

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held September 9, 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:

Renee Chi, Chairperson	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
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 was:

Marshall Topham	Local biologist
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Also present were:

Brad Young	HCP
Tom Webster	HCP

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Chi noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 11:08 A.M.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. **August 19, 2010**

The following changes were made:

Page 7, paragraph 6, sentence 3: new sentence,

Add: "The members agreed that plant and soil data is lacking and should be a necessary component."

Page 8, paragraph 8, sentence 1: changed,

From: “A multiplication system was discussed.”

To: “A multiplication system similar to the MOG model was discussed.”

MOTION by Ann McLuckie to approve the minutes with the recommended changes.
Seconded by Kristen Comella.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Discuss the results of the field trip to the Red Hills Parkway

The Technical Committee meeting began at 8:00 A.M. with the members meeting at the Pioneer Hills trailhead for a field trip. Those attending the field trip were: Renee Chi, Ann McLuckie, Kristen Comella, Tim Croissant, and Cameron Rognan. Also attending were Zac Koceja from St. George City and Phil Giles from Creamer and Noble. The members used Exhibits 3-a-1, 2, 3, and 4 to facilitate the field trip and their discussion.

The field trip began with the members leaving the Pioneer Hills trailhead parking lot and proceeding northerly on a proposed trail route to the pedestrian underpass. The members crossed under Red Hills Parkway and continued south and westerly on another proposed route to connect with the City Creek trail.

Member McLuckie talked about two options for a trail from the Pioneer Hills trailhead to the pedestrian underpass. Option #1 is to leave from the northeast corner of the lot and proceed NNW, and Option #2 is to leave the northwest corner of the lot and proceed north along the west side of the Reserve fence inside the road right of way. Member McLuckie talked about a Technical Committee meeting several years ago, and at that time the TC decided that the route inside the right of way was the preferred route because it had the least impact to tortoise habitat.

The members discussed tortoise habitat disturbance and tortoise encounters. The route inside the right of way may have a lesser impact on the habitat, but tortoises are often observed near and along a fence line. The committee members also discussed a signature (post and rail) fence along the Option #1 route to keep users on the designated trail. They also talked about property ownership near the Pioneer Hills trailhead parking lot and northerly along the right of way. The committee is waiting on additional information, such as property ownership, that may determine trail maintenance responsibility, before making a recommendation.

The members' field trip continued through the pedestrian underpass and then turned south on the proposed bike path route, and then westerly in an attempt to determine the

best route to connect with the City Creek trail. The members prefer that previously disturbed areas be used for the connection route. Member Comella talked about making trails user friendly that will be less-confusing, and keep users on the designated trails. The members used a RCDR trail map and Exhibits 3-a-1, 2, 3, and 4, provided by Creamer and Noble, to facilitate their discussion.

The field trip also included visits to Brook's Nature trail, the Owen's Loop trail, and the City Creek trail. The members discussed options and alternatives to connect to the City Creek and Owen's Loop trails from the Pioneer Hills trailhead and from the Pioneer Park and Brook's Nature Park areas. The members talked about current unlawful access points (one in particular right off of Red Hills Parkway between the Brook's Nature Park and the Owens Loop trail), approved access points, current and possible future parking areas, and most of all minimizing habitat impact. There was not a consensus on a connecting route from the pedestrian underpass to the City Creek and Owen's Loop trails. They did agree that Lynne Scott's input would be valuable.

The members discussed the options of making one comprehensive recommendation or making piecemeal recommendations as information is acquired and alternative selected. A clear decision was not made. The members did agree that the connection to the City Creek and Owen's Loop trail would not use the proposed power line route.

The field trip also included the Rusty Cliffs trail. The committee talked about the connection between the Rusty Cliffs trail and the City Creek trail. Due to the grade and the terrain, the connection will have to be made by proceeding southeasterly from the underpass on the paved bike path and then onto an existing old roadbed to the City Creek trail. The pedestrian culvert on the south portion of the Red Hills Parkway will have to be cut into the hillside. The City staff will work in conjunction with the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve staff on these connections. The members further suggested that the City be asked about cleaning up of some old debris to improve the user experience and visual appearance of the area.

The members went on to talk about two different access points, without stepovers, that are very near the bike path. The majority of the members agreed not to put in stepovers at this time but instead will monitor the sites to determine if users are accessing the areas. Members were concerned about drivers seeing a signed access point and then parking illegally and crossing the busy roadway to get to the access point. Again, the members agreed that Lynne Scott's input would be important. The committee members discussed illegal parking near the start of several illegal trails. Closing the access point between Brook's Nature Park and Owen's Loop trail is important to provide a safe parking area and encourage access to designated trails. Furthermore, additional access points require additional signage and education of the users on rules when using the Reserve. Input from Lynne Scott is necessary on these issues.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to continue this agenda item to the next meeting when Lynne Scott can attend and when additional maps can be acquired from Phil Giles of Creamer and Noble.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

b. Discuss limits of acceptable change

The committee began by resuming the discussion on **Step 4** – Inventory Existing Resource and Social Conditions. Member Chi reminded the group where they had left off last meeting – briefly discussing a MOG-type multiplication system to weight the human-caused impact to the habitat. Some committee members had researched the subject but were unable to find an existing model that fit the committee’s needs. The members talked about ‘opportunity classes’ and how to classify them; they considered zones based on elevation, geography and tortoise population density. Member Rognan advocated a simple approach and suggested categories of tortoise habitat/non-tortoise habitat.

A modified MOG-type equation was talked about. Also, members talked about resource goals and recreation goals, and designating habitat as tortoise or not tortoise and weighting critical habitat with a higher score – an impact would then result in a management action. The members also considered off trail use in the Upland Zone and off trail hunting in the Lowland Zone. Weighting impacts in the wilderness areas, considering quality user experience, was also discussed. The members considered several ideas on how to specify standards and resource indicators.

The members considered setting a work meeting in December dedicated only to setting limits of acceptable change. Member Rognan suggested that the committee begin working off of previous LAC documents. Member Rognan had two documents that will be shared with the committee members. These two documents were later labeled Exhibit 3-a-1 and 3-a-2 TC – 090910. Member Rognan further suggested that someone simply provide a starting point document from which the members can begin to revise and improve.

The members agreed to begin with a starting document and share it with the other members as improvements and revisions are added.

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to continue this agenda item to a dedicated meeting in December.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Zone 4 URDT and necropsies update

Member McLuckie provided background information on the research project. She said that last year there were two tortoises (#0323 & #0063) collected from Zone 4 but both died at the TCF before they could be shipped to Dr. John Roberts at the Thompson Bishop Sparks Diagnostics Laboratory. Because the animals had died and were frozen, Dr. Roberts was unable to perform necropsies. However, he was able to do a couple of tests. Member McLuckie explained that on September 1st, several UDWR staff and Member Rognan went to Zone 4 to look for tortoises. They found six – two females and four males. They collected three of the six – two males and one female. 50% of the tortoises observed were sick and 50% were healthy. A fourth tortoise was collected approximately two weeks earlier. Three of the four have been shipped live to Dr. Roberts; the fourth is waiting on a shipping container. Additionally, a fifth tortoise was collected from Zone 3, and she would like to collect one more. That would be a total of six tortoises in 2010 in addition to the two that died last year and were shipped to Dr. Roberts.

Member McLuckie added that because so many tortoises are ill there may be a die-off. She talked about a threshold point where so many tortoises are ill that the die-off begins. Member Rognan noted that hatchlings have been observed in Zone 4, so reproduction is occurring. Member Rognan also noted that one of the tortoises collected from Zone 4, the one that was the most emaciated, was unmarked. The members briefly discussed the tortoise population in Zone 4.

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

b. Discuss a future field trip

The committee members discussed options for a field trip. They chose to begin the regular meeting at 9:00 A.M. on October 7, 2010, and then conduct a field trip to Zone 4.

c. TC membership

Member Chi noted that she may be assigned additional or other duties for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and that she may be transitioning out of the Technical Committee. She added that the Service may station a biologist in southern Utah for the Utah prairie dog and other issues.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

a. Thursday, October 7, 2010 beginning at 9:00 A.M.

b. Thursday, November 18, 2010 beginning at 9:30 A.M.

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by Ann McLuckie to adjourn the meeting.
Seconded by Cameron Rognan.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:59 P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.