

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **September 15, 2011** in the Public Works conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah

Members present were:

Renee Chi – through conference call	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
Cameron Rognan, Chairperson	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Tim Croissant, Vice Chairperson	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Absent and excused was:

Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
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Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	HCP
Amber Stocks	HCP
Cornell Christensen	HCP

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Cameron Rognan noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 9:30am with Renee Chi attending via conference call.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. **August 18, 2011**

The following changes were made:

Page 3, paragraph 5, sentence 4: added,

From: “If the sand builds up underneath and prevents passage of animals, then the boardwalk becomes “take”.

To: “If the sand builds up underneath and prevents passage of animals or access of areas south of boardwalk then the boardwalk becomes “take”.

Page 3, paragraph 5, last sentence: added,

From: “If the trail is placed adjacent to the fence there will be least two 90 degree turns, affecting bicyclists and pedestrians.”

To: “If the trail is placed adjacent to the fence there will be at least two 90 degree turns, affecting bicyclists and pedestrians.”

Page 3, paragraph 6, sentence 1: deleted,

From: “Ann made a drawing to illustrate how a combination of trex and asphalt could be used ~~in areas where some habitat is cut off.~~”

To: “Ann made a drawing to illustrate how a combination of trex and asphalt could be used.”

Page 4, paragraph 3, number 1: changed,

From: “Acquisition of the triangular piece of property along the trails in zone three.”

To: “Acquisition of the triangular piece of property along The Trails Development in zone three.”

Page 4, paragraph 3, number 4, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Pioneer Park fencing and cattle guards.”

To: “Fencing existing gaps in Pioneer Park.”

Page 5, paragraph 2, number 4, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Ann stated as part of mitigation for the Red Hills Parkway expansion project, all fencing is being reconstructed along the road and ~~they should not exclude~~ Pioneer Park.”

To: “Ann stated as part of mitigation for the Red Hills Parkway expansion project, all fencing is being reconstructed along the road and it does make sense to include Pioneer Park.”

MOTION by Renee Chi to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS**a. Discuss Results of Red Hills Field Trip**

Cameron explained the purpose of the field trip was to look at existing fencing gaps in Pioneer Park. During the fieldtrip the group looked at what will help prevent tortoises from getting through the park and out onto the roadway as well as how to reduce interactions between people and tortoises. The committee took Exhibit 3-a-1 TC 091511 to the fieldtrip, showing where the proposed fence would go.

Ann McLuckie commented that fencing these gaps is necessary. There have been two tortoises killed by the stop light on Red Hills Parkway and observations of tortoise

activity have been noted in this area. Ann felt that fencing out high-use areas such as the pavilion and the parking lots would be beneficial.

Cameron pointed out if there is a need for cattle guards, there is also a need for fencing, otherwise the cattle guards don't serve much purpose. Cameron suggested that fencing could be part of the Red Hills Parkway mitigation. If it should have been required as a part of the Red Hills Expansion project then maybe that responsibility can be re-identified, or it can be a supplement to another project or be undertaken by the HCP.

Renee Chi explained that fencing costs were not adequately addressed in the original HCP. Fencing costs have gone above and beyond what was expected and some fencing needs fall outside the HCP budget. Any additional fencing will be good if it helps reduce tortoise mortality. Renee added that using this fencing idea as mitigation might give more flexibility with designs that may be cost prohibitive for the Reserve, the County, or the City.

Cameron mentioned there was a St. George City representative present, Mark Goble during the field trip. Mark seemed open and receptive to TC discussions and recommendations. The fence design discussed during the fieldtrip was a short signature fence with wood rail, two or three feet high. The step-overs at various access points could be wider and more luxurious than the typical step-overs since there should not be threat of ATV's.

Ann indicated since the whole area near Pioneer Park will be revamped with an education center, an upgrade of the road, and an upgrade of the parking and user facilities, this is a good opportunity to tag along and get the fencing done.

Renee said it would be nice to get estimates on the distance so there is a sense of what is being looked at. Bob suggested that Renee visit the site when she comes for the HCAC meeting on September 27th. Cameron can GPS the area to find exact distances.

b. Discuss Areas and Projects for Red Hills Parkway Mitigation

Cameron asked the group if there are other ideas for Red Hills Parkway mitigation beyond what was discussed in the last TC meeting. Renee thought of restoration with plantings. She said it would have to be in an area that needs it badly. It would be expensive and it may require watering. Ann said there is an area on the east side of Cottonwood Road that has been hammered by the Millcreek Fire. Cameron agreed that plantings would be a good route to go, especially if research can be attached. New research could be added with potential mitigation of planting and more vegetation. Bob added it should be identified as "restoration" rather than "restoration with planting" to allow for more restoration opportunities. Ann noted how seeding has been tried and how it has been a disappointment. She said it would be great to see successful plantings like those done by others at a landscape level. Ann mentioned how the DWR did plantings with gel packs which were also a disappointment during the summer. Tim

Croissant noted there are multiple options for how to do the plantings.

Renee said if there are known tangible projects that will benefit tortoises, then it is hard to focus resources on rehabilitation or restoration of fire sights when success has been spotty and can take a lot of resources. Renee felt that whatever will immediately benefit tortoises will end up being much more attractive for mitigation.

Renee said there is a short time frame to decide which mitigation options to use. If St. George does not hear from the TC soon they will probably opt to not do the 2:1 slope at the intersection and instead do a retaining wall. Regardless of which option St. George uses at the intersection, there will be an impact and Ann feels that fencing in Pioneer Park would be a good option but might not cost very much. Renee stated it would be worthwhile to get an estimate on how much it would cost to install a culvert on Cottonwood Road and it would be nice to have an estimate on the record in case it is needed for mitigation actions in the future.

The committee talked about culvert installation and monitoring. They discussed getting estimates and who to have help with the job. Ann mentioned that Rick had suggested the DWR offer to do culvert monitoring. They discussed having the project sent out for bids or going directly to somebody. Ann asked if the BLM has a disposable engineer. Tim said the Range Management people should have a general idea on a cost figure.

Cameron ended the conversation by telling the committee that with the wide range of ideas for mitigation there is a whole suite of ideas for consideration.

c. Red Hills Parkway Bid Award Update

Bob updated the committee on the Red Hills Parkway bid, stating that the bid was awarded to JP Excavating for \$13 million. The engineering firm will let the HCP know when the pre-construction conference is. The engineer anticipates it will be in the next couple of weeks. They don't have a start date yet but they anticipate starting in the next month. JP Excavating has not had tortoise awareness training recently; their whole crew will need training.

d. Status of Report on Toe Trail Recommendation

Cameron reported that he gave the TC recommendation to the HCAC and they seemed surprised by the high cost of the estimates. Bob mentioned the HCAC asked if he could contact Ivins to determine how they would like to proceed. Bob talked with the mayor and the city manager who was also surprised on the price estimates. A work meeting has been scheduled as part of the next HCAC meeting to talk with Ivins City. Ivins will come up with ideas of the value of the detention dam property. They will also look into costs for the trail.

e. Revised Recovery Plan

The Revised Recovery Plan has been published. Cameron opened discussion on how it relates to the TC. Ann understood that Catherine Darst with the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office would be involved for the Recovery Implementation Teams (RIT's). Ann noticed that the disease section, a whole appendix devoted to disease protocols, was not included in the final plan, although it was in the draft. Since it is a living document, it may be something that is still being worked on. Renee said there are a few living documents they continue to work on and generally they will be posted on the FWS website. Renee will ask about the disease section and let the TC know. Cameron noticed seeing a reference in the Recovery Plan to a Science Advisory Board. The Science Advisory Board may have already created a disease plan or protocol that deals directly with this issue.

Bob asked if Renee has heard anything about a MOG meeting or anything associated with the RIT's. Renee answered that she hasn't, however, she'll ask around FWS.

f. Fencing Update – Turkey Farm, Snow Canyon

The reason Kristen is absent is because she is finishing a fencing construction contract in Snow Canyon State Park. There have been several fencing and parking improvements along the main road through the park.

Tim mentioned fencing work will begin along Turkey Farm road the third week of October. Larry Crist with the Fish and Wildlife Service signed a paper stating the BLM does not need to do the complete formal section seven consultation process. Everything is signed and the BLM is good to go. Tortoise awareness training needs to be given to the fence contractors. Cameron and Bob mentioned they would like to be involved in the planning and to join them as the fence is constructed, to make sure there are no tortoises in the construction area.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. New Outreach Coordinator

Introductions were made with Cornell Christensen, the new Outreach Coordinator.

b. New TC Member

Cameron reminded the group that Marshall Topham's position needs to be filled. The committee was asked to come up with suggestions of people to replace Marshall's position. Ann mentioned Seth Topham would be good. Cameron said they will try to contact him but there might be a good possibility he won't be able to serve in the position due to other responsibilities.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

- a. **Thursday October 20, 2011**

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by Tim Croissant to adjourn the meeting.
Seconded by Ann McLuckie.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:07 A.M.
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.