



Phoenix, Arizona framed by mountains  
Photo Credit: Brian Truono

## Biophilic Phoenix Growing the Biophilic Movement in the Valley of the Sun

By Ashley Knudsen

Throughout the past year, Biophilic Phoenix has grown in awareness and numbers. What began as an Arizona State University student group has now transformed into a cross-disciplinary collaboration with university staff, local municipalities and nonprofit organizations. Together, Biophilic Phoenix aims to further celebrate and increase the amount of biophilic spaces, policies and partnerships throughout the Phoenix-Metropolitan area. Since joining Tim Beatley and other

sustainability professionals on a [panel discussion](#) last year, I have spearheaded the group and its efforts as project leader, further integrating Phoenix and its surrounding cities into the biophilic cities movement.

City of Phoenix Partner City Conversations

Mark Hartman, City of Phoenix's Chief of Sustainability, has been enthusiastic about envisioning Phoenix as a nature-ful city, stating: "We have a connection

to the desert here, much stronger than most other cities' connection to surrounding ecosystems. We have more parks and preserves than any other city in North America. Our long term goal, adopted by City Council, is to 'improve the quality of life for all while enhancing nature.' Our residents have a good understanding of native plants supported by dozens of education centers, botanical gardens and preserve information centers. We utilize and are restoring natural

washes, most notably the Rio Salado. Our identity is a desert city."

These conversations have led to Phoenix designating internal representatives from their Parks Department, with support from Tricia Balluff in their Environmental Programs Department, to move forward with the consideration of partner city status in the Biophilic Cities Network.

Community Event Highlight: Urban Forestry Tree Planting

On Arbor Day weekend, at the end of Earth Month (April 2017), the city and Arizona State University engaged the community with hands-on biophilia. At least twenty volunteers came together to plant forty trees at Desert West Park. Staff educated volunteers on proper planting technique for the healthy growth of Chinese elm trees. This collaboration contributed to multiple ongoing initiatives, including Phoenix's

[Tree and Shade Master Plan](#), which outlines how Phoenix will achieve and maintain an average of 25% shade canopy coverage. Arizona State University also aims to secure carbon offsets from the increase in canopy coverage to achieve their [carbon neutrality goals](#).

A similar event was hosted by the City of Tempe the next day, highlighting the completion of their draft [Urban Forestry Master Plan](#). Both plans encourage native



Volunteers and City of Phoenix staff planting Chinese Elm trees throughout Desert West Park  
Photo Credit: Emily Jean Thomas

species and drought-tolerant trees while also providing [abundant resources](#) for citizens to utilize.

#### Phoenix Nature Catalog and Map

Biophilic Phoenix participants began observing biophilic spaces around the Valley of the Sun in order to catalog and calculate their accessibility. Data is being compiled into an overall Phoenix-Metropolitan Nature Map via ArcGIS and Esri Story Maps for citizens and visitors to enjoy. The aim is to have a resource similar to what fellow Partner City Wellington, New Zealand created with their expansive [Nature](#)

[Map](#). Accessibility is divided by time scales (daily, weekly, monthly, yearly) and modes of transportation (pedestrian, public transit, personal vehicle ownership). Data collection and analysis is ongoing; however, it is not the only nature-affiliated map being created right now. [Central Arizona Conservation Alliance](#) is also working on a Natural Infrastructure Viewer for land managers, scientists, educators, community liaisons and nonprofits. Instead of showcasing existing nature-full locations, this interactive map conducts gap analyses for stakeholders to use as a tool to

target where infrastructure is needed. The three goals are: (1) protect water resources; (2) ensure habitat integrity; and (3) connect people to nature. Ultimately, the Viewer will bolster the ecological and recreational sustainability of Phoenix-Metro's park preserves.

#### Conclusion

This is only a sample of how Biophilic Phoenix is growing. Biophilic urban planning is increasing across multiple scales throughout the Phoenix Metropolitan area with projects like the [City of Goodyear's Community Health Park](#): a

129-acre community wellness area amid two West Valley hospitals. Brownfields are also being converted into "healthfields" like parks to benefit public health, the local economy and the environment through Dave Laney's Arizona Health Initiative. Biophilic Phoenix will continue to work with these and other stakeholders to seek out and highlight biophilic projects and plans. The aim is to streamline goals and objectives to make true, positive change throughout the Phoenix-Metropolitan area.

#### Resources

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