

## WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held December 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	Wash Co Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
Marshall Topham	Local biologist
Lynne Scott	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Absent and excused was:

Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
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Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	HCP
Brad Young	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 9:38 A.M.

### 2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

#### a. **November 18, 2010**

The following changes were made:

**Page 2, General Business paragraph 2, sentence 5:** changed,

From: "Member McLuckie noted that the natural substrate bottom in the Tuacahn Road culverts was used more than the corrugated metal bottom."

To: "Member McLuckie noted that from previous monitoring it was observed that the natural substrate bottom in the Tuacahn Road culverts was used more than the corrugated metal bottom."

**Page 4, paragraph 2, sentence 2:** changed,

From: “She added that clearances and surveys will often be incomplete because ~~hatchlings~~ are missed; consequently the number of *take* tortoises will be less than the actual because of the ~~hatchlings~~ not seen.”

To: “She added that clearances and surveys will often be incomplete because juveniles and immatures are missed; consequently the number of *take* tortoises will be less than the actual because of the juveniles and immatures not seen.”

**Page 5, Other Business paragraph 1, sentence 4:** changed,

From: “There will be minimal disturbance and the anticipated *take* is less than the *incidental take*.”

To: “There will be minimal disturbance and the anticipated *take* is less than the *incidental take*, and there is no anticipated *take*.”

**MOTION** by Cameron Rognan to approve the minutes with the recommended changes.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

**3. GENERAL BUSINESS**

**a. Discuss Limits of Acceptable Change**

Member Chi began by saying that the issue has gone beyond simply setting limits of acceptable change (LAC) but rather it is addressing and assessing recreational use impacts within the Reserve. Member Chi referred to Exhibit 3-a-1 TC – 120910 and explained that the TC needs to come up with their own approach to evaluating impacts and recommending management actions.

Member Chi said she made contact with Robbie McAboy, the Lead Outdoor Recreation Planner at Sloan Canyon NCA (BLM Southern Nevada District Office) located south of Henderson, NV. Member Chi explained that according to Robbie the main focus of the Sloan Canyon NCA is the protection of cultural resources and that exceeding a protection threshold initiates a management action. Member Chi further explained that the Sloan Canyon RMP may be more useful to BLM in creating a resource management plan for the RCNCA and the Beaver Dam Wash NCA; the basic concepts of the Sloan Canyon RMP may be of some use to the TC. Member Chi added that a field trip to Sloan Canyon may not be productive, but inviting Robbie to a TC meeting may be beneficial.

Member Chi referred again to Exhibit 3-a-1 and suggested using it as a starting point to evaluate and distinguish trails and habitat. She added that it may be useful in comparing and contrasting impacts across trails and the area that each trail is within. Lynne Scott talked about impacts and their cumulative effects. Member Chi commented that field trips may be necessary to fully evaluate impacts and to set values.

Member Comella joined the meeting at 10:05 A.M.

Member Rognan supported retaining some degree of flexibility; he suggested that crossing a threshold should at least trigger a more intensive evaluation and not necessarily a management action. The members discussed the merits of this idea, and continued discussing Exhibit 3-a-1.

Lynne Scott commented that setting limits of acceptable change may not be the most correct tool at this time; more appropriately may be a discussion on *desired future conditions*. The members generally agreed with this. Member Chi emphasized that there is a two-fold objective – tortoise protection is first and maintaining visitor experience is second.

Lynne stressed the importance of tying a quantitative evaluation to the (HIM) data, and if the data being collected isn't correct, then change the data being collected or the collection method. She added that Exhibit 3-a-1 does not necessarily incorporate the data. The members continued to discuss the exhibit and the data.

The discussion regarding the HIM data led to talking about the impacts and the impact levels. Bob Sandberg noted that Level 5 (the new level 4) impacts are the most severe and he stressed that everything else is less severe. Lynne Scott talked about the cumulative impacts and that by adding the cumulative points the score reflects the overall trail condition. Member McLuckie suggested factoring in tortoise habitat and applying a higher value to those impacts. The members discussed the recreation impacts, cumulative impacts, tortoise and habitat protection, and maintaining quality visitor experience; the other elements to factor in are long term plant monitoring, distance sampling (transects), and overall tortoise population monitoring. Bob Sandberg articulated the difficulties in acquiring reliable long term plant species trends.

The members continued discussing the implications of factoring in overall tortoise population trends and long term plant life trends. Lynne stressed the importance of understanding the desired future conditions and how recreation impacts affect those future conditions. Bob pointed out the problems with incorporating plant species monitoring into recreational impacts – especially when there is no current monitoring program.

Member Comella referred to Exhibit 3-c-3 TC - 081910 and talked about changing the term *Variables* to *Indicators* and assigning values, and asked what the values should be. She added that by assigning values to the indicators this would tie the overall recreation impact score back to the HIM data. The members discussed the defensibility of recommending management actions based on a quantitative and objective process.

Openness, transparency, and public involvement were emphasized; and establishing a non-subjective process was stressed.

Bob Sandberg suggested multiplying the factor values instead of adding them. Multiplying provides a broader range or spread to evaluate. The actual range of scores may not be known until the formula is tested. The members discussed weighting the factor values. Weighting critical tortoise habitat was suggested; weighting different zones within the Reserve was also considered. Member Rognan suggested using subzones to weight the factors. Area management by cumulative impact was generally agreed upon. The Paradise Canyon area was discussed as an example of why or why not a weighted factor value should be used.

The members discussed tying a recommended management action to a range of a formula result, and how the public may react to a management action taken. The process of progressive discipline was talked about. Not all committee members agreed with recommending a specific management action based on a formula result. Lynne advocated not using the NAU trail summary because a summary is qualitative and not necessarily quantitative.

Exhibit 3-c-3 TC – 081910 was further discussed. The members chose to focus on biological and resource goals and not recreation (visitor experience) goals. Resource goals, as defined in the August TC meeting were discussed. That list of seven goals was compared to the list on page 1 of Exhibit 3-b-2 TC – 090910. The seven goals from the meeting held August 19, 2010 are listed below.

- No off-trail impacts; users stay on designated trails,
- No pet impacts,
- Centralized waste disposal/restrooms,
- No new user-created trails,
- Healthy native plant systems; soils (presence/spread of invasives) – maintain/restore,
- No motorized habitat degradation/mortalities, and
- No net loss of habitat.

Soil condition is on the new list but not on the old list. Soil condition will be added to the old list; and change the term *noxious weeds* to *nonnative weeds*. The members agreed that the modified list will be submitted as the desired future conditions. The members also agreed to remove the trail summary shown on Exhibit 3-c-3 TC – 081910 because it is not quantitative.

Trail and trailhead management was discussed next. One of the questions to be answered was, “Are they the same or are they separate?” The members agreed that if there is management by area then trails and trailheads are included together, and if managed separately or non-cumulative then they are not included together.

The committee members discussed weighting the trail itself or weighting the impact and then factoring in the frequency of the impact. The committee used examples and sample values to evaluate the method that most accurately shows the impact results. Also, how to compare and contrast impacts to each trail was discussed. Furthermore, how the impacts affect the future desired conditions was talked about. Lastly, the impact variable (*indicator*) and the type (recreation or habitat) was discussed.

The difference in a trail condition from year-to-year was stressed, but that requires a well-established baseline. The members agreed that a trail-specific report on two or three trails is needed to evaluate the validity of the individual trail data rather than a summary of all of the data. Toe trail, Owens Loop and Sand Hill trail were selected for individual examples to see if the indicators are useful. Comparing trails to each other is not as useful; the trail must be compared to itself to determine the impacts over time.

Member Topham mentioned that he is considering resigning from the Technical Committee because of his inability to attend and contribute at every meeting.

Chairperson Chi recessed the meeting at 11:59 A.M. for lunch and scheduled 1:15 P.M. as the time to reconvene.

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The meeting reconvened at 1:15 P.M. Attending the afternoon session were members Chi, Rognan, McLuckie, and Comella, and Bob Sandberg and Brad Young.

During the lunch break Member Rognan printed trail impact reports for the Toe trail, Sand Hill trail and the Owens Loop trail. He prepared copies for members and the record. Also during the break Lynne Scott faxed in a trail impacts example for the Chuckwalla trail. This example is included in the record.

Members compared the Toe trail data from 2008 and 2009. They discussed applying the formula matrix to the trail impact data. The members also considered the example faxed by Lynne Scott. The members noted that the Class 4 OTIs were deleted in 2010.

The members discussed assigning values to the OTI classes, the trail interval impacts, and the impact variables. They also discussed anomalies and how to manage them. The members used the Toe trail data as a sample to run through the model formula. Sampling variation and observer bias were mentioned. The number of OTIs result for the Toe trail for 2008 = 922, and 2009 = 174. Owens Loop OTI results for 2008 = 36, and 2009 = 17. Any management actions that have been taken on a trail or in an area must also be factored in.

The members then went on to discuss trail interval evaluations, i.e., trail width, depth, rutting, etc. Members talked about the variations in the reported data – there appears to be variations due to the trail measurements not being taken in the exact same location from year-to-year. The overall value of the data diminishes with the inconsistent location of the measurements. Using consistent GPS way points on each trail was suggested. The value of the data is a separate issue from assigning a value to each trail interval variable.

The committee members talked about the options of using the data in some manner and accounting for the inconsistencies, or not even collecting the data. Members also talked about weighting trail interval variables according to positive improvement or increased negative impact. The interval variables for a trail will be totaled for the whole trail and not be rated individually.

The Owens Loop trail interval data was tested using the model values suggested by Lynne Scott. Averaging the data at the intervals may not result in a reliable trend, and can the matrix be applied to trail interval variables?

Toe trail interval #1 was next run through the model matrix. The members talked about the difficulty of manually comparing the trail interval reports for each trail year-to-year. An electronic method is necessary to make the task easier.

Members talked about getting the same results to show impact trends, and how that compares to actual on-the-ground observations. There was discussion about the data collection and reporting to make the data more reliable and usable to help in making management action recommendations.

**MOTION** by Cameron Rognan to approve the list of desired future conditions that were discussed earlier.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Member McLuckie agreed to update the approved list with the changes discussed. (The revised list and suggested values for the impacts and interval variables was received on December 13, 2010 and included in the record as Exhibit 3-a-2 TC – 120910.)

The members agreed that Lynne Scott is needed for continued discussion of this topic.

Member Rognan agreed to contact Dr. Pam Foti and ask if the trail intervals are supposed to be at the same location year-to-year, and to see if we can get an electronic version of the data or access to the entire database.

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

None.

#### **5. NEXT MEETING DATES**

- a. Thursday, January 13, 2011

6. ADJOURN

**MOTION** by Ann McLuckie to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:41P.M.

Minutes prepared by Brad Young.