HABITAT CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A **regular meeting** of the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee (HCAC) was held at the Washington City Council Chambers on **NOVEMBER 23, 2010**.

Committee members present were:

Karl Wilson, Chairman	Mayors Association
Chris Blake, Vice Chairman	Environmental Organization
Larry Crist	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
Jeff Morby	Local Development
Reed Harris	Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR)
Jimmy Tyree	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Marc Mortensen	Citizen-at-Large
Bob Sandberg	HCP Administrator

Also present were:

Brad Young	HCP
Cameron Rognan	HCP
Mike Empey	Congressman Matheson's office
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	BLM
Paul Van Dam	Citizens for Dixie's Future
Lisa Rutherford	Citizens for Dixie's Future
Alan Gardner	County Commissioner
Dr. Pam Foti	Northern Arizona University (NAU)
Rob Dobbs	UDWR
Ann McLuckie	UDWR
Rick Fridell	UDWR
Mr. Fridell	Rick's father

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wilson noted that at all committee members were present and the meeting was called to order promptly at 1:00 P.M.

2. CONSENT AGENDA

The Consent Agenda is a means of expediting routine matters which come before the committee for approval. The consent portion of the agenda is approved by one (1) non-debatable motion. If any member wishes to remove an item from the consent portion of the agenda, then that item becomes the first order of business on the regular agenda.

a. Approval of the agenda

b. Review and approve minutes

1. October 19, 2010

c. Next meeting date

1. January 25, 2011

MOTION by Chris Blake to table agenda item 3a and approve the Consent Agenda.
Seconded by Marc Mortensen.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. PRESENTATIONS

b. Southwest Willow Flycatcher nesting success report (Rob Dobbs)

Mr. Dobbs used a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate his presentation; it is included as Exhibit 3-b-1 HCAC – 112310. Mr. Dobbs explained that his presentation will provide a little background on the Southwest Willow Flycatcher (SWFL) and the research results for 2010, and compare those results with those of 2008 and 2009.

Rob explained that the SWFL was listed as endangered in 1995 due to population declines resulting from habitat loss and degradation. A recovery plan (RP) was published in 2002 with an overall recovery objective to attain a viable population of birds, and an amount and distribution of habitat sufficient to provide for long-term persistence of the species. The primary recovery action outlined by the SWFL RP is to increase and improve currently and potentially suitable habitat. To accomplish this the RP outlines a number of research objectives, the primary of which is to determine habitat characteristics that influence occupancy and reproductive success of the species.

Mr. Dobbs presented a slide that showed the long-distance migration of the birds, and he explained that there five sub-species – the one that we are concerned with is *Empidonax traillii extimus.* The next slide showed the range of the sub-species *extimus* on a regional scale. Rob described the bird's breeding habitat and defined the three primary characteristics: heterogeneous structure, close to water, and dense vegetation – 2-4 meters in height. Rob further described the bird's breeding biology, including territory, relationships, nesting characteristics, eggs, and parental care.

Mr. Dobbs then described the study components: population and breeding pair survey, nesting success monitoring, and microhabitat evaluation. Rob's next slide showed the number of territories (breeding males) and how that number declined in 2010 from 17 to 11. Decreases at two tamarisk-dominated sites, RS Marsh and Seegmiller Marsh, drove the overall decline. More important than the number of territories is the number of pairs, because this reflects the number of breeding females. The monitoring revealed no change in the number of pairs in 2010 overall. However, the number of pairs at the Seegmiller Marsh, which has historically been the most important SWFL breeding site in Utah, dropped from five (5) pairs in 2008-09 to one (1) pair in 2010. This decline was offset by increases in the number of pairs at RS East and Snipe Pond, which again, are

mixed native-tamarisk sites. So there appears to have been an important shift in the distribution of pairs as well as territories.

Rob then discussed reproductive success. He said that UDWR monitored 20 nests by nine pairs in 2010. Of those 20, six nests were successful and produced a total of 12 fledglings. Fourteen nests failed; all due to predation, but UDWR was unable to determine what the predators were. Rob added that the number of active nests keeps increasing but the number of breeding pairs is not changing. This means that the birds are re-nesting more frequently after failing. Rob further added that nesting success decreased in 2009 and remained relatively low in 2010. This may be due to nest predation which increased in 2009 and remained high in 2010. Meanwhile, hatching success decreased in 2009 and rebounded in 2010. This may be coincident with tamarisk defoliation in 2009 and a shift to breeding sites with higher native component in 2010.

Mr. Dobb's next slide shows before and after photos of tamarisk patches. These are before and after the affects of tamarisk beetles – browning. This provides an idea of how the beetles are affecting tamarisk-dominated flycatcher habitat. Robb continued his discussion regarding the nesting habitat. The number of nests seemed to increase when the birds shifted from the tamarisk-dominated habitat to a mixed native plants/tamarisk habitat, although the number of nests in the tamarisk portion of the mixed habitat remained high.

Mr. Dobbs summarized that:

- Breeding flycatcher numbers are basically unchanged, but there are fewer males.
- Flycatcher reproductive success has increased, but remains relatively low. Predation remains high, especially in willows.
- Hatching success has increased and there appear to be fewer nests in tamarisk-dominated habitat.
- Successful nest sites were found in areas of higher density of tamarisk stems.

In closing, Mr. Dobbs acknowledged that tamarisk is bad; but at the same time it can be good. Rob noted that the value of pure tamarisk habitat is declining with beetle activity, and this negatively affects the microclimate for flycatchers. Flycatchers appear to be shifting to mixed native plant/tamarisk sites. And, within the mixed native/tamarisk habitat, tamarisk contributes to increased nest success because it adds complexity to habitat structure. Lastly, Mr. Dobbs suggested minimizing tamarisk eradication in occupied, suitable unoccupied and potentially suitable flycatcher habitat. And gradually replace tamarisk in small scale with native plants that provide structural complexity.

Chairman Wilson asked the committee members if there were any questions or comments. There were none and Chairman Wilson moved the agenda.

c. Human Impact Monitoring (Dr. Pam Foti, NAU)

Dr. Foti began by introducing herself and asked a two-part question, "How are we doing the human impact monitoring (HIM), and what are we doing with the data?"

Dr. Foti, like the previous presenter, used a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate her presentation to the HCAC; it is included as Exhibit 3-c-1 HCAC – 112310. Also, the terms *human impact monitoring* (HIM) and *recreational impact assessment* (RIA) were used interchangeably.

Dr. Foti answered the '*how'* part of her question. She referred to Exhibit 3-c-2 HCAC – 112310 and explained the forms and how they are used in the field. She further explained that she first visited the area to begin assessments in 2003, but the recreational impact assessment, data compiling, and reporting has been going on since 2005. Dr. Foti told the committee that the impact assessments are done by NAU students enrolled in her graduate-level course. Each year there are 8-12 students in her Recreation Ecology class (PRM 531).

Next Dr. Foti answered the '*what'* part of her question. Recreational impact assessment is, "The systematic collection and analysis of resource data at regular intervals, in perpetuity or on-going, to predict or detect natural and human-induced changes, and to provide the basis for appropriate management response." Dr. Foti explained the key components to RIA, they are: a developed and structured system of monitoring, the data must be valid (accurate) and reliable (replicable), the system of monitoring must be feasible in terms of time, personnel and funds, the system must record changes over time, and the results must provide useful information for managerial decisions.

Dr. Foti continued her presentation by explained some things that are commonly known. She said that we know that resource change in wildland areas in response to human use is inevitable. We also know that there is no such thing as a "non-consumptive user" – all users 'consume' the resource in some manner. Furthermore, we know that getting people out and active in wildland areas is essential, but how much change in the resource base is 'acceptable' in a wildland area is a <u>managerial</u> decision. And, for the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, managers must consider the impact of recreation on the Mojave Desert tortoise habitat.

Dr. Foti discussed what else is known about recreation impacts and management. She said that we know that research has shown that visitors to wildland environments are aware of degraded resource conditions along trails and at sites, and site managers are often **directed** to keep wildland areas 'unimpaired' and human impacts 'substantially unnoticeable' (to protect the recreation experience). Therefore managers need to keep track of 'on-site resource changes' and then determine the appropriate managerial responses to the changes.

The presentation continued with Dr. Foti discussing limits of acceptable change (LAC). The four basic steps in determining LAC are:

1. Determining recreation impact inventories (What have you got on site?),
2. Setting wildland recreation management goals (What do you want on site?),
3. Listing the recreation management prescriptions, e.g., limiting access, charging fees, issuing permits, etc. (How will you manage the site to obtain your site goals?) and,

4. Conducting recreation impact monitoring (How do you know when change occurs if you don't go out and check in a regular and systematic manner?).

Dr. Foti added that impact assessors and managers must look for the patterns in user behavior and try to determine ways to change the undesirable behaviors. She cited Paradise Canyon as an example. The off trail impacts in that area were significant, but after the rail fences were installed the off trial impacts decreased remarkably.

How the impacts are tracked was discussed next. Dr. Foti said that impact assessment relies on identification of 'variables' which provide managers with information about the quantity and quality of site use. Variables must be:

- Capable of being measured.
- Sensitive to the amount and type of use.
- Related to environmental conditions, users and activities, or other site characteristic concerns.
- Able to forewarn managers of environmental degradation, and be responsive to management control.

Dr. Foti mentioned that the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve is on an annual monitoring base. This is good because it provides regular and frequent data on impacts; but annual monitoring can be expensive.

In conclusion, Dr. Foti emphasized that impact assessment is critical to protecting the integrity of the resource base and recreation use on wildland areas. Additionally, the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve has made a commitment to their on-site visitor experiences by tracking site impacts which could compromise the quality of the recreation area AND the quality of Mojave Desert tortoise habitat. Furthermore, recreation impact assessment requires on-site data collection of relevant impact variables and data analysis and evaluation to determine the type and level of impact. Lastly, Dr. Foti noted that in some cases recreation impacts may require managerial action to protect the tortoise habitat and the experience of all visitors. She stressed the importance of protecting the tortoise habitat.

Jeff Morby asked about the impact assessment from 2009 as compared to 2010. Dr. Foti explained that the monitoring forms were modified in early 2010; the significant change was the addition of standards. Setting realistic standards requires a previous set of data – which is available on-line with a login and password. Dr. Foti added that the Toe trail and the Prospector trail are examples of trails with too many off trail impacts. She further added that, generally for all trails, off trail impacts (recreation nodes) were within one mile of the trailhead. These impacts mostly included litter and non-recreational trash. She also added the RCDR trails are typically wider and shorter than trails in other areas that she assesses, and the trails were not well-planned; many of the trails simply existed when the Reserve was established.

Chairman Wilson noted that due to inclement weather in Salt Lake City, Larry Crist and Reed Harris had to leave soon. This agenda item was continued while General Business was attended to, afterwards questions and comments on this topic would resume.

4. UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT REVIEWS

None.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Land (inholdings) acquisition efforts

Chairman Wilson asked Bob Sandberg to relate any new developments. Bob said that there was nothing new to report. Jimmy Tyree also said that there was nothing new.

There were no questions or comments and the Chairman moved the agenda.

b. BLM planning update

Jimmy Tyree reported that there has not been much change. BLM is in the phase of developing alternatives for the next several months.

There were no questions or comments and the Chairman moved the agenda.

c. Technical Committee report

Technical Committee Vice Chairman Cameron Rognan told the committee that one of the new tasks that the TC is working on is evaluating the *take areas*. This is being done as a result of the HCP review by the USF&WS, and because it has been 14 years since the *take areas* were evaluated, land ownership has changed, and tortoises have been found in areas that were not previously included in a *take area*.

No decisions have been made and any proposed modifications will be brought to the HCAC.

There were no questions or comments and the Chairman moved the agenda.

d. Review and discuss the 2010 3rd Quarter Report

Bob Sandberg said that he is available to answer any questions regarding the report or to make any adjustments. There was no discussion.

MOTION by Chris Blake to accept the 2010 3rd Quarter Report.
Seconded by Larry Crist.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

There were no questions or comments and the Chairman moved the agenda.

e. Administrator's Report

1. HCP revenues and expenditures report (Exhibit 5-f-1-a)

Bob referred to Exhibit 5-e-1-a HCAC – 112310 and explained that it is a year-to-date revenue and expense summary that was printed on November 18, 2010. Bob added that HCP is spending in the red but that we haven't spent all of the funds budgeted.

Jeff Morby asked about the revenues received from impact fees. Bob explained that it was anticipated that HCP would receive approximately $450,000 but that we've only received $178, 345 which is about 39% of what was anticipated.

Chairman Wilson noted that all items listed on the general business agenda had been attended to and returned to Dr. Foti's presentation.

c. Human Impact Monitoring continued

Larry Crist asked Dr. Foti what activity has the most impact on the resources. Dr. Foti said that this is a difficult question to answer. She explained that hikers are the most common user, but if they stay on the trail then there is minimal impact. It is the off trail use that causes most impact to the resources. Hikers off trail cause some impact but mountain bikes off trail cause more. She cited the significant off trail impacts caused by mountain bikers in the Toilet Bowl area in Paradise Canyon. Dr. Foti re-emphasized the importance of staying on trail or within the recreation nodes; it is the off trail use that causes the most significant impacts.

Reed Harris noted that law enforcement is a tool that can be used to reduce high impact areas.

Dr. Foti cited the Gila trail extension as a superb trail – probably the best in the Reserve. She complimented Snow Canyon State Park on the route and alignment.

Jeff Morby commented that limiting access by permitting is a huge issue – probably too big an issue for the Reserve.

Larry Crist and Reed Harris left for Salt Lake City at 1:54 P.M. A quorum remained.

Bob Sandberg complimented Dr. Foti and the NAU students on their work, and he noted how the NAU monitoring is a good deal for the Reserve because of the value of the data available to the TC and its help in setting limits of acceptable change. It is a great help and a great boost in making decisions.

Bob addressed Jeff Morby's concerns about limiting access by permitting. Bob explained that it is not reasonable because of the way the Reserve is laid out, multiple access points, and lack of law enforcement 24/7. Bob encouraged the use of outreach and education to reduce impacts to the tortoises and the habitat.

Dr. Foti commented that the students conducting the monitoring often report that users have no idea that they are in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve – up to 80% claim they are unaware – this despite the kiosks and trail signs.

Ann McLuckie asked about dogs off leash. Dr. Foti replied that during the monitoring they do not often see dogs running around; instead they are usually within the vicinity of the owner. Dr. Foti said that dogs off trail are no worse than the kids off trail. She added that she did not believe that off-leash dogs are the problem.

Lastly, Dr. Foti said that limits of acceptable change is a theory and an idea used to assist in management decisions. She added that LAC is not an absolute; no one single number is correct and exact.

Bob Sandberg explained to the committee that he invited Dr. Foti to present to the HCAC so they could see the results of the funds being spent on human impact monitoring. Chairman Wilson commented that it is one of the best uses of funds.

Chairman Wilson returned to general business and the administrator's report.

e. Administrator's Report continued

2. 2011 budget

Bob Sandberg said that the proposed 2011 HCP budget has been tentatively approved without any changes. It will be considered for actual approval in a December commission meeting – most likely December 21st.

3. Reseeding on PacifiCorp's power lines

Bob explained that some of the seeds are already coming up. All of the areas to be reseeded have been except for one small area above the old turkey farm. The reseeding of that area will have to wait until the archaeological assessment has been completed.

4. Washington City wells

Bob reported that Washington City's Grapevine Wells #1 and #2 will be worked on after the inactive season begins December 1st.

There were no questions or comments and the Chairman moved the agenda.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT & REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

This item is reserved for items not listed on this agenda. No action may be taken on a matter raised under this agenda item. (Three minutes per person.)

Chairman Wilson invited the public to comment or request future agenda items. No one came forward and the Chairman moved the agenda.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

8. ADJOURN

MOTION by Chris Blake to adjourn.
Seconded by Marc Mortensen.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:04 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.