

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **June 10, 2010**, in the conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah

The views expressed at this, or any other, Technical Committee 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:

Cameron Rognan, Vice Chairperson	Washington County HCP
Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)

Absent and excused:

Renee Chi, Chairperson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
Marshall Topham	Local biologist

Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	Washington County HCP
Brad Young	Washington County HCP
Lynne Scott	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chairperson Cameron Rognan noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 11:14 A.M.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. May 6, 2010

MOTION by Ann McLuckie to postpone agenda items 2a and 3a until later in the meeting and move directly to Item 3b.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

b. Discuss limits of acceptable change (Exhibit 3-b-1)

Lynne Scott began by reviewing what was discussed last meeting regarding limits of acceptable change, involving the public, and perhaps combining the issue with the BLM's management plan development process. There was discussion about how much will be done during the management plan development and how that could interface with the Technical Committee's efforts, and if it is included in the management plan development process, how could the TC best participate.

Dawna Ferris-Rowley talked about the planning process and noted that the scoping meetings begin next week in St. George, Hurricane, Mesquite and Salt Lake City. She added that the plan is intended to have a 20-year lifespan. Dawna explained that BLM determines land use allocations based on resource management plans (RMP). RMPs are overarching and include considerations of such things as vegetation, soils, tortoise habitat, paleo and archeological resources, and recreational uses. The RMPs are developed on a vision of desirable conditions 20 years in the future.

Note: An emergency generator outside the meeting room was started for servicing. The generator noise totally drowned out the participants comments. The recorder left the meeting to have it temporarily turned off.

Dawna continued to talk about RMP development and the desired conditions and outcomes, including future recreational uses and possible utility corridors. Once the desired outcomes are clearly defined then it is determined which uses are permitted and which are not, and the limits of acceptable change are determined. Dawna further talked about no net loss of habitat and habitat rehabilitation. Dawna was clear that all resources within both NCAs (Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and Beaver Dam Slope) will be examined.

Member Comella posed two questions. First, is there room for the Technical Committee's highly focused efforts to determine and manage limits of acceptable change in the RMP development process? Dawna said that the TC could fill in holes in establishing future desirable conditions for plant life, wildlife, and all of the resources. Dawna added that the TC should consider what kind of questions will be asked, what the answers are, and what the ultimate goals are. Second, Member Comella asked if there is room for the micro-managed limits of acceptable change. From the BLM perspective, the RMP may not get to that micro level of management.

The members discussed the viability of merging or including the limits of acceptable change into the RMP development process. Dawna explained that the Land Bill specifies that the provisions of the HCP, PUP or RMP may be included in the revised RMP, but that BLM would not adopt a management plan that is inconsistent with the HCP, PUP or the Snow Canyon State Park management plan. BLM will focus on the bigger issues of the overarching goals and future desirable conditions. Dawna talked about management actions to achieve the desired future conditions, and asked, when is recreation use too much?

Member Rognan talked about no net loss of habitat and where to set the habitat impact level. Lynne Scott noted that managing for no net loss of habitat may be overwhelming and added that the TC members are trying to do something with all of the human impact monitoring data.

Member Comella asked again how the TC's efforts on setting limits of acceptable change and managing for no net loss can be folded in to the RMP development process. Dawna responded by talking about the current RMP, what the future RMP may look like, and how to justify management actions, e.g., closing trails. She added that the justification must be directed towards the conservation, preservation or enhancement of the habitat. Lynne added that the monitoring data seems to show a loss of habitat, the question is, what to do about it? Enforcement of the existing use regulations was discussed.

Bob Sandberg commented that the information must be taken and then something done in a positive manner. Bob talked about designated trails and keeping the recreational use on the designated trails and not double trails or other unofficial routes. Bob stressed that we should not wait two years until the NCA management plan is finished. It is necessary to determine now what can and cannot be tolerated, and it must be based on good science.

Dawna commented that the TC is on the right track in refining what is a usable trail and defining the visitor's expected experience. The members discussed small impacts that add up to significant loss of habitat.

Member Rognan suggested that the management actions taken so far be evaluated for effectiveness and review the impact monitoring data to support future recreation management actions. Member McLuckie talked about long term trends of the human impacts including increase of off trail use. She also suggested piggy-backing on the scoping process and adding detail as necessary.

The committee members further discussed how to best include intense habitat protection with the overarching management plan development, and include lowland zone and upland zone management and all other resources, e.g., archeological, cultural, etc. Bob Sandberg noted that the TC's recommendations must fit under the umbrella of the BLM management plan.

Dawna suggested reviewing what incremental level of management has been successful, and the possibility of multiple use trails or different trails for different users. She explained that hikers, mountain bikers and equestrian users all prefer different terrain. Member McLuckie noted that multiple use trails reduce the impact on the habitat. Lynne Scott pointed out the different users will create braided trails to suit their preference. Member McLuckie said that education and signage can help reduce that. Bob Sandberg talked about the reality of multiple use trails that will result in trail braiding or separate use trails. Lynne Scott said that management actions must be based on documented impact data. The members discussed designating certain trails for certain users.

Member Comella talked about doing two separate processes; the management plan development and the Technical Committee setting limits of acceptable change and perhaps finding a way to fund a facilitator.

The members discussed enforcement and jurisdiction. Questions were posed about enforcement of different ordinances and rules by different law enforcement jurisdictions. Members talked about how to achieve compliance - step-by-step using outreach, education, signs, trail stewards and enforcement officers.

Dawna talked about the reality of some areas where some habitat sacrifice is acceptable – within limits, and areas where the habitat is so sensitive that no loss can be tolerated.

The committee members talked about how to set limits of acceptable change and meld that into the BLM management development plan. The major issues include different land owners, different processes, and different users and visitor expectations.

Member Comella expressed support for a stand-alone document; Dawna Ferris-Rowley suggested a technical report from the committee. Lynne Scott talked about an activity-level plan that will dovetail with the overarching management plan. Dawna discussed involving groups such as the Citizens for Dixie's Future.

The BLM will be the primary agency drafting the limits of acceptable change document while the Technical Committee will provide technical support and recommendations. Member Rognan suggested providing technical data to BLM on desert tortoises and tortoise habitat protection and preservation. Lynne suggested that the TC provide a product – a report – because each member has their own view and their own job. The members discussed the Technical Committee being the point person. The members continued to discuss a collaborative process on habitat-based technical recommendations. Dawna talked about the management plan development process and Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and including an adaptive management suite.

The members discussed prioritizing general areas, such as the Lowland Zone or high-density/low-density tortoise population areas, and focus on those areas as opposed to Reserve-wide intensive recreation management. Member McLuckie stated that low-density areas are as important as high-density areas because density changes over time and low-density areas often have healthier tortoise populations. Her point is that they are equally important and we shouldn't assume one is better than the other. The human impact data gathered by NAU was also discussed. Questions such as, are the right questions being asked, and is the data being gathered correctly, were discussed. Bob Sandberg talked about the progress made so far by the Technical Committee.

Dawna Ferris-Rowley stressed that any product provided to BLM by the TC welcome. She added that the committee should include such things as trail corridor limits, seasonal closure recommendations and justifications, and impact monitoring suggestions. Tortoise monitoring in the Beaver Dam Slope area was briefly discussed.

At 12:40 P.M. the committee recessed for lunch until 1:30 P.M.

At 1:39 P.M. the meeting resumed. Attending were Cameron Rognan, Tim Croissant, Ann McLuckie, Kristen Comella, Bob Sandberg, Lynne Scott, and Brad Young.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to amend the agenda to discuss the items in the following order: 3a, 3d, 3c, 3e, 4a, 4b, 4c, and then 2a.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. a. Trail evaluation – Assignment #122909

1. Discuss the results of the field trip to the Prospector trail (Exhibit 3-a-1-a)

Participating in the field trip were Tim Croissant, Ann McLuckie, Cameron Rognan, Kristen Comella, Bob Sandberg, Drew Mills, Lynne Scott and Dawna Ferris-Rowley.

Member Rogan began by saying that he'll go out next week and make the modifications that were talked about during the field trip.

Lynne Scott suggested that the members discuss the issues in the order that they were encountered during the field trip.

The members began their discussion by talking about a single-track trail off of the main trail from the Cottonwood TH. After several minutes of discussion the members agreed that one of the trails should be closed and that it should be the small trail on the west side. It will be closed by placing closure signs and then reevaluated in the fall. The members also discussed two other unauthorized trails. They will likewise be closed by posting closure signs. Another unauthorized trail in a small drainage was discussed; the members agreed to leave this one as is. The committee members continued to discuss signing unauthorized trails – particularly in the area of the Red Reef trail junction.

Member McLuckie talked about the HCAC field trip to the Toe trail (May 25, 2010) and their discussion about adding or modifying signage. Member Comella volunteered to work with Judy Gubler's staff (Benny Sorensen) on taking care of the issues. Member McLuckie also suggested including a note in the Ivins City monthly newsletter regarding authorized recreational uses. Member Comella said that she would also take care of it.

Lastly, the members agreed to suspend additional field trips until cooler weather.

Lynne Scott left the meeting at 2:02 P.M.

d. 2011 budget planning (Exhibit 3-d-1)

Member Comella began by asking how many law enforcement hours might be bought with \$90,000 and suggested that much money could fund a full-time officer for the Reserve and have funds left over for deputy sheriff patrols. The members discussed the merits and disadvantages of having one dedicated officer or paying overtime for sheriff's patrols and mileage.

The members talked about Confluence Park and Other Species funding, and the benefits of getting the proposed irrigation line installed at Confluence Park and the fields developed for agricultural use. The members favor the proposed project, but were uncertain about the amount of funds to recommend.

Member McLuckie talked about the potential for carrying money over from one fiscal year to another regarding tortoise necropsies.

The education center fund (23-4149-742) was discussed, and that the HCAC had asked that the funds be available for developing infrastructure for a possible future interpretive center near the Red Hills Parkway at Pioneer Park.

The committee members talked about fencing and clearances. Member Comella asked about fencing the east boundary of the state park northward from *The Ledges* to the north state park entrance, and the east side of SR 18 north of Winchester Hills.

HCP staff will provide a proposed budget at the July meeting so a recommendation can be developed for the July HCAC meeting.

c. Gila monster update and sightings information form (Exhibit 3-c-1)

Member McLuckie said that the Gila monster pamphlet will be modified by adding a sticker on the back with the new UDWR St. George Field Office phone number.

The members discussed the Gila monster sighting report form. Member Comella suggested removing some of the wording in the opening statement of the insert. She also suggested that the observation form also be printed on a card stock so it can be used as a standalone rack card. Putting the form on the RCDR and UDWR websites was also discussed. UDWR will be the reception point for the reported observation information.

e. Proposed Cottonwood fence (Exhibit 3-e-1)

Member Croissant began by referring to Exhibit 3-e-1. He explained that the proposed fence will extend from the water tank to the north Reserve boundary. There was a meeting yesterday with the power companies, BLM, county HCP, and UDWR. It was decided that the old tortoise mesh will be replaced with the new tortoise mesh from the water tank to the substation. The new and replacement fencing will amount to approximately 4,500 feet on each side of Cottonwood Road.

Bob Sandberg asked about the priority sections to be fenced, and if it is known how far the funds will go. Member Croissant explained that BLM will request quotes for the fencing by the linear foot, corners, gates, etc. and then they'll be able to determine how far the funds will go. Bob Sandberg suggested stopping the fencing at Yellow Knolls or a little north of there to benefit the deer.

Member Croissant noted that the Environmental Assessment is still in progress.

The members discussed relocating a stepover northward near the Turkey Farm Road intersection. Member McLuckie suggested an on-the-ground inspection to evaluate the possible stepover relocation site.

The Cottonwood Road fencing project will be a future agenda item as the project progresses.

Bob Sandberg left the meeting at 2:46 P.M.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Systematic clearances – update

Member McLuckie said that more than 1,100 acres in north Washington were cleared. A full report will be included in the 2nd Quarter report. She added that the clearance efforts will focus on the Hurricane area in the fall.

b. Map update / schedule

Member Rognan said that the map contractors were waiting on some information from BLM. He added that he's going to try to get the GPS locations of all of the stepovers and provide that data to BLM for the map.

c. Next meeting date

Member McLuckie asked that members consider moving the meeting date to July 1. Consideration was given and the next meeting was set for Thursday, July 1 beginning at 9:30 A.M.

A possible agenda item will be the relocation of the stepover near the Turkey Farm Road intersection.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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The following changes were made:

(page 6, paragraph 4, sentence 1): change,

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To: “Member Croissant reported that BLM is proposing to extend the fencing northwards from the water tank to the National Forest boundary.”

(page 6, paragraph 4, sentence 2): change,

From: “The fence will be range fence with tortoise mesh.”

To: “The proposed fence will be range fence with tortoise mesh.”

<p><u>MOTION</u> by Kristen Comella to approve the minutes of May 6, 2010, as amended. <u>Seconded</u> by Tim Croissant. <u>Discussion</u>: None. <u>Vote was taken</u>: All voted aye. <u>Motion passed</u>.</p>
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5. ADJOURN

Vice Chairman Rognan adjourned the meeting at 3:02 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.

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3. a. Trail evaluation – Assignment #122909

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Minutes prepared by Brad Young.