

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, **NOVEMBER 8, 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 HCP Administrator
Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder
Jodi Borgeson	Washington County Deputy Attorney
Kai Reed	Friends of Snow Canyon State Park

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Croissant noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. October 11, 2012

The following changes were made:

Page 4, paragraph 1, sentence 3: changed,

From: "Removing plants could stir up the seeds and create something that was not there before."

To: "Removing plants could stir up the seeds and soil and create something that was not there before."

Page 5, paragraph 6, sentence 3: changed,

From: "SCSP does not want any private access into the Park."

To: "SCSP does not allow for private access into the Park."

Page 6, paragraph 1, sentence 2: changed,

From: “After the 2000 Public Use Plan (PUP) was drafted and the 2001 recreation BO was issued, HCP, SCSP, FWS and recreational users discussed this access point and ~~several others that were overlooked by the PUP and BO.~~”

To: “After the 2000 Public Use Plan (PUP) was drafted and the 2001 recreation BO was issued, HCP, SCSP, FWS and recreational users discussed this access point and trails in the Ivins area.”

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

From: “The corridor is 40’-50’ and would be a multi-use path but would most likely exclude equestrian access. Kristen felt that ~~someone~~ would need to make sure that equestrians would be okay not having access at this point.”

To: “Chuck mentioned the corridor is 40’-50’ and would be a multi-use path but would most likely exclude equestrian access. Kristen felt that Ivins City would need to make sure that equestrians would be okay not having access at this point.”

Page 8, paragraph 3, sentence 2: changed,

From: “The TC decided it would be good if ~~the Recovery Coordinator writes a letter to the HCAC and if the FWS gives the presentation at the November HCAC meeting.~~”

To: “The TC decided it would be good to discuss the issue with the Recovery Coordinator and have the FWS give the presentation at the November HCAC meeting.”

MOTION by Gary McKell to approve the minutes as amended.
Seconded by Kristen Comella.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Snow Canyon State Park Sand Dunes

Chairperson Croissant recapped, in October the TC went on a field trip and discussed the Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP) sand dune expansion proposal. A recommendation was presented to the HCAC and the County Commissioners indicated their disappointment in the recommendation. The HCAC decided to postpone any decisions until they take a fieldtrip to the dunes on November 27th, before their regular meeting.

Bob Sandberg stated that the previous TC sand dune discussion was tabled to allow the TC time to review and discuss the Public Use Plan (PUP) and Biological Opinion (BO).

The TC agreed they had reviewed these documents for the HCAC recommendation and felt it was adequate. Ann McLuckie explained the PUP and BO were very clear in stating that proposed projects involving *take* of habitat could not be done through the adaptive management process. If the project were to proceed, the HCP would need to be amended and the BO would need to be re-written. The HCP was based on *take* of 12,264 acres of habitat, 1,169 tortoises and 31,282 acres of potential habitat. In exchange the Reserve was created to mitigate these things.

Cameron Rognan read from the BO, “damaging practices such as destroying vegetation and removing or chipping rocks are prohibited. Reserve managers may need to minimally alter rock surfaces and vegetation in order to maintain trails or install signs. In both of these instances, such action is intended to reduce overall impacts to the Reserve.” Ann responded that this part of the BO was reviewed before the recommendation was given. Expanding the dunes is creating a new recreation project and is not part of an infrastructure project.

Cameron stated the BO talks about the removal of vegetation but it does not mention “adding new sand”. Ann agreed and felt it is alright to remove vegetation on the trail from a maintenance issue. Chairperson Croissant added that the documents contain a lot of wording about maintenance of the current conditions as opposed to restoration of ancestral conditions. It is unclear as to what the ancestral conditions of the dunes were. Ann wondered if the dunes were larger at one point, what was driving them to be larger. Gary said that with historic use, there were no trails. People could recreate wherever they wanted and grazing occurred in the Park until 1998.

Nathan Brown reiterated that mitigation cannot be mitigated and Ann recommended the TC should attend the HCAC meeting per their request.

b. Managers Oversight Group (MOG) Discussion

Nathan Brown will present the Managers Oversight Group (MOG) compensation ratios to the HCAC, at their request, to help them better understand the document. The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office supports the use of the MOG. California doesn't use the MOG because they use their own more intense mitigation requirements but Nevada and Utah both signed an agreement with the BLM and FWS to use the MOG. Ann said that when actions disturb tortoise habitat within the Reserve, they need to be compensated for. To compensate for devaluing the Reserve's design, the compensation needs to offset fragmentation into the Reserve. Kristen said the model shows how the standard is used by other states as well.

Cameron felt it would be good to help the HCAC understand that the FWS wants to see a net improvement, not just an exchange of equal value. Chairperson Croissant added the preference is preservation over restoration. No matter how skilled people are, it's better to preserve the land, especially in the desert.

c. Discussion of Recovery Actions for UVR RIT Meeting

Bob Sandberg and Ann McLuckie went to Las Vegas for the Upper Virgin River Recovery Implementation Team meeting. In two days the four or five subunits only had enough time to discuss the recovery actions of the Beaver Dam Slope.

d. Needs and Preparation for RIT Meeting

The FWS is organizing a Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) meeting on December 12th-13th. Ann McLuckie said the FWS will provide all the maps and bring their own equipment. It would be good if someone could bring the HCP document. Chairperson Croissant will bring his laptop and some of the BLM GIS information. Cameron Rognan added it would be good to look at landfills, fences and anything related to the Reserve boundaries and impacts.

Ann explained that because the Reserve is so close to the cities, it is automatically classified as an urban reserve with urban reserve problems which increases the potential for ravens and coyotes. Although those problems are not present right now, the area could be more vulnerable. She added, the FWS will email a draft of the recovery items which the RIT can make changes to before the December meeting.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Northern Corridor Feasibility Study

Cameron Rognan reported that the feasibility study for the Northern Corridor has been released. A specific road was not identified but the study said that eventually people need to come together and there are ways it could be worked out as a net benefit to tortoises. The study implies that a road will decrease ATV traffic; however, ATVs are not a big problem in the Reserve anymore. The study also points to mitigation land available, naming the un-purchased ELT properties as the largest and highest quality habitat available.

Chairperson Croissant said the next big step is the public draft of the BLM's management plan for the NCA, to see if the northern corridor fits in the BLM's framework. The BLM's planning process is behind and the BLM has been trying to press their consultants to assign different staff. This is the most complex planning process Chairperson Croissant has ever been a part of. It involves two NCA's, designating new ACEC's (areas of critical environmental concern) and designating travel management for over 600,000 acres.

Cameron added that one of the suggested road closures in exchange for the corridor is Cottonwood Road. Ann said that is a road that people won't let go of because it is a major access route to Dixie National Forest and has a lot of private property.

b. BLM Kiosks

Chairperson Croissant explained the BLM is replacing a lot of their kiosks in the NCA with a four sided metal kiosk. Contractors are working on Cottonwood, White Reef, Yellow Knolls, and Pioneer Hills trailhead where the existing ones are. One side will have a map with rules and regulations and the other side will focus on education and in-depth appropriate recreational activities.

Cameron Rognan asked if the BLM can electronically send him one of the kiosks so that the Reserve kiosks not on BLM land can remain somewhat uniform to the BLM. Cameron said it would be good to match the map and font as much as possible so the kiosks in all of the Reserve can be uniform and not confuse the public too much.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **January 10, 2013**

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by Gary McKell to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Cameron Rognan

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.