

**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, **AUGUST 16, 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)
Nathan Brown	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	Washington County Administrator
Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Croissant noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**a. July 12, 2012**

The following changes were made:

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

From: "There is concern with some of the ~~weedy~~ species in the seed mix..."

To: "There is concern with some of the species in the seed mix..."

**Page 3, paragraph 4, sentence 4: changed,**

From: "Bob Sandberg responded that intermediate wheat grass won't even come up."

To: "Bob Sandberg responded that intermediate wheat grass likely won't even come up."

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

From: "...the HCP can step in and help with funding but it probably wouldn't be spread aerial with the other seed mix."

To: "...the HCP can step in and help with funding but it probably wouldn't be spread aerially with the other seed mix."

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

From: "This list needs to be distributed again so the TC ~~to~~ be up to date on it."

To: "This list needs to be distributed again so the TC can be up to date on it."

**Page 5, paragraph 4, sentence 2: changed,**

From: "Ann replied the revised recovery plan states that non-natives ~~won't~~ be used in NCAs. There are available native plants that will establish like galleta grass. It would be good to ~~get in the habit of~~ using native plants that do well.

To: "Ann replied the revised recovery plan states that non-natives shouldn't be used in NCAs. There are available native plants that will establish like galleta grass. It would be good to focus on using native plants that do well.

**Page 8, paragraph 5: deleted,**

From: "Gary and Cameron discussed how the cliff at milepost 16 is very steep with the tortoise fence below the upper cliff. ~~They talked about how there probably aren't very many tortoises in that area even though it is the right kind of habitat for tortoises.~~ There are ~~however~~ a lot of tortoises to the east."

To: "Gary and Cameron discussed how the cliff at milepost 16 is very steep with the tortoise fence below the upper cliff. There are a lot of tortoises to the northwest."

**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. Rotary parking lot drainage fieldtrip**

The TC went on a fieldtrip to view the parking lot drainage project at Pioneer Park. The project is in conjunction with the Red Hills and SR-18 intersection expansion. Ann McLuckie stated this is a straightforward project. Most construction will be done in the ditches and culverts adjacent to the parking lot and impacts will be minimal. All work will occur outside of the proposed tortoise fence. The contractor will need to follow the Utility Development Protocols (UDP). They need to make sure there aren't any

tortoises that get stuck in ditches or else they need to clear the area prior to surface disturbance.

**b. Rotary parking lot drainage discussion and possible action**

The committee discussed their desire to have a tortoise fence installed before the project begins. One is already planned as a part of the Red Hills Parkway mitigation, but the timeline for its creation is still not known. They discussed the type of fencing that will be installed. Whatever type of fence is selected needs to be a tortoise barrier. Bob Sandberg stated that Kent Perkins with St. George City talked about potentially putting the fence closer to the parking lot to help direct the public into the Park.

Nathan Brown asked the committee if upgrading the fence from a signature fence to a range fence would be enough of a difference to compensate for 2.2 acres of mitigation. The committee agreed it would not be enough. Nathan added that .37 acres will be lost with a 6:1 MOG (Managers Oversight Group) compensation which amounts to 2.2 acres of mitigation. Bob responded that the fence could be part of the mitigation but it wouldn't equal the full compensation amount.

Ann McLuckie stated the fence should be installed as part of the project requirements, regardless of mitigation requirements. Kristen Comella felt that if somebody wants to go above and beyond the required fence requirements they are free to do so at their own expense but it shouldn't be counted as part of their mitigation requirements. Ann added that the type of fence installed doesn't matter to tortoises.

Ann reiterated that the City needs to compensate for the full permanent loss of habitat (2.2 acres). The difference in having a signature fence verses a range fence is about \$5,000. Renee Chi (FWS) had a lot of correspondence with UDOT and St. George City Leisure Services, but nothing was ever made official about the fence. Nathan affirmed he will write an amendment letter of the Biological Opinion (BO). The language in the amendment will say that with a 6:1 MOG ratio, which the TC calculated, 2.2 acres needs to be purchased minus the difference of the appraised value (about \$5,000) to upgrade the signature fence. The mitigation will use a mixed strategy, relying first on the list of prioritized lands to add to the Reserve, and by adding an improved fence in Pioneer Park to restrict public access and to prevent tortoises from escaping the Reserve.

On a side note, Nathan discussed the I-15, Hurricane interchange. He reported that UDOT will not be able to break ground until they first purchase the land for their mitigation. When they are ready, Nathan will send UDOT to the HCP to help facilitate the land purchases that were prioritized by the TC committee.

**c. Leeds fire ESR update**

Chairperson Croissant stated the Emergency Stabilization Request (ESR) for the Leeds fire has been submitted. The NEPA was done and desert marigold was pulled out of the seed mix, the cost was too great.

Nathan Brown asked if the BLM had received the FWS concurrence on the seed mix and Chairperson Croissant responded that they had. Chairperson Croissant stated he is waiting to hear back on the ESR submission. Two other native plants were added to the list including Globe Mallow. The city of Leeds may consider trying similar restoration work on private land. The person who started the fire has been cited.

On another note, Chairperson Croissant shared exhibit 5-c-1. There was a lightning caused fire on the rim near the High Point trail on Monday night, August 13, 2012. On Tuesday morning fire crews were at the fire and believed they could hold the fire to around 60 acres. The fire got away from them and other fire crews got involved. Fire personnel had to hike in because there was no vehicle access. The fire was very active and hard to control. By Wednesday evening the fire crews had made good progress especially on the northern edge, however, the southern end got away from them and the fire went south. There was a lot of retardant used and by the end of the day the fire grew to more than 3,000 acres.

Bob Sandberg reported the fire is mostly on the rim and has gone down to the head of Mill Creek and just north of the St. George water well. Chairperson Croissant added that fire crews are now accessing the fire through Broken Mesa and Turkey Farm. The fire has reached some critical habitat in the National Conservation Area (NCA). There is a need to stabilize the burned ground in order to stop erosion. Bob, Cameron Rognan, Tim Croissant, and Ann McLuckie will all go to the burned area and survey for tortoises and assess habitat damage.

#### **d. Red Hills Parkway / SR-18 update**

Red Hills Parkway Update: Cameron Rognan said the Red Hills Parkway expansion project is pretty much finished. The contracts aren't all finalized yet but they're done with most of the work. Cameron went to all the culverts and fences and gave the contractor a check list of items that needed to be addressed. They were very good at getting to all the items such as opening culverts, fixing fence gaps, clearing debris and garbage and working with different drainage concerns that popped up after a rain storm. Ann McLuckie was under the impression that the fence would include range and tortoise mesh everywhere. Bob Sandberg said there is not range fence at the cliff areas because the landscape is too vertical which Ann agreed. Cameron said there is a detailed fence plan which he can share with Ann. Cameron can submit further comments to Jill and hopefully the contractors can still address any requested changes or uncompleted items. Cameron informed the committee that he looked in all the culverts and observed tortoise activity in one and tracks nearby another.

SR-18 Update: Cameron contacted Stacy Young with the Trails Development to try and get the ball rolling for mitigation. Stacy will talk to the principle land owner then call

Cameron back. St. George City will probably need to be contacted now that there are two projects with mitigation and their property was considered as the second option for possible mitigation.

**e. Discussion and development of suggested recovery actions for the Recovery Implementation Team**

Cameron Rognan thought the committee could tie into recent Nature Conservancy landscape forecasting research. He felt that if the group can show what the Nature Conservancy is recommending to recover desert tortoise habitat, based on their extensive study, then it might increase our chances of receiving any available funding. Cameron has an executive summary of the Nature Conservancy's research for those who want a copy.

Ann McLuckie said that some of the outcomes of the report were brown stripping and containerized plants. Marissa (BLM, GIS) will be sending out a summary of the notes. Chairperson Croissant mentioned that if anybody wants the full report, he can get it for them. The group talked about the threat rankings of the Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) and how they don't correspond to real threats in our area and how the threat rankings need to be fixed.

Cameron added that even though the threat rankings are wrong, the recovery actions were pretty accurate. Bob responded that last month the TC discussed the threats. The FWS Desert Tortoise Recovery Office says the RIT should focus energy on the highest threats. If the highest threats aren't listed as the highest priority then it needs to be fixed. Fire might be the highest threat that we have for desert tortoises. Ann agreed that the threats don't reflect what's really happening. The group felt there must be outdated information that they're using. The data must be a predetermined thing. Chairperson Croissant added that the threat of dogs off leash doesn't take into account the fences and leash laws in effect. The FWS wants to get input from people who are on the ground and if this RIT has feelings of what are more appropriate threats and actions, those need to be expressed or documented. Kristen added that if the FWS can't change the model then it should be documented in writing that the Upper Virgin River and the Red Cliffs area have different prioritized threats.

Cameron stated that when Marissa sends out the list to review, he will take some of the bullet points to use as suggestions from the Nature Conservancy study. The Upper Virgin River deadline for suggestions is October 31, 2012.

Chairperson Croissant wondered how much this RIT ties in with BLM's State structure and goals. He said that desert tortoises are barely on the State's radar. Outside of Washington County it is not an issue. One of the bigger issues for Utah is probably prairie dogs.

Kristen Comella said that one thing the group hasn't really touched on with restoring habitat is maintenance of habitat. Recreation also needs to be addressed as there are

huge recreation impacts in the Reserve. There is data to show how tortoise habitat has been impacted from recreation. The Reserve was created to protect tortoises and tortoise habitat. It can be hard to prove that recreation impacts the tortoise numbers, but there is data to support that it impacts their habitat. Cameron will review what was entered into the system. Last month the group entered into the system that maintaining habitat should be included as a recovery action but recreation was not addressed.

4. **OTHER BUSINESS**

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **September 13, 2012**

6. **ADJOURN**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.  
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.