

**HABITAT CONSERVATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**  
for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A regular meeting of the Habitat Conservation Technical Committee (TC) was held in the conference room of the Washington County Administration Building, **JUNE 26, 2012**

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)
Gary McKell	Local Biologist
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)

Absent and excused:

Renee Chi	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
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Also present were:

Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder
Bob Sandberg	Washington County Administrator
Nathan Brown - conference call	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

**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 9:25 a.m. with Nathan Brown participating via conference call.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**a. May 9, 2012**

The following changes were made:

**Page 3, paragraph 7, sentence 1: deleted**

From: "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, ~~she will begin this project.~~"

To: "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."

**Page 5, paragraph 3, sentence 5: changed,**

From: "If it's done too late there is a ~~better~~ chance of creating a fire..."

To: "If it's done too late there is a greater chance of creating a fire..."

**Page 7, paragraph 2, sentence 2: changed,**

From: “Ann added that green stripping is ~~her preferred method to use in tortoise habitat as it is used to identify areas for fire resistant vegetation~~. Brown stripping removes forage plants and cover for tortoises and is used to create wide swaths of ~~massive landscapes with no vegetation~~.”

To: “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.”

**Page 7, paragraph 3, sentence 1: changed,**

From: “Chairperson Croissant stated that if the ~~shrubs~~ develop a resistance to...”

To: “Chairperson Croissant stated that if the vegetation develops a resistance to...”

**Page 7, paragraph 4, sentence 5: changed,**

From: “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 ~~after a fire~~ to provide tortoise food after the next rain.”

To: “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.”

**MOTION** by Kristen Comella to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Cameron Rognan.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

**3. GENERAL BUSINESS****a. Fire Management Update and Report on Assignments****2. Quail Fire**

Chairperson Croissant reported on a fire that started a few days previous and he used a map (exhibit 3-a-2) to show the fire area by Leeds and Babylon. The fire burned 1,708 acres including areas in critical tortoise habitat and in the National Conservation Area (NCA). He surveyed briefly a small part of the burned area and didn't see any tortoise sign or any dead or injured tortoises. Before the fire fighters began on the second day of suppression, Chairperson Croissant briefed them on the area and asked

for reports of tortoise sightings. None were reported. Bob Sandberg noted he hadn't received any reports either. Luckily, the fire mostly missed the really high tortoise populations.

The fire burned hot among cheat grass, black brush, creosote, pinyon juniper and cactus. The fire incident commander used a lot of water and retardant on the fire. Fire crews actively hit the area to stop it from reaching homes with two helicopters, SEATS (single engine air tankers) and heavy engines. Chairperson Croissant was able to listen to the radio unit communications and he drove Babylon Road a few times to monitor the vehicle traffic.

Chairperson Croissant will survey the area known to have tortoises and will get more information on how well the retardant acts as a fertilizer. He wondered if the helicopters ever double dipped from the Sullivan pond and Quail Reservoir, and if so, was there cross contamination. Some members thought it was unlikely there was any cross contamination.

Chairperson Croissant has been working on a seed list for his EA (with native plants and commercially available seeds) and will use that as part of the rehabilitation plan that the BLM is now working on for the burned area. When he walked a nearby unburned area, he found tortoises in their dens. Cameron Rognan noted that a lot of the tortoises are near the edge of the fire and they might be able to move out. Ann stated that during the DWR transects (which are placed north to south), there haven't been very many tortoises in this burned area. The TC discussed data of where tortoises are located.

## **1. Assignments**

Cameron reviewed some of the assignments the HCP had from the last TC meeting.

1. Exhibit 3-a-1 shows the UDOT protocols for fuel management along the right-of-ways (ROW) which the TC asked for.
2. Cameron spoke with Ivins City about what they might consider for firebreaks along Tuacahn Drive and Snow Canyon Drive. Chuck Gillette with Ivins City responded in writing that Ivins has no plans to mow these roads as they do not have the right equipment. They aren't opposed to the idea but appreciate the aesthetics of having native bushes and shrubs in the ROW and would like to understand the risks.
3. Cameron spoke with St. George City regarding Red Hills Parkway and their plans for controlling this fire break. The road itself will be a wide fuel break. They will have median plantings and will use rock along the shoulders. They are open to different suggestions or ideas.
4. Cameron spoke with the State and with a resource advisor for SITLA. They would be interested in joining a discussion about fire and resource planning.

The TC discussed when a meeting can be planned to involve different stake holders. Chairperson Croissant reminded the committee that his Environmental Assessment

(EA) should be ready this fall to apply herbicide along the main roads in the NCA. The BLM should have their National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) work complete by this fall to mow the fence line on Cottonwood Road and all trailheads and pullouts within the NCA.

The TC discussed who should draft a fire management document, since it is similar to the “limits of acceptable change” issue. Having the TC involved should help to smooth out the process and be as seamless as possible since not all Reserve land is strictly BLM land. Chairperson Croissant suggested that each agency could have a proposal to give to the BLM and the BLM could decide what they would implement. Kristen Comella added there is a lot of other property not covered by what the BLM’s interests and actions will be and something needs to be found to bridge that. Chairperson Croissant suggested that he set up a meeting where all involved can be present.

#### **d. White Reef Trail Connections – Leeds Trails Committee**

Chairperson Croissant moved the agenda to 3-d. Peter Stempel with Form Tomorrow, a 501 c-3 non-profit, explained that “Form Tomorrow” was created along with “Vision Dixie” in 2007 with a primary mission to support small communities. It was clear during the Lands Bill battle that there were great ideas however, if the small communities didn’t have support then there wouldn’t be much happening inside St. George and the county. Form Tomorrow has worked extensively with the town of Leeds on updating their general plan.

Peter introduced the seven interns who are with a program called “Education to Action” in which graduate and undergraduate students are brought to the area to work on focused projects while gaining hands on experience with multiple agencies and jurisdictions. These interns have been taking the lead in the Leeds Heritage Trails project and the Form Tomorrow staff has been mentoring their work.

Bob Sandberg explained that the interns with “Education to Action” wanted to present their project to the TC so that if there ends up being any impacts to the Reserve then the TC can give direction and advice.

The interns used a power point presentation (exhibit 3-d-1) as they explained their project. They read their mission statement and shared how they have approached context, ecology and history. They showed different land ownership parcels between the Wells Fargo Museum and the Adams’ House along with pre-existing trails which help them as they develop a new trail. The interns looked at service proximities such as gas stations, parking, accommodations and schools. These help to decide what the trail will be used for and what the demographics are. It also helps determine how the trail can play a greater role in the community for residents and tourists.

The interns have been looking at subdividing the area as it cuts through different ecological tones, including riparian habitat in Leeds Creek, the Great Basin Desert and the Mojave Desert. The trail was originally proposed as the Leeds Heritage Mining

Trail. There are major components of historical sites they have looked at as they gather information to determine what is significant and what would be the greatest interest to people who hike along the trail. The interns asked for feedback or further opportunities from the TC. They reiterated they would like to incorporate existing trails where possible to prohibit greater disturbance.

Ann McLuckie verified with the interns that they are working with the BLM. She mentioned that between the Wells Fargo Museum and the Adams' House there are very few tortoise observations. Most have been south and on the other side of the road. She also explained that creosote is a key plant for tortoises and gila monsters and a lack of creosote in their proposed trail locations may indicate that there aren't many tortoises.

The group discussed educational kiosks to help people understand when they are entering a different area and what they need to be aware of. The key is to have something that will be of interest to people. Kristen Comella noted that roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the trail is within the Reserve and the NCA boundary. The TC is mainly concerned that work involving existing trails and proposed trails is coordinated with the BLM. Outside the Reserve boundary there is more flexibility in the approach and layout of the trail in capturing historical and ecological sites.

Bob Sandberg stated there are identified trails and stepovers which have been coordinated through the TC. If the interns could tie into those as opposed to creating new ones, it makes more sense.

The interns asked if the TC has any specific information they would like to see within the NCA. Kristen stated that hikers need to stay on designated trails and they need to keep their dogs on leash. People should realize they are entering into an area that has been set aside for a very different purpose. The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve was established to protect tortoises and tortoise habitat.

Ann added, the message that is often lost is that the Reserve was created to offset *take* of tortoise habitat elsewhere in Washington County. There have been over 12,000 acres of desert tortoise habitat available for development and 1,169 tortoises that are allowed to be taken. In exchange, the Reserve was created to offset those impacts. Sometimes people forget that they've been able to develop on tortoise habitat and that the Reserve needs to be protected. Chairperson Croissant added that often times people will see closed roads and will be unhappy that they cannot drive on them anymore. Some roads and areas have been closed to protect habitat so that other areas could be built into housing and commercial developments. The county can develop because there is now a protected space of tortoise habitat. There have been issues in this specific area with people driving on closed roads, with fire, and with parking near the Adams' house.

Bob Sandberg said he feels there is opportunity to provide interpretation and education on riparian habitat. The interns have discussed educational opportunities with the BLM

and will be here until the end of August to fill the critical gaps of developing a route, developing exhibits, negotiating with private property owners, working with the City and doing the leg work that nobody else has been able to pull together.

Peter mentioned that the start and end points of the route don't necessarily have to be at the Adams' house. Peter asked if there is another significant point where people can come in or out. The interns replied they have been looking at other areas to tie in and areas which may be ADA accessible. The interns will consider visitor use and think about ways to pull people away from the Red Cliffs Recreation Area as that campground becomes very congested at times.

Kristen Comella reiterated that as long as people are aware when they enter the Reserve that they are in a different area, this trail project is a cool idea. There is a lot of flexibility outside the Reserve with trail alignment and points of significance. Signage needs to be worked out with the BLM and coordinated at a NCA level.

#### **b. 2013 Budget Planning**

Bob Sandberg showed exhibit 3-b-1, a draft budget for 2013. Bob explained the amounts in red are an increase and the amounts in blue are a decrease from last year. The bottom line budget is drafted to be the same as 2012. The County Commission asked the HCP to identify a budget which would keep the HCP operating. The HCP was also asked to identify a contingency budget which would provide funding to avoid the budget needing to be reopened if additional opportunities became available such as appraisals, surveys, fire rehabilitation, restoration, etc...

The committee talked about systematic clearances and monitoring work with the DWR. They talked about law enforcement and the monthly documentation received from the County Sheriff. The majority of law enforcement is concentrated in zone four. Bob explained that the HCP states the County would provide law enforcement if other agencies and entities were unable. The DWR was supposed to be responsible for the law enforcement and if they were unable then the County would cover the cost until it became a NCA. At that point the BLM would take care of law enforcement. BLM currently has two officers working in the County.

The committee agreed that there needs to be enough flexibility in the budget for other opportunities that become available. Ann McLuckie mentioned that Reed Harris had concerns about the amount of money in the HCP fund and he would like it to be used for the recovery of tortoises. If the money just sits in a fund then it's not doing what it was supposed to do. Bob added the budget should cover this.

**MOTION** by Kristen Comella to approve the budget as outlined, noting Ann's comment, making sure there is flexibility for clearance or monitoring as needed and it will be coordinated appropriately.

Seconded by Gary McKell.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

**c. Upper Galoot Restroom Update**

Kristen Comella stated that nothing new has happened and the project is awaiting funding. During the last TC meeting the TC discussed having more formal assignments, recommendations and HCAC actions. A recommendation on the restroom was given to the HCAC and the HCAC didn't provide a motion on the formal recommendation. Kristen asked if their silence was an approval to continue the project. Bob Sandberg stated that is the case.

**4. OTHER BUSINESS**

**a. Pioneer Park Road Repair – Red Hills Parkway**

Bob Sandberg reported there was a discussion and a presentation made to the HCAC last month. St. George City is going to chip seal the Pioneer Park loop road. The HCAC stated they are comfortable having the HCP staff work out the details. Bob and Justin Neighbor will give tortoise awareness training and the city crews will have a monitor with them for the full extent of the project. They are hoping to be done tomorrow. The City would also like to pave picnic areas and kiosks with their next budget.

Cameron Rognan stated there was a tortoise picked up on the Red Hills Parkway. This is the fourth tortoise they have found on the parkway during their expansion project. The tortoise was previously marked and it was returned to the same general area. The City is on schedule to finish their expansion project by July 31<sup>st</sup>.

**b. Tuacahn Fencing**

Kristen Comella inquired if there will be follow-up on fencing near Tuacahn. Currently there is a gate with a lock in place. The fence needs to be modified to add some type of stepover structure. The TC agreed there needs to be follow-up. Kristen and Ann McLuckie will set something up.

**c. Dump Site Mitigation**

Chairperson Croissant reported the mitigation on the old dump site off Cottonwood Road was not completed very well in the past. The FWS sent a general notice to Rocky Mountain Power stating that something needs to be done regarding mitigation fulfillment.

**d. Recovery Implementation Team (RIT)**

The committee discussed the RIT webinars that have been available. The FWS, who holds the webinar, wants participants to get on the site and identify recovery actions that would reduce threats and help recover the tortoise with a deadline of October 31<sup>st</sup>. In December the FWS will come to the area and help condense and prioritize the options.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **July 12, 2012**

6. **ADJOURN**

**MOTION** by Gary McKell to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:22 a.m.  
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.