

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held April 12, 2012 in the Public Works conference room at the Washington County Administration Building,
197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah

Members present were:

Tim Croissant, Chairperson	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Ann McLuckie, Vice Chairperson	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Cameron Rognan	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Renee Chi – through conference call	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Gary McKell	Local Biologist

Absent and excused was:

Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
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Also present was:

Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder
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1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Croissant noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed and the meeting was called to order at 10:10 A.M. with Renee Chi attending via conference call.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. February 9, 2012

The following changes were made:

Page 1, paragraph 1: changed,

From: "A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held March 8, 2012 in the Public Works conference room at the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Building"

To: "A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held March 8, 2012 in the conference room at the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Building"

Page 4, paragraph 6, sentence 5: added,

From: "She reiterated that sounds are amplified."

To: "She reiterated that impacts are increased and sounds are amplified."

Page 4, paragraph 7, sentence 4: changed,

From: "Renee answered as a biological group providing feedback, it ~~isn't inappropriate~~ to weigh in."

To: "Renee answered as a biological group providing feedback, it is appropriate to weigh in."

Page 5, paragraph 1, sentence 5: added,

From: "There may be more wiggle room to adjust the fall access date."

To: "There may be more wiggle room to adjust the fall access date such as September 31st."

Page 5, paragraph 5, sentence 3: changed,

From: "Ann commented as part of the adaptive management process, "It doesn't work if we're strong armed into doing something."

To: "Ann commented, the adaptive management process doesn't work if the TC is politically pressured into doing something."

Page 7, paragraph 3, sentence 5: changed,

From: "Renee stated when the UDP was amended the HCAC wanted a stricter requirement for insuring that mitigation is adequate."

To: "Renee stated when the UDP was amended the HCAC wanted a less strict requirement for insuring that mitigation is adequate."

Page 9, paragraph 3: added,

The old St. George airport used to have a single engine air tanker (SEAT). When the airport moved it was unable to accommodate a SEAT. If a SEAT is placed in Mesquite to help fight fires, it will be good for the Beaver Dam Slope but the change will not be good for the Reserve as it would physically be further away.

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Renee Chi.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. **GENERAL BUSINESS**

a. Discussion and possible action on fieldtrip to Upper Galoot restroom proposal in Snow Canyon State Park

Chairperson Croissant reported the fieldtrip was canceled and moved the agenda, noting that this discussion has been tabled to the next meeting.

b. City Creek Trail Connector at Pioneer Hills Trailhead – Zack Koceja

Chairperson Croissant noted the absence of Zack Koceja. Cameron Rognan reported on behalf of Zack. St. George City has concerns with a paved Roadrunner trail they will put in within the next few weeks. The trail will begin at the Pioneer Hills Trailhead and will parallel below the Red Hills Parkway. The City has concerns which include maintenance issues from debris, trash, and tumbleweed that will collect in that area. They feel the user experience will not be pleasant on this trail right below the road. They're also worried about safety concerns including the barbed wire fence and the inability for vehicles and trail users to see each other. Exhibit 3-b-1 is a map of the trail.

Cameron explained the Roadrunner trail will be hidden from the road above, leading to a culvert under the road and will connect to the Red Hills Trail which also parallels the parkway on top. The trail system eventually leads to the City Creek trail. St. George is hopeful the Roadrunner trail could be moved about 50 meters to the east on an existing unauthorized trail. Cameron noted the proposed trail would be 150 meters and would replace the Roadrunner which is about 130 meters. The Roadrunner trail is technically outside the Reserve. If the TC were to authorize use of the existing trail that connects to the culvert, the TC should ask the City to offset paving that segment of trail. Ann McLuckie responded that the TC looked at this trail a couple years ago and decided not to use the proposed trail because there would be more tortoise impacts.

Chairperson Croissant will check if part of the land is BLM. Ann felt the trail should be kept where it is as many trails are next to busy roads. Cameron reiterated the safety and maintenance concerns of the City and it was discussed that the barbed wire can be taken out and a more attractive signature fence could be used. Cameron asked if Lynne (with BLM) has considered different fencing options like this for the Reserve in the planning process. Chairperson Croissant responded the BLM has looked at potential routes but hasn't specifically looked at how the routes will be maintained. The BLM has not been looking at trail designs but at some routes that may need to be closed or maintained. The BLM has also looked at adding new routes.

Chairperson Croissant stated that the trail on the highway side of the fence would simplify the tortoise issue. If the proposed route through the Reserve is used, there would need to be a stepover at the culvert (there would be two stepovers 150 meters apart) and fences on both sides of the trail.

Renee Chi stated there are old roads up the hill which are not designated trails. Something would be needed to prevent people from wandering up there. Cameron felt that if the BLM is okay with the proposed trail then perhaps St George City would be

willing to fix some old roads as mitigation for authorizing that trail. Ann added there will be a high traffic of people and if the proposed trail is used it would need to be fenced, leaving the triangular piece of habitat cut off from tortoises. Moving the trail is not a benefit to tortoises and people can handle the Roadrunner's short distance of 130 meters. Renee stated it would cost a lot to fence from the parking lot to the culvert.

Cameron reiterated the safety difference with this trail is that people will be below the road and will not be able to see cars driving by. Renee said the ideal situation is to keep the Roadrunner trail. If safety is a concern, a guard rail could be put along the highway. If they're adamant to move the trail, the TC should discuss the requirements for putting the trail into the Reserve. Lynne at the BLM has career experience with trail building and may have a better gauge for the health and safety issue.

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to discuss the proposal with Lynne. If Lynne rejects the proposed alternative, then the proposed alternative is completely rejected. If Lynne does not reject it, the TC can still revisit the issue and make a final decision. That decision will have to be made outside the context of a normal meeting due to time constraints.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: Ann reiterated the TC would need to revisit the issue before a final decision is made.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

c. Johnson Canyon Seasonal Closure

The TC reviewed exhibit 3-c-1, a background of the Johnson Canyon trail and proposals for closure dates on the trail. The TC discussed the following alternative proposals from the exhibit:

Alternative 1. No change. Leave current Johnson Canyon seasonal closure in place: March 15 through October 31 except by ranger guided hike.

Alternative 2. Reduce Johnson Canyon seasonal closure by two months: March 15 to August 31 except by ranger guided hike.

Alternative 3. Remove all seasonal closures from Johnson Canyon: open year round.

The TC eliminated alternative one since there may be wiggle room in the fall closure period. The TC discussed how there is not very much tortoise activity during the September 1st time frame. There is other wildlife, specifically nesting raptors, that would likely be finished nesting at that time. The TC considered and eliminated alternative three for the impacts to other species.

Ann McLuckie mentioned the primary concern opening the closure date to August 31st is the nesting raptors and amphibians. They're active in September but to a much lesser degree. When compared with alternative one, alternative two may increase impacts to tortoises and gila monsters. It would not have a significantly larger impact to them than other areas such as the nearby Scout Cave trail, which remain open all year.

Renee Chi asked if tortoises are doing well enough that human impacts can be increased. Ann said no and Renee asked if that is a good management decision. Chairperson Croissant commented that in other areas with foot traffic there are no closures. In Johnson Canyon there are not as many tortoises as in other areas. Ann reminded the committee that the main concern in this canyon is nesting raptors, not necessarily tortoises.

Gary McKell asked about ranger guided hikes and stated that people are still allowed some provision of access. Cameron suggested that if the committee feels uncomfortable with the current proposal, the closure dates could be modified to March 15th through September 15th.

MOTION by: Ann McLuckie to accept alternative two with a change that August 31st would be changed to September 15th because of concerns of desert tortoises, other sensitive reptiles and other wildlife.

Seconded by: Cameron Rognan.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

d. Red Hills Mitigation

The TC previously discussed using the old dump site off Cottonwood Road as mitigation for the Red Hills Parkway expansion. It became apparent that the site was used in the past by JBR for mitigation. The BLM required a 50% restoration success rate. Chairperson Croissant will contract JBR and find out what their monitoring showed. He will also check on the BLM case file.

Cameron Rognan asked if the area can be used for mitigation again if it is deemed JBR completed their mitigation requirement. The TC discussed how it would be good to use a different mitigation method rather than just seeding. Ann McLuckie explained the soil is super hard and if it's not broken up, the seeding wouldn't work. The TC decided it would be good to check how JBR did their restoration. If JBR reached the success criteria with a sign off by the BLM, then the area could be open again for mitigation, as long as more efficient restoration techniques are used.

The committee discussed the need to make a more specific recommendation on how the area is to be restored. It would be better to work out the mitigation site now so that contractors and other details for restoration can be lined up. Plan A for mitigation is still the old dump site with a new method for restoration. Plan B is the DWR property.

4. **OTHER BUSINESS**

a. Eagar Mining Claim

Ann McLuckie reported she received a message from Faith Martinez, an intern from the

Attorney General's office with the Department of Natural Resources. Faith wanted to follow up on the Eagar mining claim. Ann returned the call but was unable to reach Faith. Chairperson Croissant is working with the FWS to restart the consultation process and potentially get an incidental take permit. The BLM has an incidental take permit for general BLM operations in the 1999 general management plan. Mr. Eagar does not have plans to do work on the ground until the active season is over.

b. Trail in Springdale

Cameron Rognan explained that Springdale City has a proposal for a trail through a *take* area. The City has a volunteer group of 200 individuals to dig out an earthen trail with shovels. This area is managed differently than other *take* areas where tortoises are removed and put into Zone 4 of the Reserve. The tortoises in this area will not be removed during the clearance. HCP staff will act as biological monitors, surveying the entire trail the day before and during construction to look for burrows or tortoises. The project is scheduled for July 21st during the active season, yet outside the normal survey/clearance window. Cameron expressed how he feels this is a good time for trail building since most tortoises will not be as active during the summer heat and should be encountered less frequently on the trail. Ann McLukie and Renee Chi agreed it is a good time for following this procedure. Cameron mentioned the trail will be near the cemetery and there is a lot of tortoise sign throughout the area.

Ann mentioned she talked with Springdale about fencing along Zion National Park boundary. It would not be good for the relationship between the City and the Park as it sends a negative message. A fence wouldn't be good for tortoises because it would bisect their habitat.

There will be a tortoise awareness training before the trail construction begins. The City was encouraged to put up signs and information panels for users to understand what they should do if they see a tortoise. Renee mentioned education should be more of a requirement than a suggestion since the tortoise is a threatened species. It would be good to have some level of enforceable management stating that dogs have to be on a leash. Once there is a designated trail, people will take their dogs. Renee stated that if tortoises are being substantially harassed or if usage in this *take* area is too high, then perhaps the tortoises should be removed from the area if people can't comply. The stress level to tortoises should not be increased.

Cameron mentioned if there are a lot of encounters with tortoises then the City should consider tortoise fencing along the trail. The trail will be in steep terrain and there are only a few select places where people may see tortoises. Cameron will stress education and the dogs on leash requirements with the City.

c. RIT

Renee Chi asked if the TC had a chance to participate in the RIT (Recovery Implementation Team) webinar. Everyone participated and will review the comments

and tools by April 27th. A substantial amount of money has been put into these RITs and members should take this opportunity to provide feedback specific to this area.

d. Reseeding Cottonwood Road

Chairperson Croissant mentioned he talked with some individuals from the Color Country district office regarding seeding along the Cottonwood Road fence. They would like to create a seed mix with non-native plants. They would like to include forage kochia and Chairperson Croissant did not agree with that. Chairperson Croissant will come up with a list of native plant species that could be used including globe mallow and desert marigold. Dawna Ferris-Rowley with the BLM has talked about using seed balls, but this method may be impractical for the area as roughly 18,000 seed balls would be needed. This assumes a disturbance along the fence of 11 miles long and 10 feet wide. The seed balls need to be about the size of a golf ball so that rodents don't carry them off.

Ann McLuckie mentioned the Revised Recovery Plan states that non-native plants will not be used to rehab areas within recovery units. Cameron Rognan asked if there is anything that will exclude tumble weed. The TC talked about how there isn't anything known to out compete tumble weed besides forage kochia. The committee discussed having school children or scouts pick tumbleweeds for a project. A concern in sending youth to pull tumbleweeds is once the weed has cured, (end of May or early June) they get prickly. Shrubs would be good to plant as they could survive for multiple years.

e. D'Goat Ranch

BLM staff likes the goats grazing along Cottonwood Road. Some people had concerns with the herding dogs being off leash. Those dogs are prevented by the fences from getting to tortoises. There are people with the goats day and night and the goats are surrounded by nylon electric fences which are moved every few hours.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

a. Thursday May 10, 2012

Ann McLuckie asked if the June meeting can be reschedule. The TC will discuss this at the May meeting. The committee will meet at the Galoot parking lot in Snow Canyon for a fieldtrip at 9:00 on the 10th followed by the regular meeting at 10:00.

6. ADJOURN

MOTION by Chairperson Croissant to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.