

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **May 9, 2012** in the Public Works conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 East 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
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)

Also present were:

Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder
Bob Sandberg	Washington County Administrator
Brian Bock	Arizona Strip Fire Management
Paul Briggs	Southwest Utah Fire Management

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 10:00 a.m. with Renee Chi attending via conference call.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. April 12, 2012

The following changes were made:

Page 4, motion discussion, changed:

From: “Ann voiced that if Lynne likes the proposed trail, the TC will need to assess why she likes it and what her concerns are.”

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

Page 5, paragraph 2, sentence 2: changed,

From: “Cameron suggested that if the committee feels uncomfortable with the current proposal, the closure dates could be reduced to September 15th through March 15th.”

To: “Cameron suggested that if the committee feels uncomfortable with the current proposal, the closure dates could be modified to March 15th through September 15th.”

Page 6, paragraph 3, sentence 2 and 3: changed,

From: “~~The City responded it would not be good for the relationship between the City and the Park as it sends a negative message. It wouldn’t necessarily be good for tortoises at this point either.~~”

To: “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.”

Page 7, paragraph 2, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Chairperson Croissant mentioned he talked with some individuals from Cedar City regarding seeding along the Cottonwood Road fence.”

To: “Chairperson Croissant mentioned he talked with some individuals from the Color Country district office regarding seeding along the Cottonwood Road fence.”

MOTION by Gary McKell to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. **GENERAL BUSINESS**

a. Tabled Discussion and Possible Action on the Upper Galoot Restroom Proposal in Snow Canyon State Park

Kristen Comella reported that the TC went on a fieldtrip to Snow Canyon State Park. She showed exhibit 3-a-1 TC 050912, a proposal for the Upper Galoot restroom facility. The current restroom is roughly 5’ x 8’ with a single-stall vault toilet. The facility needs to be upgraded as the use is exceeding its design. In the 1998 Resource Management Plan, it was proposed to build a flush facility and the Park would like to pursue that now.

Kristen proposed to move the new facility (approximately 13’ x 20’) to the edge of the existing parking lot. It would need a septic system and the Park would dig a 5’ x 100’ area on an existing roadway behind the parking lot for the septic tank and leach field.

Ideally if funding permits, the Park would like electricity to heat the facilities during the winter to prevent the water from freezing. The Park would like to run electricity up the side of the road from Lower Galoot. This would impact an additional 5’ x 1,400’ area.

Rocky Mountain Power estimated it would cost about \$15,000 to extend the electricity. The second alternative for heat would be to use propane, which would require a tank. The largest full-size tank (the Park probably won't need the largest size) would impact an additional 4' x 8' area behind the facility. The committee talked about other heating methods and Kristen stated she looked into other options and propane would be the second option.

Ann recommended that impacted areas be adjacent or as close to existing disturbed areas as possible. If electricity is extended, the trench should be placed along or by existing roadways and parking lots to minimize habitat disturbance. Utility Development Protocols (UDP) should be followed.

Kristen reiterated the restroom facility would have approximately 13' x 20' of permanent impact. The septic tank would add 5' x 100' of temporary impact. The electrical route would add 5' x 1,400' of temporary impact. Kristen asked if there would be a need to compensate for the impacts. Ann stated the temporary impacts should be rehabbed.

Ann explained that this restroom is part of recreation infrastructure and all efforts for recreation infrastructure projects should keep impacts to a minimal size and be as close to existing disturbed areas as possible. All temporary impacts should be restored. Ann clarified that the paved trail in Ivins (TC Toe Trail discussions from 2011) was initiated by an external source and purchased with Section 6 funding and was not a necessary recreational infrastructure.

Kristen restated this is an existing restroom facility which needs to be upgraded. The structure will be removed and another one with a slightly larger footprint will be placed closer to the parking lot in an existing disturbed area.

MOTION by Ann McLuckie to approve the restroom facility as proposed, keeping in mind (as described in the project) that impacts will be placed adjacent to existing structures and that the existing restroom facility will be removed and that area will be rehabbed.

Seconded by Renee Chi.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The committee discussed how it would be best to work during the inactive season. UDP protocols will need to be followed along with fencing and biological monitoring. Kristen replied she is at the mercy of the region crew's availability and when funding is available, regardless if it is the middle of the summer. The unit is prebuilt so construction of the new facility should be very fast. Digging the trench may take the longest because of all the lava rock. The flush facility will cost about \$35,000 plus prep work; the end result would be about \$45,000-\$60,000.

b. Red Hills Mitigation

Chairperson Croissant stated that the TC selected the old dump site for the Red Hills Parkway mitigation. The site was previously used as mitigation by JBR who mentioned they never did the second phase of monitoring as it was not part of their contract. When the five year period came, they discussed it with Rocky Mountain Power and never did anything else. JBR feels the standards of range conditions weren't met. The BLM currently includes final monitoring in contracts; however, it was not always that way. Ann McLuckie asked if they are obligated to follow through even though it was not in the contract. Chairperson Croissant stated the contract was with Rocky Mountain Power and their permit with the BLM has required follow-up. Times have changed since the contract was written and now there is National Conservation Area legislation.

Cameron recommended moving forward with mitigation option B, an old burn site on DWR property. St. George City will have a contract for the mitigation and the contractor responsible for the reclamation may subcontract the work out. Bob mentioned the TC has reviewed the seed mix as part of the Biological Opinion (BO). Renee stated the rehabilitation/reclamation plan was provided in the original project proposal. The contract can state specific directions based on the years that have lapsed and various failed rehabilitation projects. Recommendations can also be given as to what we think would increase the likelihood of success.

Bob added the rehabilitation plan was put together and identified in the BO by the HCP, the BLM and the FWS. The time for seeding has been set between the first of November and the end of December. The TC discussed the possibility of changing the rehabilitation plan from seeding to planting but then talked about the contractor's bid which was based on seeding and on a specific seed mix stated in the BO.

Renee stated there needs to be a certain percentage rate met to consider it successful. Bob said that follow-up/monitoring is in the reclamation plan over a three year period to accomplish a 50% success rate. If they don't meet that rate after three years then there is a provision for them to redo the rehabilitation. However, it doesn't last in perpetuity.

c. Firebreak Recommendations

Chairperson Croissant suggested the committee address this topic after agenda 3-d.

d. HCP Budget Planning, Fiscal Year 2013

Bob Sandberg showed exhibit 3-d-1 TC 050912, a draft budget for 2013. The 2013 amounts are duplicates from 2012 and the TC will need to give a recommendation to the HCAC at their July meeting. The budget column shows what it will take to keep the HCP open and functioning. The contingency column was provided by the HCAC and the County Commission as extra funds to be used if opportunities present themselves. The HCAC can spend this money without having the County Commission re-open the budget. An example is fire rehabilitation and reclamation work.

c. Firebreak Recommendations

Ann McLuckie showed exhibit 3-c-1 TC 050912, a 2006 assignment to the TC to find ways to reduce fires in the Reserve. In late 2005 the TC brainstormed fire rehabilitation goals, shown in the table. Kristen Comella stated that during the previous HCAC meeting, they asked the TC for recommendations on fire fuel reduction management.

Ann stated that a lot of the 2006 priority actions are still relevant today. Kristen asked if the County can develop a MOU with the different entities that would do the work. Cameron reported that UDOT is aware of fire issues and they have their own protocols and procedures to follow on SR-18 and I-15. They usually keep 3" to 4" of vegetation to prevent erosion during heavy rain falls and they can't mow SR-18 because it's too rocky. UDOT plans to mow 30 feet from the shoulder on I-15 and will discuss with their environmental personnel to see if there's anything else they can do to reduce fires. Kristen asked if UDOT might share their written detailed protocols with the TC.

Kristen added that the HCAC is willing to spend more money on fire management. They feel that if there are things to be done, they should be done. Brian Bock from Arizona Strip Fire Management stated that there is a short window of opportunity. If mowing is done too early then vegetation will grow up after the mowing is done. If it's done too late there is a greater chance of creating a fire (from sparks) while making a firebreak.

The committee discussed removing the annual, finer fuels on Tuacahn Drive and leaving the more woody vegetation. Brian stated that taking out a few shrubs could potentially save a thousand acres in the Reserve. Creosote does burn, but aesthetically, what would Ivins want to do? The County will talk to Ivins about their desire and ability to create a firebreak along Tuacahn Drive.

Chairperson Croissant stated that one thing he has seen change from the past is more discussions on acceptance of herbicide spray. He is working on an Environmental Assessment (EA) to spray Cottonwood and Babylon roads. The EA is 90% complete and the service roads and non-BLM lands could possibly be added to the EA with a little more GIS calculation. If money became available to spray and the UDWR or State Lands wanted their roads sprayed, the EA would already be in place.

Paul Briggs with Southwest Utah Fire Management stated that spraying would need to be redone every two-three years. The main thing to do would be to remove the fuel so there isn't residual vegetation lying around for five to ten years. Plateau seems to work really well for firebreaks on a smaller landscape scale. The annual grasses are starting to show signs of resistance after two applications so it may be better to spray every other year. Paul added the TC is welcome to develop a long term fuels and habitat restoration program for the area with the Color Country Fire office.

Ann added that plateau is sensitive to concentrations. Zion National Park used plateau but found that it inhibited native species. Several years later it seemed to promote

cheat grass which came back strong and plentiful. The herbicide is somewhat of a disturbance but if plateau is used occasionally it would probably still be effective.

Goat grazing along Cottonwood Road has made a huge difference. Wildfire can sometimes be stopped by a little path but depending on the conditions, can also skip over 14 lanes of highway. Some areas along Cottonwood Road still have fuel and in those spots a fire can pass right through. Long term monitoring of the fire break would be beneficial. Chairperson Croissant expressed his curiosity to see the difference between goats and selective herbicides.

The TC will follow up with UDOT and approach Ivins about Tuacahn Drive. The Ivins dike will be left off the table from a firebreak issue; however, it is still on the table as a maintenance issue. The expansion of Red Hills Parkway has become a firebreak and in the future, St. George could mow this road if needed. Last year some trailheads were mowed and it would be good to do it again, to trim back to a certain standard every year. It was suggested to have water available and ready in case sparks start a brush fire.

Paul mentioned there are always dedicated hunters in Washington County who look for service hours and may be able to help. Brian added the fuel could be removed from ROWs along Turkey Farm Road and some kind of hard surface could be put down so that there wouldn't be a need to weed-whack or bring in goats.

It was summarized that there are goats this year and Chairperson Croissant will continue to work on his EA for herbicide use. Whatever the inmates and goats don't get to, the BLM can use their own crews to finish. Fire coordination is ongoing and fire crews are getting more used to resource advisors and tortoise issues.

MOTION by Kristen Comella that HCP staff follows through with UDOT to get their protocol and procedures for SR-18 and I-15 and the TC can further assess those. For 2012 HCP staff will coordinate with UDOT in the mowing of those areas. HCP staff will also coordinate with Ivins City to discuss firebreak options along Tuacahn Drive. HCP staff will also coordinate with John Schmidt, with Forestry Fire and State Lands, to see what options are available this year for SITLA properties. HCP staff will also coordinate with the city of St. George even though it may not be a priority this year. Since Red Hills Parkway was identified as a priority area, HCP staff will coordinate with St. George to discuss protocols and procedures for what may need to be done along Red Hills Parkway. BLM will continue to take the lead on Cottonwood Road with the grazing, the work crews and fire crews for continuing the work where applicable along Cottonwood Road. Each agency will assess and mow as appropriate at trailheads.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: The committee decided the immediate action can be taken on Red Hills Parkway, SR-18 and I-15. Mowing can be done if the UDP is followed within the road ROW. Any other roads will need further discussion with the TC.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to have the TC work with Color Country Fire to develop a long term fire management and restoration plan for the Reserve.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Bob Sandberg explained that exhibit 3-a-1 TC 070709 (a scope of work: green stripping) is part of a habitat management plan. Ann added that green stripping is preferred over brown stripping in tortoise habitat. Brown stripping removes forage plants and cover for tortoises and is used to create wide swaths with no vegetation.

Chairperson Croissant stated that if the vegetation develops a resistance to herbicide, then herbicide becomes a short term fix. In the EA, plateau will be the preferred herbicide but there could be another one added as a backup which also targets cheat grass. Paul explained that the complexity has changed somewhat with the designation of the NCA. Depending on what the NCA plan comes out to say and what this committee wants to do, the fire crews also have some input as they have started to have success with other species. Kristen replied that when the TC decides to start the process of working with Color Country Fire, it can be part of that long term plan.

Ann stated the exhibit 3-a-1 TC070709 doesn't make reference to any specific plants. Chairperson Croissant added that green strips give firefighters a better chance to control the fire. It may not be as effective as brown stripping to stop a fire but it's better than nothing. Paul said that after a fire there is bare ground and seed but before the fire there are hazardous fuels (cheat grass). The habitat will be way better off than it is right now if perennial grasses and forbs can be established (native or non-native) and will green up to provide tortoise food after the next rain. It will also help hold the soils in place.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Trapped Tortoise

Kristen Comella mentioned she received a phone call from a Park visitor who hiked on Toe Trail and reported a trapped tortoise in one of the fenced in detention structures near the dike. Kristen and Ann McLuckie checked out the area and freed the tortoise. How the tortoise got into the structure is a mystery. Ann stated it was easy to move the thick wires and clips with her hands. She suggested using stronger clips.

b. Assignments and Recommendations

Kristen explained that in the past the TC had formal assignments from the HCAC and the HCP Administrator. The TC would give clear, typed up recommendations on those assignments. Kristen requested that the TC go back to formal, written assignments and

recommendations. Having it written provides a great paper trail. Ann McLuckie will write a formal recommendation on fire management and also on Johnson Canyon. Kristen Comella will do a write-up on the Upper Galoot Restroom.

c. Springdale Trail Construction

Cameron reported he sent Springdale City the clearance paperwork and they plan to do their trail construction in a take area on July 21st. Cameron will give tortoise awareness training and will be there prior to and during trail construction to look for burrows and tortoises.

d. Fire Management

The TC will meet with Color Country Fire and add them as a future agenda item to discuss. The TC will pull together information regarding all fire information. The TC will accumulate all documentation from previous recommendations. Bob Douglas has a big TNC map and ecological sites identified along with addition information. The TC will bring the document. Some data that is reported shows where cheat grass has covered more than 20% and the TC will overlay that with fire history. The cheat grass cover changes every year so this would be a one-time measurement.

5. NEXT MEETING DATE

a. June 26, 2012

6. ADJOURN

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

The meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.
 Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.