

## WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **JANUARY 7, 2009**, in the conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 E. Tabernacle St., Saint George, Utah

**The views expressed at this, or any other, Technical Committee (TC) meeting do not necessarily represent the positions or views of any particular federal, state or local governmental agency, division or department. They are solely the opinions of the individual members of this Technical Committee.**

Members present were:

Kristen Comella, Chairperson	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
Ann McLuckie, Vice Chairperson	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Bob Douglas	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Bob Sandberg	Washington County HCP
Renee Chi	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Absent and excused was:

Marshall Topham	Local Biologist
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Others present were:

Brad Young	Washington County HCP
Tom Webster	Washington County HCP
Lauren Hunt	Washington County HCP
Laura Taylor	City of St. George
Lynne Scott	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

### 1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Kristen Comella noted that there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 9:38 A.M.

### 2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

#### **a. Minutes from the meeting of December 11, 2008**

The following changes were made:

**(page 2, paragraph 4, sentence 2):** changed,

From: "Chuck was asked to correct the ratio in paragraph 2 on page 1 from 3:5 to 1:3."

To: “Chuck was asked to correct the ratio for temporary impacts in paragraph 2 on page 1 from 3:5 to 1:3.”

**(page 3, paragraph 7, sentence 4):** added,  
New sentence #4: “A geotechnical survey of the area has not been completed.”

**(page 3, paragraph 7, sentence 2):** added,  
New sentence #7: “Clark added that they estimate 60 days construction time.”

**(page 4, paragraph 6, sentence 2):** changed,  
From: “The design was completed by Creamer & Noble Engineers in ~~June 2008.~~”

To: “The design was completed by Creamer & Noble Engineers in October 2007.”

**(page 7, paragraph 2, sentence 5):** added,  
New sentence #5: “It is important that compensation that the Technical Committee identifies or suggests does not overlap with the responsibilities of the HCP”

**MOTION** by Renee Chi to approve the minutes of December 11, 2008, as corrected.  
Seconded by Bob Sandberg.  
Discussion: None.  
Vote was taken: All voted aye.  
Motion passed.

### 3. **GENERAL BUSINESS**

#### a. **Assignment #112508A – Leeds to Harrisburg sewer line**

1. Field trip to the proposed site. Examine and evaluate the habitat, review the proposed pipeline route and determine biological impacts.

The field trip was rescheduled to the next Technical Committee meeting – February 12, 2009. The proposed route within the reserve should be staked by then, and hopefully the weather will be better. Also, BLM wants to adjust the alignment. Meanwhile, BLM will be working with PSOMAS.

#### b. **Assignment #102808 – Red Hills Desert Garden** – Review and discuss the latest concepts and plans. Provide guidance and recommendation to the HCAC.

Bob Sandberg explained that there was another desert garden steering group meeting after the last Technical Committee meeting. Laura Taylor added that there was not a new color exhibit for today’s meeting. Some committee members still had their copy of Exhibit 3-d-1 TC – 121108 from the last TC meeting. Laura referred to the blue area and asked if there was discussion regarding it. The members discussed renaming or removing the designation.

Ann McLuckie said that the name, “Live Tortoise Display area” doesn’t describe it well, and Lynne Scott said if not much (habitat) is going to change then remove it. Lynne distributed an aerial photo of the Pioneer Park areas showing the current approved trails and the BLM property boundaries. She explained that some of the yellow and green areas are partly on BLM property and subject to an environmental assessment (EA). Lynne added that she has asked the BLM cadastral surveyors to survey the BLM property lines in the area.

Kristen Comella asked about the Program Statement document. Laura read the section from page 3 regarding the Red Cliffs Desert reserve – goals and objectives. Laura asked for help in clearly defining the blue area’s function, and the area above (northerly) of the reserve boundary. Renee questioned why the blue area is even mentioned and shown on the diagram. Kristen answered that is what needs to be determined. Bob Douglas asked if there would really be any improvements in the blue area. Bob Sandberg replied that it is just an opportunity to view wildlife and plant life in its natural setting. Ann suggested an improved interpretive trail in the yellow and green areas. The members discussed a potential 10,000 sq. ft. HCP administrative building in the red zone. The members further discussed various ideas for promoting education and awareness of tortoises and native habitat without impact to the tortoises, other wildlife and habitat.

Kristen read from the program statement the descriptions of the red, yellow, and green areas (pages 12, 13 & 14). Bob Douglas suggested removing the blue area and informing visitors that unimproved areas lay beyond the desert garden. Bob Sandberg suggested loop trails. Ann suggested small loop trails in the yellow and green areas and medium loops northerly. She explained that the botanical garden is just that, and a portal to native areas beyond. Renee expressed agreement.

Renee expressed a concern about development, loop trails and an office building. She said that if the administrative office is not going to be built in this area, then development may not be in the best interests of the tortoises and perhaps less overall development is called for. Ann reiterated her suggestion of medium-sized loop trails. Bob Douglas suggested a future option for trail development. Kristen suggested phases of development. Bob Douglas suggested a place on the drawing to show a trailhead that leads to natural habitat.

Kristen summarized the group’s feeling that the blue area should be removed and focus on the red and yellow areas. The group felt that the Reserve as a whole functions as a tortoise and wildlife observation area and no blue polygon was necessary. Lynne reminded the members that portions of the green and yellow areas are within BLM property and that an EA will be necessary – which requires time and money. Members discussed property ownership issues. An EA may be necessary for the entire project, especially if there is a federal nexus. Kristen suggested taking the green area out and adjusting the yellow area boundary line to the base of the cliff. Discussion continued with members referring to the old exhibit and the new aerial photo. Bob Sandberg and Bob Douglas talked about the garden’s objective and the HCP’s objective and how the

garden should meet both. Members discussed the characteristics again of the green and yellow areas.

Lynne said some of the area in the green area is tortoise habitat. Renee echoed that and added if it is BLM property then it is critical habitat and must be protected. Renee added that more information is necessary regarding planned development and emphasized that the Technical Committee is not throwing cold water on the project.

Kristen and the members discussed alternatives and options regarding the green and yellow areas, development, trails, and habitat preservation. Members continued to refer to the exhibits and discuss options for adjusting the red, yellow and green area boundaries. Laura explained that they are trying to identify the desert garden boundaries using the colored bubbles. The concepts of a botanical garden and a recreational park were discussed. Laura discussed the separation of the red area and Pioneer Park. Lynne was concerned about charging fees on BLM property. Laura brought up the issue of noise invasion if the outdoor educational areas and amphitheatre were too close to nearby traffic. An HCP administration building and interpretive center will also require significant parking.

Kristen discussed the high cost of developing the red area. Lynne asked about the funding sources. Laura said that Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD) had envisioned up to \$1,000,000.00 in funding and grants. Laura further talked about a land sale to accommodate permanent structures within the red area. Kristen suggested working in phases. Renee agreed that phase development was more favorable, and perhaps the phases would not be interdependent.

Lynne Scott redirected the discussion to the green area shown north of Brooks Nature Park. She has concerns about development. Bob Douglas talked about minimal development in both green areas. Renee said that critical habitat must be protected. Kristen voiced agreement. Kristen again suggested removing the eastern green area and adjusting the yellow area perimeter. The BLM property boundary must be determined so any conflicts can be identified.

Bob Sandberg reiterated what the HCAC has asked for – an evaluation of the biological impacts of the proposed desert garden. Simultaneous debates and discussions followed regarding recreation management, tortoise management, partnerships, and responsibilities.

Kristen restated the characteristics of the yellow and green areas. The eastern portion of the green area is the sticking point. Ann suggested adding habitat restoration and minimal natural trails or footpaths to the yellow area description. The green area would not have any irrigation. Clarifying the BLM property line was again discussed.

Lynne again referred to the green area north of Brooks Nature Park. She wants the area excluded from the desert garden concept plan. The original concept and scope of the desert garden was discussed and reexamined. Development of the desert garden in

phases was also re-discussed. Ann said referred to the green area north of the Owens' Loop Trail, and explained that she doesn't see any negative biological impacts by keeping the area designated green because there is already a trail, we're not adding a new trail to her understanding, and the habitat is being enhanced by removing noxious weeds. Bob Douglas talked about the eastern green area and again said that the property line needs to be defined. Ann agreed that the boundary line needs to be determined. Lynne said that BLM can only accept surveys done by their cadastral surveyors and perhaps the City of St. George could have the boundary line surveyed. She added that she has put in a request to the cadastral surveyors, but doesn't know how soon they can get to it. Ann again expressed concern about impact to tortoises if there were trails in the green area east of Pioneer Park because she had visited the area and observed fresh tortoise scat.

Members discussed the old concept plan and how the plan has evolved to the current concept plan. They reiterated that the BLM boundary still needs to be determined. The members discussed a field trip to the area.

Bob Sandberg said the boundary really doesn't make a difference, other than if BLM is involved, the development process will take longer. Lynne suggested a field trip to determine if the eastern green area should be left in or not. Renee proposed a separate description and color for the western green area (northerly of Brooks Nature Park), and different labels for yellow sub-areas.

Kristen summarized the group's agreement:

- The blue area is removed,
- The BLM property boundary needs to be determined,
- The green areas need to be reexamined and reevaluated, and
- Determine where the eastern edge of the yellow polygon should be.

Bob Sandberg suggested development in phases, staying involved in the planning process and provide clear recommendation and guidance to the HCAC. Kristen said the sticking point remains clarification of the green area. Bob Douglas asked about conducting a presence/absence survey in the area. The members discussed the merits of a survey and the tortoise population in the area and decided that a survey was not necessary at this time. Bob Douglas volunteered to conduct a presence/absence survey on his own if he felt it would be helpful.

The members agreed to conduct a field trip to the Pioneer Park area at 1:00 P.M. today.

End of Part 1 of 2 recording.

#### **4. OTHER BUSINESS**

##### **a. Bluff Street Cracks (Diagonal Street Cliffs) – Status and update**

Bob Sandberg provided a status and update of Joe Allen's proposal. The question was raised on whether or not Washington County ever adopted the boundary change moving the RCDR boundary from the top of the cliffs to the bottom. This will be researched and determined. Bob Sandberg reported that he has talked with Joe Allen, and he has emailed Kent Perkins and Bob Nicholson at the City of St. George. Laura Taylor provided feedback from her discussions with Kent Perkins and Bob Nicholson. She gave Kent's recollection of the history of this issue. According to Kent, Lori Rose had observed Peregrine falcons nesting in the area and had asked the City to implement some closures to protect the falcons. Then, UDWR became involved and decided that the City should be responsible to take action. The City didn't have the staff so they turned to the HCP and asked about moving the boundary to the bottom of the cliffs, which eventually happened. The City is hesitant to make the area a "designated climbing site" fearful of liability issues. Laura also discussed Joe Allen's original request and intent (see HCAC meeting minutes September 23, 2008).

Signage, authority to post signs, trail closure, and trespassing was discussed by the members. Previous sign posting problems, authority by the HCP to post signs and enforcement was also discussed.

The problem with trail improvement is the steepness of the terrain, erosion, stabilization, and then maintaining the difficult trail. Laura expects Joe Allen will be contacting the City of St. George soon. Kristen will likely be seeing Mr. Allen tomorrow at a Climbing Advisory Team meeting and will discuss type and location of hardware at the top of the Bluff Street Cracks (aka Diagonal Street Cliffs).

### **3. GENERAL BUSINESS (continued)**

- f. Continue development of a Fire Management Plan** for the reserve – Action items, scope of work documents and recommendation for the HCAC (January 27, 2009).

Ann McLuckie distributed a rough draft scope-of-work document (Exhibit 3-f-1 TC – 010709) for reseeding previously seeded polygons. The members were asked to provide input on this draft. It can then be refined and submitted to the HCAC along with a draft fire management plan. Ann is working on two scope-of-work documents. One for monitoring the polygons already set up (Exhibit 3-f-2 TC – 010709) and one for reseeding and monitoring polygons. Committee members will provide feedback to Ann on these projects.

- e. SR 18 widening project** – Update and status

Bob Sandberg said that he and Justin Neighbor met yesterday with Brett Jensen of Jacobs Engineering regarding the widening project. The project is going forward and will be advertised soon for a contractor. They hope to begin moving dirt in mid-March. UDOT intends to stay completely within the fenced right-of-way. The project has been

scaled back. It is only going to go from south of Twist Hollow up to the *Trails* project intersection, but not all the way. One lane will be added to the southbound side. There will be no culvert extensions inside the reserve. The fence at Buckskin Wash will have to be moved about two feet, but the fence will stay on top of the culvert.

Ann asked if they will have a biological monitor on site. Bob Sandberg said not necessarily, UDOT and the HCP will work together. Bob Sandberg added that the fence has been evaluated. Some minor repair work is required which HCP will perform and some major repairs are necessary that UDOT will take care of – hopefully before February 15. HCP will then clear the area inside of the right-of-way. Fence integrity will be maintained throughout the construction period.

**d. Technical Committee – Annual elections of Chair and Vice Chair**

Continued to next meeting.

**c. Assignment #092308B – Snow Canyon State Park improvements –**  
Coordinate with State Parks on an education facility and an expanded parking lot.

Kristen suggested a field trip to Snow Canyon State Park next meeting just to preview the sites to be discussed.

**4. OTHER BUSINESS (continued)**

**a. Turkey Farm – Status and update**

Ann said the place has really changed. Almost all of the structures have been removed, except one which is contaminated with asbestos. Appropriate permits must be obtained before the asbestos can be removed. She added that Neil Perry has developed a reseeded plan.

**b. Next meeting date(s)**

1. February 12, 2009

The next meeting will have two field trips, one to Snow Canyon State park and one to the Leeds area for the proposed sewer pipeline.

The meeting recessed at 12: 17 P.M. to reconvene at Pioneer Park at 1:15 P.M.

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The meeting resumed at 1:15 P.M. at Pioneer Park. Attending were:

Kristen Comella	Bob Douglas
Bob Sandberg	Ann McLuckie
Renee Chi	Lynne Scott

The members evaluated the habitat and terrain in the area of the proposed desert garden. They discussed the features, characteristics and optimal educational uses. The members decided to abolish the green area and alter the perimeter of the yellow area. Kristen will provide a presentation to the HCAC on January 27, 2009.

**5. ADJOURN**

There was no other business to discuss.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.