

Fire ban hits county May 1 Revenue

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The Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department will initiate its annual fire ban on Wednesday, May 1, 2019.

"Given the abundance of rain we've received this year, we've had an outstanding wildflower season. Unfortunately, as the blooms and brush die off and dry out, the parks are left with dangerous levels of fuel loads on the ground that can ignite a wildfire with just a small spark," said R.J. Cardin, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Director. "As a land manager, we believe the decision to implement

sooner rather than later is the responsible thing to do to ensure park visitor and park resource safety."

A fire ban is initiated to limit the possibility of starting a brush fire, which could cause serious damage to the parks. The fire ban includes the use of campfires, fire pits and charcoal grills; however, it is still acceptable to use gas/propane grills in designated areas such as the ramada areas, semi-developed and developed camping sites.

Campfires along the shoreline at Lake Pleasant Regional Park are included in the fire ban due to higher

than usual water levels and dried brush along the shoreline. Violation of this park rule, Rule 113, may result in a citation.

It is also important to note that during this time of year, the National Weather Service often issues red flag warnings across central Arizona to alert land management agencies that conditions are ideal for wildfire ignition. Should this occur before the fire ban goes into effect, park supervisors have been authorized to issue temporary fire bans to ensure public safety and protect the parks resources. When temporary fire bans are issued, information will be posted on the website, and park visitors will be notified as they enter the park. The parks will also stop selling firewood during this time.

While smoking in the parks is still permissible, it is discouraged due to the extremely dry conditions. Those who feel they must smoke are urged to be re-

sponsible and ensure that all cigarettes are properly extinguished and placed in trash receptacles. A date to lift the fire ban has not been identified and will be determined by the amount of rain Maricopa County receives during the monsoon season.

The following Maricopa County parks are affected by the fire ban: Adobe Dam Regional Park, Buckeye Hills Regional Park, Cave Creek Regional Park, Estrella Mountain Regional Park, Hassayampa River Preserve, Lake Pleasant Regional Park, McDowell Mountain Regional Park, San Tan Mountain Regional Park, Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area, Uesery Mountain Regional Park, Vulture Mountains Recreation Area, and White Tank Mountain Regional Park. If you have any questions regarding the fire ban, call the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department at 602-506-2930, or visit maricopacountyparks.net/.

\$365 annually.

Webb said all citizens depend on the public safety services and the \$1 is cheap.

Councilman Mike Scharnow suggested 50 cents a day instead.

Councilman Alan Magazine agreed.

"I can't support \$365 but I can support half of that."

"I understand the affordability of \$1 a day," Councilwoman Sherry Leckrone said. "But this is a big jump, and much more than proposed."

The motion to approve the \$185 annual fee was approved 6-1 with Spelich opposing. He told *The Times* he did not necessarily oppose the fee; it is very similar to one he proposed for infrastructure and maintenance earlier this year. However, he was looking for a sunset time in which the fee would expire, and he could not get that included in the motion.

Both Spelich and Tolis urged staff to do serious research concerning a community police department rather than contracting with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. MCSO's annual contract increases are primarily due to issues with the state's Public Safety Pension Plan and are expected to be as much as 10 percent up to 20 years into the future, according to Miller.

"I want staff to come up with a very thorough plan for our own police department," Tolis said. "In the future, we are going to have to do this."

Spelich said there are a lot of talented retired law enforcement people living

in Fountain Hills and he urged staff to tap their expertise in helping come up with a plan.

The council action last week allows for a 60-day notice period before the sales tax increase can officially be enacted. The proposal will come back for a final vote and public hearing at the council's June 18 session. It would take effect in September, Miller said.

Along with approval of the public safety fee the council voted to allow for a hardship application for low income residents. Miller said Salt River Project has a good program and he would accept an SRP bill as an indication of hardship. Exactly how the hardship is determined will need to be worked out.

The town will plan to begin collecting the public safety fee in January, when the environmental fee was collected.

None of these new revenues collected within the next fiscal year can be spent during that year because it will not have been budgeted. Staff is proposing that the funds be placed initially in the Capital Improvement Fund to give that balance a boost.

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Discover Essentrics class starts in May

The "Discover Essentrics" exercise program is being offered by the Town of Fountain Hills Community Services Department beginning in May.

Essentrics (Course #4203) is a full-body exercise program designed to rebalance the entire body through simultaneous stretching and strengthening. This class is for anyone, of any age or fitness level, who wants a safe exercise program

that achieves full body health.

The classes, taught by Toni Whaley, meet Monday and Wednesday, May 13 through June 17 from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Community Center.

Classes are open to those age 45 to 75, and there is a \$70 fee.

Preregistration is required. Register online at fh.az.gov/recreation or in person at Town Hall or the Community Center.

Sanitary

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the job they did negotiating the agreements.

The original engineering estimate for the project was \$3.7 million.

"This is a 34.5 percent reduction from that initial estimate," Dudash said. "This was an awesome job by staff."

The district had determined that it needed to replace underground vaults that house electrical and pumping equipment for its recharge and recovery wells for storage of treated wastewater. They found the existing facilities in bad repair and aging. There are also concerns regarding electrical equipment underground and safety of employees working in the confined space of the vaults.

The town has in previous years expressed some interest in having an additional restroom in Fountain Park, but had never followed through.

However, Trompke approached the town about sharing facilities if it moved its equipment into aboveground buildings. A portion of each structure is to be used for electrical and monitoring equipment for the adjoining underground well, and the rest of the building would be built as a public restroom.

The project includes two facilities adjacent to two of the well sites in the park. The locations are on the north side near Panorama Drive and the amphitheater and the second is on the east side next to the parking lot and also near Panorama Drive.

The town is not participating in the construction of the facilities, but will take responsibility for maintaining the restrooms once complete.

Trompke said construction will begin on the building on the east side during May with work on the second to begin in June after graduation at the amphitheater.

Takeback

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that their usual methods for disposing of unused medicines – flushing them down the toilet or throwing them in the trash – both pose potential safety and health hazards.

For more information about preventing prescription drug abuse, go to fhcoalition.org. For those unable to make it to the official event, a permanent drop-off box for prescription drugs is located near the MCSO office within the Fountain Hills Community Center and can be accessed year-round during normal business hours.

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