

MINUTES

OPEN SPACE COMMISSION
MONDAY
APRIL 28, 2025

MEETING WILL BE HELD IN PERSON
4:00 P.M.
PICTURE CANYON PRESERVE TRAILHEAD
3920 N EL PASO FLAGSTAFF RD
FLAGSTAFF, AZ 86004

1. **Call to Order:** Chair Jackie Thomas called the meeting to order at 4:00pm at Picture Canyon Natural & Cultural Preserve.
2. **Roll Call**
Present:
Chair Jacqueline Thomas Commissioner Nat White
Co-Chair Bruce Fox Commissioner William Kluwin
Commissioner Lina Wallen Councilmember David Spence (Council Liaison)
Absent: Commissioner Mary Norton (P&Z Liaison) and Commissioner Molly Joyce.
Others present: Robert Mark, Bill Case, Roy May, Wm. Michael Wilson, Cathy Scudieri, Robert Wallace, Sylvia Struss, Ashlee Fliney, and Cole Lang.
3. **Land Acknowledgment:** Chair Thomas read the land acknowledgement.
4. **Approval of the March 24, 2025 Minutes:** Commissioner White motioned to approve the March 24, 2025 Minutes, Commissioner Wallen seconded, and all voted in favor.
5. **Public Comment:** Chair Thomas opened up the meeting for public comment. Open Space Supervisor Robert Wallace described that for this walk, we would stop and discuss topics together at different areas. He mentioned that it was okay to chat about topics as we were walking, but to re-state questions and comments for the whole group when we stopped, so that everyone could hear and be involved in the discussion, and those discussions could be reflected in these Minutes.
6. **Business Items**
 - A. **Beautification Grant Application: McMillan Mesa Natural Area Vegetation:** Mr. Wallace reported that the Open Space Section provided a letter of support for a Beautification grant application from Flagstaff resident Crystal Estrada to plant native and deer-resistant plants at the bottom of the Sego Lily Trail from McMillan Mesa Natural Area where N. Izabel St and 6th Ave intersect. This was in addition to the letter of support provided for the artwork on the Picture Canyon footbridge, to be renamed the Jack Welch Memorial Bridge. Projects are being presented to the Beautification Commission on May 12, 2025 4-6 pm.
 - B. **Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve: New Proposed Trail - Don Weaver Trail Canyon Route:** At the Outdoor Education Classroom, the group stopped and Mr. Wallace explained that the purpose of this walk was to provide an understanding of the proposed re-route, to provide feedback, and to vote on whether to recommend it. The proposed trail would run parallel to the canyon on the north side, is anticipated to be two feet wide (four feet total including a buffer of one foot on either side), and would be made with hand tools. The purpose of the proposed realignment is to provide an enhanced hiking experience, protect archaeology, and reduce unauthorized social trails. Flagline Trails planned the proposed route with donations. Once the Open Space Section had money for it, it would be professionally built. If approved, Open Space would send the draft letter to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

At the Pit House Overlook, Mr. Wallace pointed out that we had walked the current alignment on the Pipeline road, which is an easement for Kinder Morgan -- El Paso Natural Gas, and under it are four large pipelines. Public feedback has been that it is not enjoyable to hike on, it is hot, and it is insulting to the memory of Don Weaver. He noted that the proposed alignment was skirting the archaeological polygon on the north side of the canyon, so that there were fewer concerns about archaeology.

Where the trail turns off the pipeline road and the new proposed trail begins, Mr. Wallace pointed out the footbridge and the Tom Moody Trail below. A group photo was taken. Mr. Wallace described that there was a conservation easement on Picture Canyon, since the land was purchased with a Growing Smarter grant from the Arizona State Land Department. We are allowed to develop 20 acres of the 478 acres. When Picture Canyon was purchased by the City of Flagstaff, 9.2 acres were developed with trails, trailheads, signage, and parking areas. The formal trails: Arizona Trail, Tom Moody Trail, and Don Weaver Trail, and the Waterbird, Pit House, and Petroglyph Overlook spurs comprise 5.7 miles.

Mr. Wallace pointed out that the Open Space Management Plan lays out management goals for Picture Canyon, including minimum conflicts and degradation. Specifically, section 3.2.2 specifies we will coordinate with SHPO to develop an alignment for the Don Weaver Trail. To add this proposed realignment would be a half mile, which as a single track with a buffer would develop 10,500 square feet, or .24 acres. He did not see the need for additional trails after this proposed realignment but would like to see additional access points.

From a management perspective, the benefits of the new trail would be an improved hiking experience, reduced social trails, and it aligns with the Open Space Management Plan and the Conservation Easement. Concerns are the impact on the viewshed in that visitors would see the trail and other visitors on the south side of the canyon and vice versa, that it could cause new social trails, the more developed the Preserve is the less solitude visitors may have, and it is not on our capital improvement project list yet, so there is presently no money to do this. This Commission has preferred, in the Observatory Mesa area, that all trails be multi-use trails; this trail would be primarily walking and running due to terrain challenges, but the pipeline would remain open as an option. There was discussion about the trail substrate; there would be excavation of dirt, but no additional substrate like the FUTS (Flagstaff Urban Trail System) trails. It was noted that this new trail would not be suitable for bicycles or horseback riding, especially at the Petroglyph Overlook, because of boulders and rocky terrain. There was some discussion about using signage that encouraged foot traffic only. It was also noted that Picture Canyon has approximately 30,000 visitors per year.

At the Pit House Overlook, Open Space Steward Robert Mark provided some historical information of the area, saying that this area appeared to have been a village of pit houses. There is no record of excavating the pit house at this site, so it was possibly done by looters. Harold Colton (archaeologist and the founder of the Museum of Northern Arizona) excavated this area later. He described pit houses as partly subterranean, with the top half being thatch. Pottery sherds on the trail are being protected by wood chips.

There were questions about some of the trail restoration work and jute netting on some of the areas of the proposed trail. Mr. Wallace responded that when we applied for the AZ State Parks Recreational Trails Project (RTP) grant, some of this area was identified for restoration, and it was restored, but it would not be a lot of work to undo some of that work in appropriate areas.

At the Petroglyph Overlook, Mr. Wallace described the next steps if the Commission recommends moving forward with this realignment. The drafted letter will go to SHPO for feasibility, and then to AZ State Parks for feasibility under the Conservation Easement. There would likely then be some public engagement, such as a 60-day online survey, a guided hike for the public, and tribal consultation. Then we would go back to AZ State Parks for formal approval. He noted that the initial proposal for the re-route placed the trail below the ledge, but this would have required extensive work, made the trail highly visible from across the canyon, and routed it directly through sensitive archaeological sites. From this spot, this proposal follows along the top of the ledge, and then drops down towards the waterfall.

Back at the Educational Classroom, the Commission took public comment. Cathy Scudieri said that she has been involved with Picture Canyon and the Picture Canyon Working Group for a long time. She is excited to have this realignment, it is a great idea, and has been a long time coming. Robert Mark said that he has been involved with Picture Canyon for more than 25 years when it was first proposed to be preserved. He's done cartography, helped put it on the National Register of Historic Places, and the realignment has been a long-time idea. He said he's 82 years old, and he would like

to live long enough to see it done! Roy May is part of the Northern Arizona Audubon Society, which considers this an Audubon site. He moved to Flagstaff eight years ago, but visited for several years before that, and he heard about and began following the efforts to preserve Picture Canyon. He thoroughly enjoys walking here and said that anything is better than the pipeline road for a trail. What we hiked today, he said, is an excellent option, and better than the first iteration. He supports a "mainly for walking" approach, does not believe every trail has to be multi-use.

Among the Commission, it was suggested that, when we do the letter to SHPO, we include that no trees would be impacted by the trail, and that the trail provides a more interesting, topographic diverse experience for visitors. There was discussion about the management concerns:

- A good alternate trail such as this one, would reduce the making of social trails.
- A trail that is good for walking and running is multi-use, this new trail is not taking away anything from visitors, it is enhancing the experience.
- The views for visitors is improved by this trail. In hiking this proposed alignment, the group got a view we would not get elsewhere. Commissioners were not concerned about being able to see the south side trail, or vice versa; there are spots where this is already true, and it does not reduce the enjoyability of the visitor experience.
- The visitor experience is improved because of more shade, a more enjoyable and potentially safer trail than the pipeline road, and it brings people to the waterfall, which is what visitors want, and why social trails have been made there.
- Potential signage was discussed about recommending the trail for foot traffic.

Commissioner White said that the Picture Canyon Working Group has provided a lot of guidance and did the pre-work to make this realignment a reality; they need the Commission's support to move forward. Chair Thomas read emails from Commissioners Molly Joyce and Mary Norton, that they were both in favor of the new trail alignment.

Commissioner Wallen motioned to recommend that the Open Space Section consider and take next steps to implement the new trail alignment of the Don Weaver Trail. Commissioner White seconded, and all voted in favor.

7. Reports and Updates

- City Council Liaison Report:** Councilmember David Spence had to leave the meeting before his report.
- Planning and Zoning Commission Representative Report:** Commissioner Norton in an email, reported that the Regional Plan Retreat for City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and County Supervisors, was taking place on Friday May 2, 2025 from 9am-5pm in the meeting room in Flagstaff City Council Chambers, and that the public is welcome to attend. She noted that the mapping of proposed trail alignments would be an important topic. Conceptual FUTS alignments are in the current plan, even if they cross private or state property, which helps staff to negotiate easements for those areas. But there is feedback that keeping the specific alignments in the plan may encourage unauthorized use across private property. She encouraged anyone who could attend to attend. Mr. Wallace noted that at the May 12, 2025 Open Spaces Commission meeting, Martin Ince would provide a FUTS update, including discussion of future trails, and an update on the Regional Plan regarding FUTS.
- Open Space Management Report:** Mr. Wallace reported on the placement of the plaque at McMillan Mesa Natural Area, which recognizes how the area was protected by voters. Open Space Coordinator Sylvia Struss noted the upcoming Full Moon Hike on May 12, 2025 at 7:15pm at Tunnel Springs Trail, and upcoming volunteer invasive weed pulls at Picture Canyon, and N. Izabel Street hillside restoration. Chair Thomas encouraged staff to reach out to Kit Metzger of the NRCD (Coconino Natural Resource Conservation District) to give a report on work we are doing and inspire them to volunteer. All upcoming events and volunteer opportunities are posted at <https://volunteer.flagstaffaz.gov>.
- PROSE March 2025 Monthly Newsletter:** was provided to the Commissioners with the Agenda for this meeting.

8. **Informational Items To and From Commissioners and Staff:** Mr. Wallace reminded the Commissioners that the Observatory Mesa Trail Plan would be on the Flagstaff City Council agenda on May 13, 2025 starting at 3pm; there are other items on the agenda before us. There was discussion about Commissioners attending and providing public comment. Mr. Wallace mentioned that the proposal for artwork on the foot bridge would be presented to the Beautification Commission by Diana Henry (the same time as the next Open Spaces Commission meeting).

Commissioner White reported that Flagstaff Trails Initiative (FTI) is working the with US Forest Service to develop interpretive signs for the Spruce Wash area, covering geology, history, botany, ecology, and flooding, and that hopefully those would be done by the end of the year. Mr. Wallace requested contacts for the folks working on those signs, as we might recruit them to help with interpretive signs that the Open Space Section is developing for McMillan Mesa Natural Area.

9. **Potential Future Agenda Items:** Chair Thomas noted that at the next meeting on May 12, 2025 from 4-6pm at the Flagstaff Aquaplex, there would be the FUTS update with Martin Ince, and an Open Space Education update with Ashlee Fliney.
10. **Adjournment:** Commissioner White motioned to adjourn, it was seconded by Vice Chair Fox, and all voted in favor. The meeting ended at 6:08pm