physical buffers and as ways to link activity centers, recreation areas, and other open spaces with neighborhoods and the community in general.
- ❖ Lands not suitable for development should be converted to open space or recreational use if acceptable to the City.

- ❖ The City will encourage private dedications of open space land or conservation easements in areas adjacent to public open space, City parks, National Forest, BLM lands, State Trust Land, or in other locations that support the open space objectives.

5.2.5 Funding

- ❖ The City will seek additional long-term dedicated funding sources for open space expenditures, including acquisition and operations. The voter-approved sales tax extension initiative in May, 2000, allows the 1% sales tax revenues to be used exclusively for either road improvements or open space acquisition. This sales tax extension is due to expire in 2015. Other needed open space expenditures may include activities to protect or restore natural resources and improvements, facilitate public access, install and maintain trail systems and other public facilities (restrooms, picnic areas), perform general land management, and protect users and property—none of which may be funded with the current sales tax revenue.

5.3. Developments and Improvements on open space Lands

5.3.1 Roads

- ❖ The City will discourage or deny any proposed new road construction on open space land and will limit motor vehicles to existing roads only for emergency, wildfire prevention, utility maintenance on specified easements, and appropriate administrative uses by the City or contracted agencies.
- ❖ The City may, in special circumstances, use open space lands for rights-of-way for roads, provided that at the time of acquisition, the deed for that open space parcel indicated that use as a condition. Water, sewer and other below-ground utilities may be installed on open space lands only if adequate financial guarantees are in place to assure that any disturbed areas will be restored or rehabilitated to a natural appearance and proper ecological functioning and will not disturb or destroy any archaeological or cultural resources.

5.3.2 Utilities

- ❖ Where non-City utilities exist within an open space preserve, access will be allowed only on specified easements. Utility companies will be required to minimize all impacts. Where limbing or tree removal occurs for power-line maintenance, all material cut shall be removed from the site. Where City utilities are being maintained, impacts to the riparian area must be minimized. Any open space site damaged by authorized uses shall be restored to its previous condition.
- ❖ All utility and public works projects, whether on open space lands or not, shall be designed and constructed consistent with the City's open space goals, objectives, and policies.
- ❖ The City will strive to maintain the integrity of water delivery and storage structures on its open space lands. The City should manage water responsibly for beneficial uses to ensure the protection of water rights.

5.3.3 Habitat

- ❖ The City will limit improvements on acquired open space land to actions required to manage/protect habitat for native plant or wildlife species, to maintain continuation of agriculture, or to provide nature-based recreation (including picnic areas, public restrooms, and small educational/cultural centers). However, if the acquired land had an

existing structure that would suit open space needs in the future, that structure may be kept on the open space.

- ❖ The City may modify landscape conditions caused by destructive natural phenomena to allow for habitat restoration, public safety, or the reconstruction of public facilities, such as trail or cultural resources. The City will use natural-appearing methods for all such modifications.

5.4. Management of Open Space Lands

5.4.1 Inventory

- ❖ The City should inventory in detail all acquired land (e.g., collect existing data, provide photographic record, and conduct specific studies as warranted to document unique conditions) and monitor the land at least annually. If boundaries are accurately marked according to legal descriptions, the City can initiate a variety of proactive management practices. These include avoiding encroachment by adjacent property owners and avoiding trespass issues onto adjacent private land. Permanent metal markers will mark the boundaries of open space every fifty to one hundred feet.
- ❖ Ideally, specific management plans shall include the following resource inventories: 1) Past research (e.g., Prescott College's Creeks Repository, which includes decades of resource inventories and various plans that address Prescott's greenways), 2) Climate, 3) Geology, 4) Soils, 5) Prehistoric and historic resources, 6) Hydrology (groundwater, water quality, wetlands, floodplains, water rights), 7) Wildlife (reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, insects), 8) Vegetation (native, exotic, noxious weeds, wildfire mitigation/fuels reduction), 9) Significant features, 10) Adjacent land uses, 11) Air quality, 12) Water quality, 13) Ownership, 14) Mapping – GIS, 15) Zoning, 16) Recreation (current and potential), 17) Existing or potential trail corridors (to further :the Mile-High Trail System and Bike/Ped System), 18) Visitor management (current and potential), 19)Threat assessment and responses, 20) Management: site stewardship (current and potential), City management (budget, staff, resources, materials budget), partnerships, 21) Volunteer opportunities, 22) Potential grant sources.

5.4.2 Management of Flora and Fauna

- ❖ The City will recognize the following objectives for open space lands:
 - Preserving viable populations of native plants, animals, birds, fish, and reptiles.
 - Controlling and managing native species using natural processes as much as possible and adhering to rules and regulations of federal and Arizona wildlife agencies.
 - Controlling and managing non-native species, where practicable, to enhance and restore native ecosystems. Mechanical and biological control are encouraged, and the use of chemical pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides will be resorted to only when staff has determined that other options are not feasible or acceptable.
- ❖ Where open space preserves have non-native vegetation species that are preventing native species from becoming reestablished, the City will evaluate and implement, if recommended, restoration or rehabilitation. In areas where densities of vegetation have allowed trees to become vulnerable to disease, the City may consider thinning projects to ensure survival of vegetation and access to trails.
- ❖ Arizona Game & Fish Department (AGFD) shall be the responsible management agency regarding all wildlife species within Prescott's open space preserves.

5.4.3 Historic and Prehistoric Preservation

- ❖ The City will seek to protect significant historic, archaeological, and ethnographic resources on open space lands. Potential resources will be evaluated according to Prescott's Historic Preservation Commission and State and National Register standards. Various laws afford protection of prehistoric and historic resources, such as buildings, ruins, human remains, and sacred and ceremonial objects. Every attempt must be made to preserve, inventory, and assess prehistoric and historic resources within all targeted open space areas, especially prior to increases in public access.
- ❖ Archaeological resources shall be left undisturbed (or improved or uncovered where possible) unless removal is justified for protection. Historic areas, structures, or landscapes will be preserved in their present condition if that condition allows satisfactory management and use within the financial constraints of the open space program. Cultural resources not identified as having local, state or national significance may be permitted to deteriorate naturally, unless their removal is necessary for public safety or to restore land to its natural condition.

5.4.4 Public Safety

- ❖ The City may modify landscape conditions caused by destructive natural phenomena for habitat restoration, public safety or the reconstruction of public facilities, such as trail or cultural resources. Natural-appearing methods should be utilized for all such modifications.
- ❖ The City may temporarily close to the public an open space property or water body if necessary to protect a natural resource or to make a property safe for public enjoyment.

All open space preserves must adhere to the current City Fire Department policy on wildfire and vegetation management. Any open space owned by the City or others, within the City, will have a vegetation management plan, and owners will modify the vegetation on each property to lessen the probability of fire leaving or entering. The zone distance criteria should be recommended for private properties. Vegetation modification zones should be installed around the perimeter of such public properties. Where a preserve abuts other open space, City actions will be consistent with wildfire and vegetation management of the jurisdiction responsible for the adjoining land.

5.4.5 In-holdings

- ❖ The City shall establish a land dedication education and incentive program for existing landowners whose properties lie within identified open space areas. These education efforts should be provided in partnership with organizations like the Central Arizona Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Open Space Alliance, Prescott Creeks Preservation Association, and the Highlands Center for Natural History.
- ❖ All state and federal agencies managing lands within the City's planning area should consult with the City regarding any plans for changing management objectives or ownership of public lands. The City will oppose any changes that are deemed to be inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Open Space Plan.

5.4.6 Leases

- ❖ The City may allow certain open space properties to be leased for continued agricultural uses, such as farming and grazing. Agricultural leases should afford limited public access for passive use when not precluded by safety conditions. Activities with high potential for point- or non-point-source water pollution will be avoided as much as possible.

- ❖ Grazing lessees may be permitted to continue necessary maintenance of stock tanks, fences, gates, windmills, etc. Communication site lessees may be permitted to continue necessary maintenance of communication sites. Motorized travel for all lessees shall occur on existing roads only.

5.4.7 Stewardship and Volunteer Programs

- ❖ The City will actively encourage volunteers as a resource to the open space staff and to the public. The open space program should be an organized effort to provide volunteer work that is meaningful, productive, and satisfying for the volunteers and the open space staff.
- ❖ While ultimate management of public land in these open space preserves will rest with the City of Prescott, many opportunities exist for area non-profit organizations or organized neighborhood groups to play a strong stewardship role. These stewardship responsibilities can be formal partnerships, similar to the 25-year agreement between the City of Prescott and Prescott Creeks for management of the Watson Woods Riparian Preserve. Formal agreements will specify specific roles and responsibilities of the City and the non-profit partner. Less formal partnerships can also exist, such as a neighborhood group adopting a section of a creek.
- ❖ Regardless of the formality, various groups and organizations can provide much-needed day-to-day stewardship of selected areas. This can include volunteer patrolling, constructing and maintaining trails, inventorying resources, restoring vegetation, providing educational opportunities, monitoring types and volume of visitation, and writing grant proposals. The City Open Space Manager will monitor all contracts and agreements.

5.4.8 Public Access

- ❖ Public access may not be denied in cases where public funding is being used for acquisition. Public access, however, has to be managed proactively to limit volume and types of public access. This may require guided tours, permit systems, and on-site presence of volunteer patrols or site stewards by the various organizations in the Prescott area. With a projected population of 205,000 persons in the Quad-City area by 2015, and as the Prescott National Forest becomes increasingly crowded, Prescott's open space preserves will likely see increased visitation, and they must be managed for the general public benefit. Trail systems can be designed to channel visitors away from sensitive flora, fauna, or prehistoric/historic sites, but will not prevent off-trail use entirely. Educational programs, such as "Tread Lightly!" and "Leave-No-Trace", may be used to help curb resource degradation. By law, every attempt shall be made to allow persons with disabilities the opportunity to experience the open space preserves. Topography is a limiting factor in many cases; however, some special accommodations can be made through Prescott Parks and Recreation's Special Needs Program.

5.5 Management Responsibilities

As the City Open Space Program grows, new responsibilities will arise for increasing public awareness and promoting education programs, working cooperatively with other organizations and agencies, negotiating further acquisitions, managing habitat and public uses, constructing and maintaining improvements, and assuring public safety. The management, staffing, volunteer coordination, and day-to-day oversight of City of Prescott Open Space Preserves should be a function of the Parks, Recreation, and Library Department. The Community Development Department will also provide expertise and assistance where needed.

A proposed distribution of those roles is outlined as follows:

5.5.1 Open Space Manager

- ❖ Coordinates the work of other City Staff members assigned to Open space
- ❖ Works with OSC to assure coordinated negotiations with property owners
- ❖ Prepares the annual budget for open space activities
- ❖ Keeps open space maps current and helps update the Open Space Plan as mandated
- ❖ Coordinates open space activities, land management, and acquisitions with other City departments
- ❖ Presents recommended actions to City Council
- ❖ Coordinates and oversees preservation and construction work on city-owned open space lands
- ❖ Provides day-to-day management (e.g., site visits) to City open space preserves.
- ❖ Provides coordination for all volunteers and stewards.

5.5.2 Parks, Recreation, and Library Department

- ❖ The Administrative Assistant position is responsible for the real estate-related tasks associated with open space acquisitions.

5.5.3 Open Space Commission (OSC)

- ❖ Makes recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council regarding open space purchases, physical improvements, plan review, and development policies. Commission chair should be present during presentations by the Planning Commission to City Council.
- ❖ Assists the Open Space Manager with preliminary property negotiations and provides resource information

5.5.4 Planning Commission

- ❖ Recommends and/or approves amendments to the open space portion of the Master Plan
- ❖ Recommends negotiations and purchases of open space by the City
- ❖ Recommends open space implementation plan, policies, and procedures
- ❖ Updates the open space Master Plan routinely in conjunction with Prescott General Plan reviews, at least every five years or as required by law.

5.5.5 City Council

- ❖ Approves amendments to the open space portion of the Prescott Master Plan
- ❖ Authorizes negotiations and purchases of open space by the City

5.6 Comparison of relative strengths

The day-to-day management and stewardship of Prescott's open space preserves can often be accomplished through cooperative management or stewardship agreements with non-profit organizations. An example of where this is already working is the 25-year agreement between

the City of Prescott and Prescott Creeks for the Watson Woods Riparian Preserve. Formal agreements such as this specify the roles and responsibilities of each party, require continual monitoring, and provide accountability. During one of the public workshops to obtain public input on open space, an exercise was performed to identify the strengths of the City and non-profit organizations for partnerships. The results of this exercise are captured in the following information:

5.6.1 Strengths of the City of Prescott

- ❖ Ability to promote the economic and tourism benefits of the preserves to the community
- ❖ Ability to identify and promote the increased property values near preserves
- ❖ Ability to provide City staff, resources, and expertise for management
- ❖ Ability to provide continuity in management over an extended period of time
- ❖ Ability to provide knowledge and electronic information on land uses
- ❖ Ability to provide opportunities for resource-based work for youth as reduced incentives for crime
- ❖ Ability to provide a positive image in conserving the City's natural characteristics
- ❖ Ability to provide buffer zones for noise abatement/pollution
- ❖ Ability to provide gateways and/or public access to new or existing public lands
- ❖ Ability to absorb the liability of public access
- ❖ Ability to provide police and fire protection
- ❖ With paid staff, ability to help avoid "burnout" of volunteers

5.6.2 Strengths of non-profit organization partners

- ❖ Ability to initiate voter referendums for complementary efforts
- ❖ Ability to accomplish tasks without government bureaucracy
- ❖ Ability to provide expertise (e.g., biological) that City government may not have
- ❖ Ability to maintain a consistent mission without outside pressure
- ❖ Ability to initiate public education and benefits of open space preserves
- ❖ Ability to have consultants donate their services as a tax-deductible contributions
- ❖ Ability to apply for grant funding and foundation monies not available to governmental entities (e.g., Army Corps of Engineers funding awarded to Prescott Creeks)

List of Federal, State, Municipal and Non-Profit Prescott Area Organizations

Arizona Game & Fish Department
American Trails
Arizona Native Plant Society – Prescott Chapter
Central Arizona Land Trust (CALT)
Citizen’s Water Advisory Group (CWAG)
Embry Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU)
Friends of “P” Mountain—Class of ’58
Friends of J.S. Acker
Green Map/Earth Day
Highlands Center for Natural History
Keep Prescott Beautiful
Open Space Alliance of Central Yavapai County (OSA)
Prescott Alternative Transportation (PAT)
Prescott Area Wildland-Urban Interface Commission
Prescott Audubon Society
Prescott College
Prescott Creeks Preservation Association (Prescott Creeks)
Prescott National Forest Friends
Prescott Open Spaces
Prescott Paddle America Club
Sharlot Hall Historical Society of Arizona
Sierra Club—Yavapai Group of the Grand Canyon Chapter
The Nature Conservancy
The Pulmonary Foundation
Town of Chino Valley
Town of Dewey-Humboldt
Town of Prescott Valley
Trust for Public Lands
U. S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S.F.S. – Prescott National Forest
Verde Watershed Association
Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona
Western Yavapai Conservation Education Center
Yavapai College
Yavapai County
Yavapai Heritage Foundation
Yavapai Trails Association (YTA)
Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe

Executive Summary

OPEN SPACE IS A VITAL PART of the small-town character and unique natural environment of Prescott. It has long been recognized as a key issue for maintaining a high quality of life for those living in or visiting our community. The Prescott Open Space Master Plan was prepared by the City of Prescott Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC). This plan is a product of intensive volunteer effort by OSAAC committee members over the course of a year. It was partially based on the City of Durango's Open Space Master Plan, as Durango has many similarities to Prescott with respect to natural amenities and open space needs.

The citizens of Prescott passed an initiative in 2000 to fund open space purchases with a portion of sales tax monies. Public forums in 2002 helped clarify priorities and suggest potential open space sites. Mayor Rowle Simmons assembled the Advisory Committee in 2003 to advise the City Council on strategies for open space acquisition and stewardship. With the 2007 adoption of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (PRMP), OSAAC offered this plan as an expansion of the open space portions of the PRMP into a more detailed and prescriptive document.

The committee has identified key issues, most related to rapid population growth, expanding development, loss of potential open space resources, and insufficient regional planning. Preservation of open space has become a top priority of the citizens and City Council, and this plan is the guide to that end.

This Open Space Master Plan describes a number of potential and existing open space properties and defines the values and criteria under which acquisition decisions should be based. It further suggests potential partnerships and strategies by which open space might be secured. It provides a detailed action plan and open space policies. This plan recognizes that the ongoing acquisition program must be complemented by clear management responsibilities, which it defines.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Adopt the Open Space Master Plan as an element of the Prescott General Plan.

Recommendation 2

Replace the current Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) with a permanent City Council-appointed Open Space Commission (OSC). This commission serves at the Council's request. A commission must always be in place and given authority to function effectively according to its designated responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

Establish an Open Space Foundation, in conjunction with or as a work group of the Open Space Commission, to pursue immediately the creation of a permanent funding source for all open space acquisitions and management operations.

- Recommendation 4** Create a position on the City of Prescott Development Review Committee for one member of OSC. This will help insure that this committee will consider open space in all development reviews. As part of future annexations and planned developments, require the dedication of effective open space areas that have high value to the open space system. Develop specific criteria for evaluating areas as additions to the City's open space system, including City-owned lands that have natural values as open space. Pursue the protection of those lands and their public uses subject to specific conditions and criteria.
- Recommendation 5** Coordinate regional open space planning with all affected federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations, as well as with the Quad-City governments.
- Recommendation 6** Review and revise City ordinances to increase incentives for open space preservation. These ordinance guidelines will be directed toward conserving open space and/or minimizing project impacts to open space values on hillsides, watersheds, and wildlife.
- Recommendation 7** Report at least annually to City Council and the public on open space losses, gains, concerns, and opportunities.
- Recommendation 8** Update and maintain the Open Space and Trails map system as a planning tool and public information resource.
- Recommendation 9** Develop programs to increase public awareness of the tax and estate planning benefits of donations of land and conservation easements. Enlist aid of Arizona and national non-profit land trusts in the effort.
- Recommendation 10** Conduct an analysis of requirements and costs vs. benefits of setting up Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transferable Development Credits (TDC) systems to preserve open space.
- Recommendation 11** Review and update the Open Space Master Plan within five years of its adoption.
- Recommendation 12** Establish, when funding is available, a position for a full-time Open Space Manager to be responsible for continued development of the Open Space Program and management of open space properties as acquired. Assign or otherwise provide management staff for this program.

Council Packet Info

To: Mayor & Council

From: Bruce McKeeman, Co-chair, Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee

Date: 12 June 2009

RE: Presentation of Open Space Master Plan at 16 June 2009 Council Meeting

Mayor and Council:

I am pleased to present the Open Space Master Plan developed by the Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee. Not only was this plan developed using regional and national models, it was also developed at virtually no direct cost to the City of Prescott. The plan covers extensive background justification for the value and benefit of open space to the City of Prescott and provides background for potential and preserved open space areas.

Attached below is a list of open space program successes, as well as the executive summary and recommendations from the plan.

2008 Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee completes Open Space Master Plan

City purchases 80 acre James parcel in Granite Dells area

City purchases 36 acre Granite Gardens (Hazelwood parcel) in Granite Dells

City purchases 6 acre HB Won parcel in Granite Dells area

City purchases 6 acre Green parcel in Granite Dells area

2007 City prepares and re-opens Community Nature Center to school groups and general public

City purchases 8 acre Hisokota parcel in Granite Dells

City purchases 4 acre Open Space at rodeo grounds

2006 City accepts five-acre open space donation along Granite Creek upstream of Yavapai-Prescott Indian Reservation

City purchases 18-acre Community Nature Center from Prescott Unified School District

City annexes Boyle/DeBusk Open Space Preserve into City, and rezones to Natural Open Space designation

2005 City purchases 28 acres in Granite Dells along Granite Creek

City accepts donation of open space on hill behind Village at the Boulders

Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee develops a new open space policy that revises many recommendations from the 1999 Prescott Open Space Plan

2004 City accepts donation along Miller Creek (linear open space) to benefit the Prescott Greenways Project

City purchases 34 acres along eastern shoreline of Watson Lake

City completes land exchange along Miller Creek (linear open space) to benefit the Prescott Greenways Project

2003 City accepts open space donations that include the following:

- 9.7 acres near Mountain Club now known as Boyle/DeBusk Open Space Preserve in partnership with Central Arizona Land Trust who holds the conservation easement
- 7 acres along White Spar/SR89 and Granite Creek now known as White Spar Creekside Preserve

Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee is formed

2002 City begins discussions of long-term planning for open space purchases

2001 City purchases the 32-acre hill east of Thumb Butte (formally known as Prescott Buttes)

City purchases 25-acre parcel in Granite Dells north of Watson Lake

2000 Prescott voters approve 1% sales tax extension for street improvements, and add open space acquisitions

2000 Prescott and Prescott Valley complete Coordination Plan for proposed Glassford Hill Preserve (State Trust Land)

1999 City develops and adopts the 1999 Prescott Open Space Plan

1998 Willow and Watson Lakes and associated land base purchase

City creates Trails and Open Space Coordinator position

City purchases lots on face of Thumb Butte through partnership with Central Arizona Land Trust



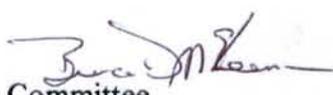
OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

824 E. Gurley St.
Prescott AZ 86301
928-777-1122

MEMORANDUM

May 28, 2009

TO: George Wiant, Chairman, Planning and Zoning Commission

FROM: Bruce McKeeman, Co-Chair, Open Space Advisory Acquisition Committee 

RE: **Update on the City of Prescott Open Space Master Plan**

Approximately a year ago our committee presented the City of Prescott Open Space Master Plan to the Planning and Zoning Commission and received approval from the Commission with some recommended changes. I am enclosing 7 copies of our updated Master Plan for the Commissioners. Subsequent to our presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission, the following revisions have been included in the plan:

RECOMMENDATION

Establish an Open Space Funding Task Force, in conjunction with or as a subcommittee of the Open Space Advisory Committee, to pursue immediately the creation of a permanent funding source for all open space acquisitions and maintenance operations.

UPDATE

Establish an Open Space Funding Task Force, in conjunction with or as a work group of the Open Space Commission, to pursue immediately the creation of a permanent funding source for all open space acquisitions and management operations.

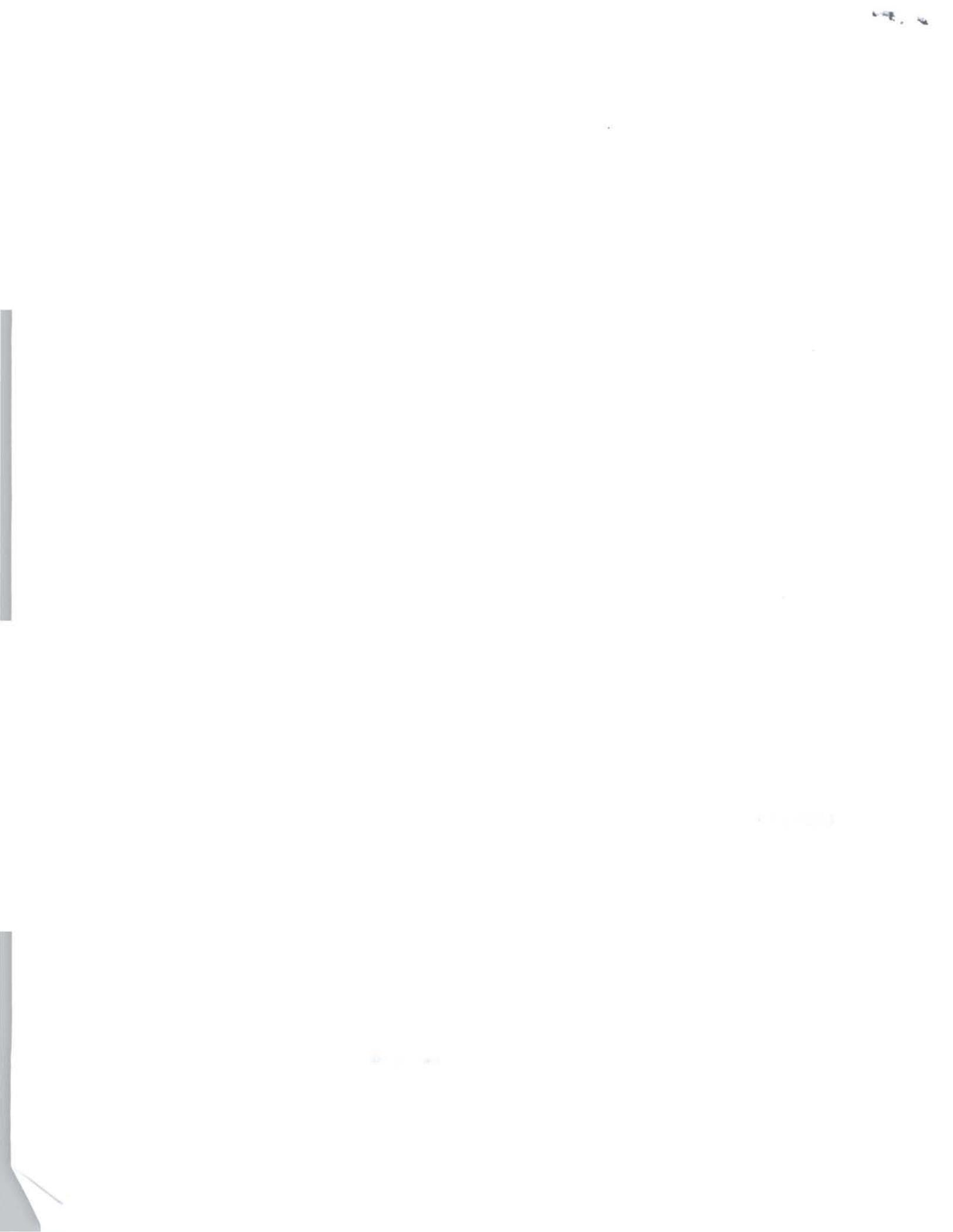
RECOMMENDATION

The Commission had concerns about the Granite Dells area not being specifically highlighted enough in the Master Plan.

GRANITE DELLS DESCRIPTION UPDATE

Granite Dells: Its Streams and Lakes

The Granite Dells area, in addition to its spectacular geologic formations, encompasses two major drainages, Granite Creek and Willow Creek. Much of the open space within these valuable stream courses is important wildlife habitat but has great potential for low impact public recreation. Much of the area is in private ownership. The City seeks to acquire certain parcels within these riparian corridors to protect the physical integrity of sites within lower Willow Creek and Granite Creek from development and ultimately to create a contiguous "greenway" system of natural areas for public use. The City of Prescott already owns Watson Woods Riparian Preserve along Granite Creek upstream from Watson Lake. Subsequent to the purchase of



both Willow and Watson Lakes, the City purchased an additional 25-acre parcel (Ericksson) in 2001 for \$325,000. In 2005, the City purchased in fee simple 28.26 acres of private property (Payne parcel) for \$187,500, and a conservation easement (now held by the Central Arizona Land Trust) was placed on the parcel. Prescott is currently attempting to secure additional properties that will protect the riparian resources of lower Willow and Granite Creeks upstream from their confluence.

Watson and Willow Lakes currently provide the most important economic and recreational resources in this area, and the greenways will significantly enhance recreational possibilities in this highly scenic Granite Dells area. Public uses at the lakes already include boating, fishing, birding, natural history education, hiking, picnicking, and camping. The lakes host thousands of migratory waterfowl, as well as eagles, shorebirds, and nesting colonies of herons and cormorants. The creeks below them have exceptional habitat for Wood Ducks, raptors (e.g., Zone-tailed Hawk, Common Black-Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Great Horned Owl), numerous mammals, and many songbirds, and the Granite Dells formations offer sensational rock-climbing and scenery.

Granite Dells: Wildlife Corridors and Geology

From the start of the prioritization process, State Trust Lands consisting of rough, wild granitic formations of Granite Dells were recognized as potentially vital wildlife corridors between Watson Woods and Glassford Hill. Small streams, some with permanent pools hosting aquatic vegetation, create oases for wildlife within this labyrinth of spectacular geologic features. Deer, mountain lions, peccary, and other native wildlife are rarely disturbed by humans in this rugged landscape. If the corridor can be preserved, they may be able to persist as viable populations. Land adjoining State-owned property is proposed for development and also remains vulnerable. However, the open space significance of this area may eventually create an opportunity to achieve important conservation goals that will complement protection efforts in other Granite Dells areas.

Subsequent to our presentation to the Planning and Zoning Commission, we have made presentations to the City Council, Parks and Recreation Board, and the Open Space Alliance. Our Committee anticipates a final workshop presentation to City Council for adoption of the Master Plan. If you have any questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact me at (928) 771-0784. Thank you for your input on the Master Plan.

cc: Tom Menser, Vice Chair, Planning and Zoning Commission
Commissioners Dick Rosa, Joseph Gardner, Len Scamardo, and Seymour Petrovsky.



COUNCIL AGENDA MEMO – June 16 & 23, 2009

III-A

DEPARTMENT: Parks, Recreation & Library

AGENDA ITEM: Approval of Open Space Master Plan

Approved By:

Date:

Department Head: Debbie Horton

06/10/2009

Finance Director: Mark Woodfill

City Manager: Steve Norwood



06/10/09

BACKGROUND:

The Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) presented a summary of the proposed Open Space Master Plan to Council on October 14, 2008. Since that time, the Master Plan has been recommended for approval by the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Parks & Recreation Board. OSAAC now requests Council approval of the proposed Master Plan. The plan recognizes that the acquisition program must be complemented by clear management responsibilities, which it defines. Recommendations include:

1. Adopt the Open Space Master Plan as an element of the Prescott General Plan.
2. Replace the current Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee (OSAAC) with a permanent City Council-appointed Open Space Commission (OSC). This commission serves at the Council's request. A commission must always be in place and given authority to function effectively according to its designated responsibilities.
3. Establish an Open Space Funding Task Force, in conjunction with or as a work group of the Open Space Commission, to pursue immediately the creation of a permanent funding source for all open space acquisitions and management operations.
4. Create a position on the City of Prescott Development Review Committee for one member of OSC. This will help insure that this committee will consider open space in all development reviews. As part of future annexations and planned developments, require the dedication of effective open space areas that have high value to the open space system. Develop specific criteria for evaluating areas as additions to the City's open space system, including City-owned lands that have natural values as open space. Pursue the protection of those lands and their public uses subject to specific conditions and criteria.
5. Continue to participate with federal and state agencies in planning the management of public lands within their respective jurisdictions within or near Prescott. Seek to develop a Regional Urban Interface Plan with all affected agencies, as well as with Quad-City governments.

AGENDA ITEM: Approval of Open Space Master Plan

6. Review and revise City ordinances to increase incentives for open space preservation. These ordinance guidelines will be directed toward conserving open space and/or minimizing project impacts to open space values on hillsides, watersheds, and wildlife.
7. Report at least annually to City Council and the public on open space losses, gains, concerns, and opportunities.
8. Update and maintain the Open Space and Trails map system as a planning tool and public information resource.
9. Develop programs to increase public awareness of the tax and estate planning benefits of donations of land and conservation easements. Enlist aid of Arizona and national non-profit land trusts in the effort.
10. Conduct an analysis of requirements and costs vs. benefits of setting up Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) and Transferable Development Credits (TDC) systems to preserve open space. Implement if feasible.
11. Review and update the Open Space Master Plan within five years of its adoption.
12. Hire a full-time Open Space Manager to be responsible for continued development of the Open Space Program and management of open space properties as acquired. Assign or other wise provide management staff for this program.

The Master Plan was developed using regional and national models of successful open space preservation and management. This plan is a product of intensive volunteer effort by OSAAC committee members over the course of a year. The Parks, Recreation & Library Department is appreciative of the many hours volunteers have contributed to the success of our efforts towards being responsible stewards of the environment.

Recommended Action: Recommended Action: **MOVE** to approve the Open Space Master Plan.