

## WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **JULY 7, 2009**, 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:

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

Also present was:

Brad Young	HCP
Lynne Scott	BLM
Dave Kiel	BLM
Vicki Tyler	BLM
Dr. Pam Foti	Northern Arizona University (NAU) via conference phone

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

Chairperson Ann McLuckie noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 9:36 A.M.

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

a. June 11, 2009

The following changes were made:

**(page 3, paragraph 4, sentence 16):**

From: "A revised draft of the Scope of Work Plan will be prepared for the HCAC."

To: "A draft of the Scope of Work Plan will be prepared for the HCAC."

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

From: “Use of this route will chiefly be limited by the seasonal closure – March 15 through October 31.”

To: “If approved, use of this route will chiefly be limited by the seasonal closure – March 15 through October 31.”

**(page 4, paragraph 4, sentence 3):** changed,

From: “~~The routes and the activity need to be legitimized and controlled because there is evidence that it is already occurring, and has been occurring for considerable time.~~”

To: “The routes and the activity have been occurring for considerable time, and either needs to be legitimized and controlled or removed entirely.”

**MOTION** by Kristen Comella to approve the minutes of June 11, 2009 with the changes and corrections.

Seconded by Bob Sandberg.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

### **3. GENERAL BUSINESS**

- a. Continue development of the Habitat Management Plan and scope of work projects.

Member McLuckie distributed a draft Scope of Work: Green Stripping document. It is a four-page document identified as Exhibit 3-a-1 TC – 070709. Member McLuckie talked about a meeting held last Monday (June 29, 2009) with Vicki Tyler (BLM) and Ryan Shakespeare (BLM). At that meeting Member McLuckie presented a green stripping proposal, and Vicki suggested to Member McLuckie that the green strips be up to 50 meters wide, which is wider than the proposed eight (8) meters in width.

The committee members discussed the Environmental Assessment (EA) necessary for the project. The EA will be managed by BLM and will include green stripping, restoring/creating islands of vegetation, and research/monitoring. The EA will be written to include projects in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and on the Beaver Dam Slope. The members talked about including a variable green strip width of between 50’ and 400’, depending on terrain and existing vegetation, in the EA. This will provide enough flexibility to accomplish the objectives and address any issues.

The members also talked about the next meeting with BLM staff. That meeting will be on July 9, 2009. Members McLuckie, Sandberg and Douglas will attend. Ronald Bolander (BLM) will also be there.

The discussion was briefly interrupted by agenda item 3 b.

**b. Discuss human impact and limits of acceptable change.**

A conference call was made to Dr. Foti at 9:58 A.M. The Technical Committee members introduced themselves, as well as Lynne Scott and Dave Kiel.

Dr. Foti talked about the trail monitoring process and the forms used for human impact monitoring within the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. Dr. Foti referred to the 42-page report distributed to the committee members. The report is identified as Exhibit 3-b-1 TC – 070709. Dr. Foti also explained how the actual trail monitoring is conducted. The students first evaluate the trail head and then the trail. They stop at ½-mile intervals on the trail and at ‘rec nodes’ (recreation nodes are rest stops, overlooks and picnic sites). Dr. Foti noted that the recent fencing additions in the Paradise Canyon area seem to be working very well at reducing off-trail impacts (OTI).

Member McLuckie asked about the significant OTI reduction from 2008 to 2009 (shown on page 1 of the exhibit). Dr. Foti explained that there are two primary reasons. The first reason is the reduced impact on the Paradise Rim Trail. The second reason is the way in which the OTI was counted on the Toe Trail. Dr. Foti added that the Toe Trail is especially impacted by the local residents and not every OTI was recorded, only the significant ones. Lynne Scott stressed that including all OTI is important in order to compare apples to apples from year to year. Dr. Foti said that her data of the Little Purgatory trail, the Mustang Pass trail and the Church Rocks trail may be incomplete, and she needs some information on the Turkey Farm trail and the Petrified Dunes trail for next year’s monitoring.

Dr. Foti talked about each page of the exhibit and how the data is gathered and reported. She also talked about general trends. She expressed confidence in the data because of consistency in the monitoring, and that overall, it appears that visitation to the Reserve is increasing.

The members asked about the next step to determine limits of acceptable use. Dr. Foti explained that a form needs to be created that sets a standard to gauge limits of acceptable use. The data gathered using this form will be included in the database. Additional database costs will be incurred and a bill from Tim Carley (dba Recfusion) can be expected.

The committee members asked about off-trail class 4 and 5 impacts, and which trails are being impacted the most. The members also talked about different methods to control OTI. Lynne Scott talked about signage at all entry points. Dr. Foti said that many users surveyed by the students claimed that they were not aware that they were within the Reserve. The members asked for a table showing the class 4 and 5 OTI with GPS coordinates. Dr. Foti will provide the requested information. The members asked about possible ideas for setting the standards. Dr. Foti will compose some ideas and have suggestions ready for the September 10<sup>th</sup> Technical Committee meeting.

The members discussed prioritizing problem areas – specifically the locations of the class 4 and 5 OTI. Prioritization of actions will be an agenda item for the next meeting.

- c. Discuss and develop a budget recommendation for the HCAC – Assignment #040709 (Exhibit 3-c-1TC – 070709).

The committee members referred to Exhibit 3-c-1 TC – 070709 and discussed budget issues – particularly fencing gaps and adding tortoise mesh to existing fence where necessary. Member Sandberg reported on the fencing projects recently completed and those currently in progress. Member McLuckie commented that the fence along Cottonwood Road is inconsistent and in some places inadequate. Discussion ensued relative to how expensive this would be.

The members discussed various line items shown on the exhibit. Member McLuckie talked about line item #713 and explained that there is a tortoise (#0581) showing signs of advanced shell disease. She has communicated with Dr. Kristen Berry and Dr. Mary Brown regarding this particular tortoise and they have suggested that this specimen be necropsied. Necropsies can be expensive, and may be necessary on one or more tortoises. Member McLuckie also talked about two tortoises that show signs of having Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URDT). These tortoises were removed from Zone 4 and relocated to the TCF where they are awaiting additional blood testing.

The members also talked about the interpretive/education center at Pioneer Park - line item #742. There is uncertainty if a center will be built there. The unknown factors include the NCA status, a joint building with BLM and Beaver Dam Slope NCA staff, and perhaps partnering with the BLM Arizona staff and/or the U.S. Forest Service.

<p><b><u>MOTION</u></b> by Kristen Comella to approve the budget as outlined. <u>Seconded</u> by Bob Sandberg. <u>Discussion</u>: None. <u>Vote was taken</u>: All voted aye. <u>Motion passed</u>.</p>
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The meeting recessed for a lunch break at 12:05 P.M.

The meeting resumed at 1:28 P.M. and is recorded as TC 07-07-09 - Part 2. All members were present.

The committee members continued discussing agenda item 3 a – habitat management and green stripping. Vicki Tyler joined the group. Member Douglas displayed a large map of the Reserve showing some of the twelve proposed habitat restoration and rehabilitation islands of vegetation. These polygons are based on soil types and could be up to 20 acres in size. The members discussed prioritizing which areas to do first. Some of the proposed sites are on SITLA lands and the State of Utah must be involved. Benefiting the Mojave desert tortoise was emphasized. The Agriculture Research Service (ARS) will be involved with research plots within the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and the Beaver Dam Slope, and perhaps in Nevada and Arizona as well. The members discussed planning specifically enough to meet the needs of an EA, yet general enough to provide mobility and discretion in accomplishing the objectives.

Various ground disturbance methods and minimizing negative impacts to tortoises and habitat were discussed by the members. Vicki suggested considering green strips in areas other than just Zone 3. Various areas in Zones 1, 2, 4 and 5 were evaluated, such as the Babylon Road, Snow Canyon Road, the Hurricane Cinder Knolls and Red Mountain. Some were dismissed while others may merit reevaluation. Funding sources, plant species and brown stripping were also briefly discussed. The term 'annual stripping' was adopted to mean the application of Plateau<sup>®</sup> as a pre-emergent that does not affect existing plant life. Green stripping along Cottonwood Road and the Mill Creek Road, along the rims of Broken Mesa and Diamond Valley Mesa (Lava Ridge) was discussed.

Member Comella talked about roadside treatments along I-15, Red Cliffs Recreation Area Road, Cottonwood Road, Red Hills Parkway, SR 18, and Tuacahn Drive. The members discussed fuel breaks – whether it is green stripping, brown stripping, annual stripping or vegetation removal. Tamarisk removal from City Creek, Halfway Wash and Sand Hollow Wash was also talked about.

Vicki Tyler used the white board to put up ideas and strategies in an EA development. She also offered suggestions on how to manage issues through proposing alternatives and mandating stipulations. The next meeting to discuss some of these issues will be on July 9, 2009.

Lastly, Member Douglas said the Initial Fire Attack map is nearly complete and will be ready for distribution by himself and Member Sandberg.

**d. Zone 5 Virtual Learning Project – Dan Zaleski, Hurricane Elementary School**

Member Sandberg talked about Dan Zaleski's proposal to conduct field trips into the Reserve and to create a virtual learning project. Member Topham suggested that Mr. Zaleski submit a plan detailing what his objective is and how he proposes to accomplish it. The committee members agreed. Member Sandberg will recontact Mr. Zaleski and request the necessary information.

**e. Desert Garden and Interpretive/Education Center at Pioneer Park.**

Member McLuckie talked about the latest botanical garden concept plan (see Exhibit 5-e-5-a HCAC – 062309) and noted that the 'natural trails' are still shown northerly of the Social Garden Area. She suggested sending a more formalized recommendation to the planners and emphasize that the trails be removed from the plan. Member Sandberg will stress to Laura Taylor (City of Saint George Parks Planner) the Technical Committee's recommendation concerning tortoise and habitat protection. The next concept planning meeting is scheduled for July 16 at 3:30 P.M.

The committee members discussed the concept planners' desire to have a loop trail instead of a single two-way trail. Member McLuckie suggested an alternative route. The members debated whether or not another field trip to Pioneer Park is necessary.

Member Sandberg informed the members of the City of Saint George's intent to remove the communications towers at the overlook shown on the exhibit (Exhibit 5-e-5-a HCAC – 062309). The 'movie screen' is still owned and operated by Qwest and is not included in the removal plan.

The committee members agreed that HCP Administration should coordinate with the City of Saint George in the removal of the communications towers and structures and that the Utility Development Protocols be followed.

- f. Canyoneering in Snow Canyon State Park – discuss a field trip for August 13 or September 10.

Member Comella recommended at the members meet for a field trip on the morning of the next Technical Committee meeting (August 20, 2009). The objective is to survey the approach to the proposed Island in the Sky route. The field trip will take about 90 minutes. The members agreed to meet at 9:30 A.M. at the Johnson Canyon parking lot.

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

- a. SR 18 widening project – status (Bob Sandberg)

Member Sandberg informed the committee members that Sunroc intends to begin work on or about July 13. Tortoise Awareness Training has been rescheduled from July 3 to July 10.

- b. Red Butte – Saint George power line upgrade – status (Bob Sandberg)

Member Sandberg informed the committee members that Renee Chi, Justin Neighbor, Greg Brown (JBR) and he inspected some of the power pole sites to be replaced. The inspection was early this morning. PacifiCorp will apply to the USF&WS for an amended Biological Opinion. Members Chi and Douglas will coordinate and document the proposed amendment.

Member Chi talked about the sensitive habitat and timing the construction work during the inactive season for at least the ten most southern power poles. Work not done during the inactive season will require that the ingress/egress route be staked, a monitor with each piece of moving equipment and protective fences around the power pole work sites.

Member McLuckie noted the JBR Environmental does not have a current state permit to handle tortoises. She will email JBR and remind them of the requirement.

- c. Next meeting date.

The next TC meeting was set for Tuesday, August 20, 2009. The meeting will begin with a field trip in Snow Canyon State Park beginning at 9:30 A.M. The members will assemble at the Johnson Canyon parking lot.

The regular meeting will commence after the field trip. The regular meeting will be held in the Washington County Administration conference room, 197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah.

**d. Reseeding results.**

Vicki Tyler distributed a spreadsheet showing the results of reseeded efforts. She composed the spreadsheet from field notes provided by Joe Jensen (BLM Cedar City).

The members also discussed another handout distributed by Ms. Tyler. This handout is an update of the Kolob Fire Treatment prepared by Cheryl Decker (Zion National Park).

There was an additional brief discussion about the Beaver Dam Slope restoration plots. Member Douglas used a map to show soil types, terrain and plot locations.

**5. ADJOURN**

There was no other business to discuss.

Member Comella departed at 3:05 P.M.

Member Topham departed at 3:35 P.M.

A quorum existed until the meeting adjourned at 3:45 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.