

# WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held January 13, 2011, in the Public Works conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah

Members present were:

Renee Chi, Chairperson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
Cameron Rognan, Vice Chairperson	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Absent and excused was:

Marshall Topham	Local biologist
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Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	HCP
Brad Young	HCP
Lynne Scott	BLM
Iris Picat	BLM
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	BLM

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chairperson Rognan noted 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. **December 9, 2010**

The following changes were made:

**Page 3, paragraph 6, sentence 2:** changed,

From: “Bob Sandberg noted that Level 5 impacts are the most severe and he stressed that everything else is less severe.”

To: “Bob Sandberg noted that Level 5 (the new level 4) impacts are the most severe and he stressed that everything else is less severe.”

**MOTION** by Ann McLuckie to approve the minutes as corrected.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

### 3. GENERAL BUSINESS

#### a. Finalize the Desired Future Conditions

Member McLuckie began by referring to Exhibit 3-a-1 TC – 011311 and explaining that the italicized text are her notes that may need further clarification. She also explained the tables and the values on the second page.

Important questions for the committee to resolve are, can Dr. Foti modify the HIM data into a more usable form, e.g. a spreadsheet, and are the trail intervals comparable – are they supposed to be at the same location year-to-year or random? And, if they are random, then the results must be averaged. Lynne Scott added that Dr. Foti said that the trail intervals are supposed to be the same, but the points are not GPS designated. Member McLuckie said that some of the intervals are up to 200 meters off, and if the data cannot be compared accurately then the data is of reduced value.

Member Rognan commented that he is working with Dr. Foti on getting all of the data and will be formatting it into a usable format. Also, he'll be meeting with Dr. Foti tomorrow (Friday, January 14, 2011) to acquire all of the data.

The members briefly discussed the recreation nodes table included in Lynne Scott's example faxed to the TC on December 9, 2010. The members discussed reliability and usefulness of the HIM data. The options are to try using the data or paying more, perhaps much more, for more exact and precise trail interval measurements. Member Rognan will ask Dr. Foti about using precise GPS trail interval locations.

Bob Sandberg brought up the issue of not allowing any domestic livestock in the Reserve. He explained that this may remove a tool from the tool bag of controlling vegetation and fire fuels. Members discussed and debated the issue. The language was modified to, "No unmanaged domestic livestock." This will provide a degree of management flexibility. Members agreed that equestrian use on trails does not fall into this category and will continue as is.

The committee also discussed the condition: "No tortoise mortality." This condition was modified to, "No human-induced tortoise mortality."

**MOTION** by Ann McLuckie to approve and adopt the Desired Future Conditions with the two modifications.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The approved document is included in the record as, Exhibit 3-a-1-a TC - 011311 - Approved Desired Future Conditions.docx

**b. Discuss adjusting the *Take Area* boundaries**

The members delayed discussion on this agenda item for a few minutes waiting for Chairperson Chi to join the meeting. Meanwhile Member Rognan explained that as a result of the HCP review by the Fish and Wildlife Service the HCP staff is reexamining the existing *take areas* and is trying to determine where tortoises still occur in the *take areas* and if there are additional *take areas* that should be added.

Member Rognan provided some figures regarding *take areas*. He explained that initially there were over 12,000 acres defined in the *take areas*, but that number has been reduced to 11,867 because some of the *take areas* have been included into the Reserve. Of that, approximately 7,400 acres have been surveyed or cleared. And, approximately 4,556 acres of *take areas* have been developed. Prior to the formation of the HCP about 2,584 acres were developed, leaving 1,972 acres developed after the HCP. Member Rognan added that he has tried to identify the undevelopable (steep hillsides) areas within the *take areas*. His current approximation, which is probably underestimated, is 1,036 acres.

Chairperson Chi joined the meeting at 10:07 A.M.

Member Rognan continued by distributing maps that he prepared showing the *take areas*, cleared acres, developed areas, and known tortoise habitat and populations. He further explained that there are areas outside the established *take areas* that are potential tortoise habitat with likely tortoise populations.

The members discussed Take Area 1 – Springdale. The lack of fencing the Zion National Park boundary to keep tortoises in the park was talked about. The members also talked about designating new areas as something other than a *take area*. But it was brought out that if any new areas are not designated a *take area* then there is no requirement for developers to coordinate with HCP prior to development. An amendment to the HCP may be necessary. The term, ‘Protection Area’ was discussed. The members discussed how to manage or release properties within the designated *take areas* where there are clearly no tortoises.

The discussion moved on to the Hurricane, Washington, and St. George *take areas*, and the uncoordinated development that has occurred in some of these areas. The members discussed the amount of acres that have been developed without a proper clearance. Some thought the acreage was significant while others thought it was very minimal.

The committee discussed modifying the *take areas* adjacent to the Reserve boundary to create a buffer zone with a different designation. The members agreed that developed areas within a *take area* will remain unchanged and areas within a *take area* where there are no tortoises should be released. The members also discussed undevelopable areas within a *take area* where there are, or may likely be, tortoises. The members continued to discuss reducing or expanding the existing *take areas*, adding new areas or establishing a protection buffer.

Dawna Ferris-Rowley, Iris Picat, and Lynne Scott left the meeting at 10:35 A.M.

The committee members talked about the incremental release of lands for development and the mitigation goals and objectives. The members also discussed defining 'new' tortoise areas, not as a *take area*, but as 'potential tortoise habitat', then the areas would be surveyed and a clearance completed if necessary.

The members also discussed the 'agreement' several years ago to clear only those properties adjacent to the Reserve. Bob Sandberg explained that the HCP continued to clear all properties within the *take areas* prior to development. That policy continues to the present. The committee talked about the consequences of property development in a *take area* without coordination and a clearance. They also talked about the absence of ordinances and enforcement difficulties. Research is necessary to determine what, if any, ordinances are in place concerning uncoordinated development within a designated *take area*.

Chairperson Chi summarized the areas to be considered. First is the Green Valley area. Much of the area is private property but it is known that there are tortoises present. Ideally this would be included in a *take area*. Secondly is the Sleepy Hollow area. Most of this is owned by SITLA and there is a tortoise population. This area should also be mapped and included in a *take area*. The area south of Hurricane should likewise be included in a *take area*. The Rockville area should also be included, the Gunlock area expanded, and the Hurricane Cliffs area considered. Furthermore, the undevelopable areas within *take areas* should be clearly identified and designated. And, non-tortoise habitat within a *take area* should be released or removed.

The committee stressed fair and consistent property owner treatment and protection of land owner rights. The committee also concurred with Bob Sandberg's suggestion to emphasize process education and development of clear protocols.

The members discussed adding small specific areas along the Reserve boundary where there are tortoises but the areas were not included in the original *take areas*. Fencing to keep tortoises within the Reserve was accentuated.

The members agreed that increasing the overall *take area* acreage is not problematic and is permitted in the HCP. Members discussed the process of surveying and clearing areas designated as *potential tortoise habitat*. Sensitivity to public reception of any changes was stressed.

Member Rognan agreed to create maps and shape file layers for the *take areas* as they currently exist, the proposed new *take areas*, proposed *potential tortoise habitat areas* which will be survey areas, and proposed *protection areas*. Member Rognan will also review the Reserve boundary and update the *take areas* around there. Lastly, the members discussed color codes and map characteristics to show the different areas.

**c. Annual election of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson**

Member Chi opened the floor for nominations. Member McLuckie nominated Cameron Rognan for the position of chairperson. Member Rognan nominated Tim Croissant for the position of vice chairperson. Member Comella moved that the nominations be closed. Chairperson Chi closed the nominations and called for the vote. By unanimous vote Member Rognan was elected chairperson for 2011 and Member Croissant was elected vice chairperson for 2011.

**4. OTHER BUSINESS**

**a. Fire fuel reduction**

Bob Sandberg voiced concerns regarding fire danger in the coming months and his desire to reduce fire fuels by introducing livestock. He explained that it is just an idea that needs discussion to see if there is support for pursuing.

Member McLuckie talked about Landscape Forecasting by The Nature Conservancy and the process for evaluating landscape and the habitat for improvement and restoration. The members also discussed the Mojave Desert Initiative (MDI). The Initiative has basically been discontinued because the funding source (ARRA) has been removed. Member Comella talked about green-stripping along the Turkey Farm Road (Cottonwood Road). Bob Sandberg stressed that he wants to do something – anything – to reduce fire fuels and fire danger.

Member McLuckie departed at 11:30 A.M.

The members discussed the process of introducing grazing, study areas, timing, and the long-term impacts. There is enough receptiveness of the Technical Committee for the HCP administration to proceed in researching possibilities – exclusively within the Cottonwood Road right of way. Funding the livestock grazing was briefly discussed. Member Croissant suggested paying for the grazing so as not to give the appearance of establishing grazing rights.

The committee suggested taking the issue to the HCAC. Bob will bring up the subject at the next HCAC meeting (January 25, 2011) in his administrator's report.

**b. Personnel issue**

Bob Sandberg announced that Brad Young is leaving HCP effective January 24, 2011. The members said that he'll be missed.

**5. NEXT MEETING DATES**

**a.** Thursday, February 10, 2011 at 9:30 A.M.

**b.** Tentatively March 3, 2011 at 9:30 A.M.

**6. ADJOURN**

**MOTION** by Cameron Rogan to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 A.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.