

# CASA GRANDE MOUNTAIN PARK TRAIL SYSTEM MASTER PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

The Casa Grande Mountain Park Trails Master Plan represents the collaborative effort of local residents, public and private landowners, City officials and staff to create a shared-use trail system for Casa Grande Mountain Park. When fully implemented this trail system will provide a dynamic range of recreational experiences for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians.

The proposed trail system is organized into blue, brown, green, purple, and red loops with eight connector trails totaling 22 miles. Four trailheads are proposed for the north, east, south, and west ends of the park. The City is also pursuing the acquisition of 80 additional acres from the Bureau of Land Management.

## PURPOSE of the PLAN

This master plan was prepared to define a vision for Casa Grande Mountain Park Trail System and to identify goals, objectives and an implementation schedule to make that vision a reality. Guiding principles in the development of this plan were:

- Identify a shared-use (hiking, mountain biking and equestrian) trail system that connects with the City's pathway system, regional trails where feasible, and trails from adjoining developments.
- Secure public access on the north, east, south, and west sides of the park, and define trailhead requirements.
- Increase communication and understanding among the Park's adjacent landowners about mutual interests for recreation and conservation activities.
- Leverage funding.
- Secure adjacent properties managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

## VISION

Arriving to Casa Grande Mountain Park's Trail System from downtown Casa Grande or neighboring developments is easily accomplished by motorized or non-motorized means. Hiking, riding your horse, or pedaling a mountain bike to the mountain park are all possible from city and regional trails. Trailheads located at each compass point of the park provide parking for vehicles and give easy access to the shared-use trail system. Water conserving restrooms are available at the western trailhead located on the military preserve. The western and southern trailheads are the largest and provide trailer parking to accommodate oversized vehicles and trailers. All trailheads include a kiosk showing the entire trail system and provide safety information to warn users about the potential

## **VISION** continued.

danger of recreating in the desert. Other amenities include trash containers, shade structures, benches, and signs. Trails leading from the trailheads provide users with a variety of choices including long or short looped trails, easy to challenging experiences, short and long range views, and views of the city and of the desert. Most trails are approximately two feet wide, are natural surfaced, and designed to follow the contours of the land. They generally do not exceed a grade of 7%. Short looped trails located from each trailhead meet accessibility guidelines. Trails at decision points are well marked to direct trail users to their desired destination. Interpretive signs are liberally placed to identify plants, explain major habitat types, and show illustrations of common wildlife. Other interpretive signs provide hiking and riding information to enhance user experience. The surrounding desert is free of litter, roads, and disturbed areas.

## **GOALS and OBJECTIVES**

### **Goal One: Create a shared use trail system.**

#### Objectives:

- 1.01 All trails will accommodate hiking, mountain biking, and horse riding.
- 1.02 Trails will be interconnected to provide a wide range of loop options. Some exceptions may be warranted for short distances to lead trail users to a prominent feature or vista.
- 1.03 Trail grades should be sustainable and in general will not exceed 7%.
- 1.04 The trail system should provide a range of experiences such as relatively easy to technically challenging trails.
- 1.05 Trails will be kept cleared of obstructions and litter; the tread surface will be free of abnormalities, and water control devices or runoff techniques will be maintained to minimize erosion and puddling.

### **Goal Two: Locate trailheads on the north, east, south, and west side of the mountain park.**

#### Objectives:

- 2.01 The west trailhead will be coordinated with the Arizona National Guard and will have the most public facilities of the four proposed trailheads (restrooms, water, trailer parking, etc.). The number of parking spaces will be dependent on the needs of the Guard and the City.
- 2.02 The location for the north trailhead needs to be identified and land acquired. The City's property in this area will not accommodate a trailhead to provide public access to the mountain park. Parking for five to ten cars should be provided.
- 2.03 The east trailhead is ready for development and parking for five to ten cars should be provided.
- 2.04 The south trailhead is to be located on Bureau of Land Management property. The 80 acre site will be acquired by the City through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act. Parking will accommodate 10 to 15 oversized vehicles or trailers.
- 2.05 Facilities such as parking lots, toilets, water fixtures, etc., where these amenities exist, will be in working order and in a condition to suitable to supplying the services intended.

## **POLICIES**

1. Activities are limited to day use (sunrise to sundown).
2. Motorized recreation is prohibited.

## **PLANNING PROCESS**

This Plan was collaboratively produced by the City of Casa Grande, a Trail-Users Advisory Group, consultations with adjacent landowners, and the National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

The planning process included three public workshops, a presentation to the City Council, and numerous meetings.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Casa Grande Mountain Park**

- Acreage

- Elevation

The highpoint of the Casa Grande mountain range is 2350 feet. The majority of the park lands are rocky, steep, and rugged. A wash runs north and south through two prominent ridges.

- Vegetation

The mountain park resides in the Sonoran desertscrub region and includes many plants associated with that life zone. A sample list includes: saguaro, foothill palo verde tree, ironwood tree, barrel cactus, prickly pear, chainfruit cholla, creosote bush, brittlebush, fairy duster, triangle bursage, penstemmon, Mexican gold poppy, lupine, etc.

- Wildlife

Despite there being no perennial water source the park is home to a wide variety of wildlife including Red-tailed Hawk and Cooper's Hawk, Mourning Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Cactus Wren, coyote, gray fox, bobcat, javelina, Desert cottontail, Black-tailed jackrabbit, desert kangaroo rat, etc.

- Archeology

A cultural resources survey was completed for an 80 acre Bureau of Land Management parcel. The report was completed by Desert Archaeology, Inc. under contract with the City of Casa Grande. No other cultural resource survey work is done for the mountain park.

- Existing Road and Trails

Multiple roads and "wildcat" trails exist through out the park. It is recommended that all roads be removed and the landscape rehabilitated. Unauthorized trails should also be removed or added to the trail system plan through a public process.

1. Arrange to meet with a BLM realty specialist.
2. Submit application form 2740-1 to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix Field Office, 21605 North 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85207, telephone (623) 580-5500,
3. The application should be made for lease and purchase. Purchase will be considered only after substantial development, as described in the plan of development.
4. Submit a plan of development, site plan and management plan to include information on the lands, planned expenditures, maps, development time frames, maintenance and administration.
5. The filing fees are \$100 per application
6. The minimum processing time is six months.

## **TRAIL SYSTEM**

### **A. Shared-Use**

The mountain park trail system will accommodate hiking, horse back riding, and mountain biking. Most trails will be natural surface and interconnected. Exceptions could include paved trails to increase accessibility and trails leading to a specific destination such as a vista or natural feature. Trails will be designed and constructed to reasonably accommodate all levels of mobility. Trails will follow the contours of the land, so that the vertical slope is less than 7%. Looped trails will vary in distance, degree of difficulty, and will be located to take advantage of views and points of interest. If possible, a small loop trail from each trailhead will be constructed to accommodate users of all abilities.

### **B. Naming Trails**

Trails will be named after natural or cultural features or resources as approved by the community services director.

### **C. Trailheads**

Four trailheads are planned for the mountain park trail system. A trailhead will be located on the north, east, south, and west side of the park. All trailheads will include information boards, trash containers, and if feasible will be linked to the City's pathway system and regional trails. All trailheads with the possible exception of the west trailhead will be unpaved.

North Trailhead: A north trailhead will require land acquisition and an easement(s) for access. Only 5 to 10 car parking will be provided.

East Trailhead: The east trailhead will only accommodate 5 to 10 car parking spaces.

#### E. Brochures

Brochures to promote the mountain park and disseminate important information to potential park users can be produced and distributed through out the City. A general information brochure would include a map of the trail system and how to get there by vehicle or non-motorized means. The park's rules and regulations, recommendations about sun protection and hydration, and what to do in the event of an emergency could be highlighted. In addition, a brief description of common plants and wildlife found in the mountain park along with photographs will help enrich visitor experience.

Other brochures could be developed around some of the interpretive themes discussed earlier to augment interpretive signing or provided additional information not possible in a wayside exhibit.

#### G. Design Guidelines

The Casa Grande Mountain Park is a beautiful setting typified by rugged rocky peaks and ridges. Saguaro cactus is strewn through out the park and is Arizona's signature plant. Surface water is non-existent except during occasional summer thunderstorms or winter rains. Ironwood and Palo Verde are the two notable trees and Cholla and Prickly Pear cactus is abundant. Brittle bush and Triangle Bur Sage blanket the desert floor among the rocks and boulders. Design guidelines should be respectful and complimentary to the Sonoran Desert environment. Materials will need to be durable to with stand the desert heat and cold, and vandals. Steel, stone, concrete, and other similar materials should be utilized over wood and synthetic materials or similar products.

#### H. Trails:

It is recommended that all trail design follow the guidelines described in two recent publications: "Trail Solutions – IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack" and "Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds" unless otherwise specified in this document.

Front Country Trails: are loop trails within close proximity of the four proposed trailheads. Trails in this zone may be up to 5 feet wide, natural surface, and to the extent possible will not exceed a 5% longitudinal slope and a 2% cross slope. If desired some trails within the front country trail zone may be paved or hardened. Ideally the hardened surface trails will match the color of natural surface trails.

Back Country Trails: are trails outside of the front country trail zone. Back country trails will be 2 to 3 feet in width, natural surface, and to the extent possible will not exceed a 7% longitudinal slope and a 2% cross slope. Short distances exceeding 7% longitudinal slope may be required at wash crossings and other similar situations.

#### I. Site Furnishings

Trailheads: Site furnishings may consist of kiosks, trash receptacles, benches, picnic tables, shade structures, drinking fountains, and hitching posts or rail. These items can be custom designed or purchased from a catalogue. Materials should be durable, withstand extreme temperatures (especially heat), be easily maintained, vandal resistant, and composed of finishes and colors that blend with the desert environment.

J. Operations and Maintenance

- **Illegal Dumping**  
Perimeter fencing and gates at access points will be installed to discourage illegal dumping. Increased presence of law enforcement and park users will also help reduce the anonymity of dumping illegally. Dumped items should be removed immediately when reported to or observed by park officials.
- **Landscape Rehabilitation**  
Undesignated paths, disturbed areas, and roads not planned for inclusion into the trail and access system will be obliterated and “naturalized” by scarifying the tread, planting native vegetation and/or scattering native debris as directed by the parks and recreation facilities manager.

**TRAIL SYSTEM PLANNING, DESIGN, and CONSTRUCTION PRIORITIES**

Year	Planning	Design	Construction	Comments	Estimated Costs
2008	Nominate Trail System to the Arizona State Trails System (see <a href="http://www.pr.state.az.us">www.pr.state.az.us</a> Applications are due July 1)  <b>East Trailhead</b>  001- Prepare a Sign, Wayside, and Site Furnishings Trail System Plan  Brown Loop (3.8 miles) Brown Connector (.8 miles)	<b>East Trailhead</b>    Brown Loop (3.8 miles) Brown Connector (.8 miles)			001- \$15k
2009	001- Prepare a Sign, Wayside and Site Furnishings Trail System Plan  002- Prepare a Landscape Restoration Plan	001- Sign, Wayside and Site Furnishings.	<b>East Trailhead</b>  001- Partial Implementation of Sign, Wayside and Site Furnishings Trail System Plan   Brown Loop (3.8		\$10k to \$50k  001- \$10k  002- \$15k  \$38k

- Bureau of Land Management  
Contact a local Bureau of Land Management field office for specific information about their Challenge Cost Share Grant Program
- d. State Funding Sources (See trails funding matrix)
  - Arizona Game & Fish
  - **Arizona State Parks**
  - Arizona Office of Tourism
- e. Regional Funding Sources (See trails funding matrix – SAFETEA-LU)
  - Central Arizona Association of Governments
- f. Local Business Sponsorship  
Businesses benefitting from outdoor recreation are good targets for requesting funds, in-kind services, or materials for trail projects. Some companies may be interested in opportunities for their employees to participate in trail building or other projects related to the trail system. Sponsoring events is also another popular way for businesses to support the trail system and receive recognition for their involvement. Sponsorship when possible should be mutually beneficial so be sure to emphasize how the business will benefit from their support and how their help will make a difference to the community.
- g. Foundations  
The website below is a good place to research what foundations may be out there that support trail related projects. Your best bet is foundations located in Arizona but national foundations can be a potential source for funding too.
  - [www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org/resource/search](http://www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org/resource/search)
- h. Donation Programs  
Donation programs can be simple or sophisticated depending on time, energy, and creativity. This is a good way to involve individuals, families, and other organizations. Donation programs can be especially successful when they recognize the donor in some permanent way. For example, benches located throughout the trail system could have a donor's name appropriately displayed on the bench or some other type of site furnishings including signs.

## **RELATION to OTHER PLANS and DEVELOPMENTS**

### Multi-Use Path Plan

The Multi-Use Path Plan identifies bike lanes along major streets in Casa Grande and a non-paved route that circles the City using canal and utility corridors. The most logical connections between the City's multi-use paths and the mountain park trail system are connections at the proposed north and west trailheads.

### Community Services Department Master Plan

The Parks and Recreation Plan proposes expanded recreation facilities and programs including non-motorized trails.

### County Trails and Open Space Plan

The County Trails and Open Space Plan identifies major trail corridors and existing or proposed trails identified from various local planning documents. The nearest major trail corridor to the mountain park trail system is the Anza National Historic Trail.

### Regional Trails Master Plan

A Regional Trails Master Plan was approved in May 2008 by the City of Casa Grande in conjunction with Don McGann & Associates, Inc. The intent of the plan is to identify a regional trail system. The plan recommends that regional trails connect to the mountain park trail system. Logical connections would be at the four proposed trailheads.

### Casa Grande Mountain Ranch Property

The Casa Grande Mountain Ranch property is located on the eastside of the mountain park. Development plans for the property are in their early stages. The City will coordinate with representatives of this development as plans move forward.

### Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management manages 80 acres on the south end of the mountain park. A trailhead and trails are proposed for development on the 80 acre site. The City will work to acquire the property through the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

### Shooting Range

The City operates and manages a shooting range on the west side of the mountain park. This facility was recently upgraded to improve safety and is used by various law enforcement agencies as well as private citizens. All trails will be located outside the safety zone for the range and trail users will be alerted about the proximity of the rifle range to the trail system.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Casa Grande Mountain Park Trail System promises to be a spectacular local and regional attraction for trail enthusiasts, wildlife watchers, and those looking for a natural respite from the City's growing urban environment.

Implementation of the trail system will occur incrementally over five to ten years and can be adjusted as time and resources dictate. Accurate cost estimates for trail systems are not easily made so adjustments can be done as development occurs and actual costs are incurred. The estimates provided have attempted to strike a middle ground and do not include land acquisition costs.

Connecting the mountain park trail system to city and regional trails should be a priority. It may be possible to fund these linkages through SAFETEA-LU funding (See trail funding matrix), which emphasizes transportation networks and not recreation.

Enjoy the trails!