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## Prescott closes escrow on Dells open space acquisition

Preserving the Granite Dells



Escrow closed Friday, Jan. 26, on the 160-acre parcel of Granite Dells land that the Prescott City Council agreed to buy in late November. The city plans to build about six miles of trail in on land, and Chris Hosking, city trails and natural parklands coordinator, left, and Joe Baynes, recreation services director, right, recently checked out one of the possible trail routes. (Cindy Barks/Courier)



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Prescott Recreation Services Director Joe Baynes walks over the granite boulders that rise from the bed of Boulder Creek, a seasonal waterway that runs through the 160-acre Granite Dells parcel that the

Local outdoor enthusiasts just gained another artery into the heart of the Granite Dells.

Escrow closed Friday, Jan. 26, on the City of Prescott's purchase of a prime Granite Dells parcel that was previously a part of the Storm Ranch North.

The Prescott City Council unanimously agreed to buy the property for \$2 million in late November, and escrow has been underway since then.

Mayor Greg Mengarelli lauded the purchase Friday afternoon. "It's in a really key area," he said of the 160 acres, adding, "I think it's important to keep as much open space as possible in the Granite Dells."

The council vote occurred just prior to the swearing in of the new council and mayor on Nov. 28, and Mengarelli

City of Prescott bought from the Storm Ranch North. (Cindy Barks/Courier)

remembers noting the significance of the move by the previous council.

“There were a lot of things going on at that meeting, but I commented that this is a big deal,” he said.

Joe Baynes, recreation services director for the city, called the transaction a “win-win” for the city and Storm Ranch owners Ed and Virginia Seaver, Eleanor Huddleston, and James Harvey. “They were wonderful to work with,” Baynes said.

“The Granite Dells are unique to the United States,” he added, “and to be able to preserve this big chunk of land is just monumental.”

**Trail building**

The piece of open space is located along the east side of the popular Peavine Trail and will allow for trail access into the granite formations and ravines of the Dells.

With Friday’s completion of the transaction, Parks and Recreation officials are set to get started on the new trails.

Chris Hosking, the city’s coordinator of trails and natural parklands, said Friday that he expects trail-construction work to get underway in early February, weather permitting.

Once the first loop is complete — likely within about two months — Hosking says the public will have access to the land. Until then, he urges patience.

“We need to get gates, because there are cattle in there, and we need trail signs,” Hosking said, adding that the existing barbed-wire fencing does not allow for easy access.

Hosking and Baynes gave a report to the Prescott Parks and Recreation Board Thursday, Jan. 25, announcing that the close of escrow was imminent.

On Friday, the city delivered the check for the land, and escrow closed late that afternoon.

In all, Hosking told the board, “there is potential for six miles or so of trails” on the parcel.

He plans to schedule a work day for the volunteer Over the Hill Gang trail-building group on Feb. 5 to get started on the first loop.

Boulder Creek, a seasonal waterway that runs through the property, will feature prominently in the network of trails, say Baynes and Hosking.

The location of the parcel — running along nearly a mile of the Peavine, and adjacent to State Trust Land in the Glassford Hill area — also will allow for expanded trail connectivity, Hosking said.

“It’s part of a bigger picture,” he said. With a trail to the summit of Glassford Hill in the works, for instance, the new parcel will allow for a connection with the Peavine.

Meanwhile, Hosking said, “We ask people to be patient. There’s a lot of work to be done in there.”

He told the Parks and Recreation Board that the entire six-mile network of trails could be complete within about a year.

**Continued preservation efforts**

Efforts to preserve the Granite Dells have been underway for years, and the city has bought a number of open space parcels over the years, including Willow and Watson lakes.

Joe Trudeau, Southwest advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity, commended the city for adding the crucial 160-acre parcel.

“It’s an incredibly valuable piece of open space to add to the city’s portfolio,” Trudeau said. “It is completely undeveloped and wild.”

Still, Trudeau said, “In my opinion, the job is far from over.”

A political action committee, Save the Dells ([www.savethedells.org](http://www.savethedells.org)), has formed, he said, to get the word out about the remaining Dells parcels that should be preserved as well.

He cited parcels such as remaining Storm Ranch North acreage, as well as Dells-area land owned by the Arizona Eco Development company, which earlier announced plans to build homes on two parcels, one of which includes the iconic Point of Rocks site.

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“There is nowhere in the world quite like the Dells,” Trudeau said. The intent of the Save the Dells group is “to show the city and developers that it is in the best interest of the community to protect the Dells,” he said.

Mengarelli said he sees the importance of such an effort.

“With Arizona Eco Development potentially coming into the city this year, I want to do everything we can to preserve as much of the Dells as possible and continue to develop trails,” Mengarelli said.

He referred to the Dells as an “important destination for residents as well as visitors.”

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