

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, **APRIL 12, 2013**

Members present were:

Ann McLuckie, Chairman	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Nathan Brown, Vice Chairman	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Cameron Rognan	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

Absent and excused:

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

Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	Washington County HCP Administrator
Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Dave Kiel	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Lynne Scott	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ann McLuckie noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 9:10a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. March 7, 2013

Page 6, paragraph 3, sentence 3: changed,

From: "A ~~structure~~ has been placed to control traffic with interns counting cars and only allowing a certain number in the campground area so that emergency personnel can access the area if needed."

To: "A trailer has been placed to control traffic with interns counting cars and only allowing a certain number in the campground area so that emergency personnel can access the area if needed."

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Recreation Management Considerations (Dave Kiel, BLM)

Dave Kiel, a recreation planner for the BLM, presented recreation planning considerations. Dave read from exhibit 3-a-1 while explaining that the BLM is working on a recreational management plan (RMP) for the Red Cliffs and the Beaver Dam Wash National Conservation Areas (NCA). The BLM has done quite a bit of work and has collected a lot of data. When the omnibus lands bill passed it called for many things to be conserved, protected, and enhanced (pg. 2). The recreational component is the only listed use that has the ability to degrade the other six components.

Legislation said that NCA planning can draw from the HCP, the St. George field office RMP and the Public Use Plan (PUP). In addition, there are seven documents that need to be followed for recreation planning (pg. 3-7). The BLM feels it would be best to take a comprehensive look, to throw out all misconceptions and start over. There is mixed land ownership inside the Reserve/NCA and the BLM did their recreation planning under the assumption that SITLA and private lands will come into federal ownership in the future. The BLM didn't include SCSP or Kayenta in their RMP.

The PUP is the big driver because it is specific to the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. The PUP is 13 years old and outdated. When it was written, it didn't resemble what Washington County looks like today. BLM employees and their interns hiked every trail in the Reserve and other areas off the trail system to see what was happening. The BLM has visitation tracking devices to detect full-size vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, mountain bikes, horses and hikers. In 2012 there were 139,391 visitors in the Red Cliffs NCA.

The BLM took a hard look at the trail system. Most trails go out and back and there are few opportunities for loops. Many are access roads and don't go where visitors want to go. Dave and Lynne found many illegal, user-created trails in the Reserve (linear disturbances). For many years the Reserve has had a human impact monitoring system which is based on existing trails. It documents deviations from the trail system but doesn't map the size or extent of those linear disturbances and is confined to the approved trail system.

The BLM decided to measure all linear disturbances in the NCA and in the Reserve. They took the best aerial imagery available and digitized every disturbance outside of the approved trail system. Interns used GPS cameras and hiked every disturbance. They ground truthed and measured every disturbance and determined what kind of users were on each trail from the tracks observed. Interns also determined how heavy the use was. An additional analysis compared recent data with historical data collected before the creation of the Reserve.

Including SCSP, there were 104 miles of linear disturbances (65 acres of illegal trails). Visitors are utilizing 84 miles and the remaining 20 miles are not being used or they

were non-existent. From the authorized trail system, there are 78 miles of single-track trails. This shows us that there are more illegal single-track trails than legal trails.

Of the 104 miles of linear disturbances there were 84 miles that existed prior to the creation of the Reserve (roads, ATV tracks, horse trails, etc.). There has been 20 miles of new disturbances since the creation of the Reserve (this includes the Upland Zone where people are allowed to walk off trail and also included areas of SCSP that are out of the fee area).

Education, regulation and enforcement have been done in the past. There has been very little enforcement over the years. In order to keep people on a trail system it is more about education, regulation and *design*. Education has been done very well. In the past it has always been about “encouraging” people to obey rules. Now there are rules and regulations at all trail access points. The BLM has had a lot of design success elsewhere because trails follow the routes people want to go. Dave read from page 49 of the exhibit to describe design criteria for the Red Cliffs NCA. Once these steps are followed there would need to be a monitoring program. Page 51 shows an excel spreadsheet the BLM uses to track efforts being made to specific trails. The BLM now has zero tolerance for illegal trails.

The BLM looked at the experiences and benefits people derive from the Reserve. Dave read page 60, the BLM’s desired future conditions. The upland and lowland zones are largely based on tortoise habitat. These zones have been explained to numerous amounts of people over the years. It goes in and out of the wilderness boundary and conflicts with the Wilderness Act. The BLM is considering redoing the zones so that they are consistent with the desired future conditions yet invisible and totally obvious to the public. The only thing visitors need to know is that if they are in wilderness they can go off trail. If not in wilderness, stay on trail. The BLM has carsonite signs along the trails indicating the wilderness boundaries.

Standard BLM zone names are Rural, Front Country, Back Country and Primitive. The only difference between Front Country and Back Country is the level of regulation, staff presence and money that is spent there. The BLM would allow off trail use in Rural areas because keeping people on trail in these areas is impossible and could never be done such as Pioneer Park. The BLM would spend the vast majority of time and money in the Rural areas.

Prior to the implementation of the HCP there was a lot of motorized use. We have been enormously successful in eliminating motorized use in the Reserve. Chairman McLuckie mentioned she has been confused why zone 4 is considered Upland Zone especially with the high density of tortoises there. She added it is also confusing to visitors. Bob Sandberg explained that when the HCP was created, zone four was an area for translocation and those involved didn’t think that many tortoises would survive there. They decided to make it upland so that people would still have a place to go off trail. Chairman McLuckie stated the DWR has found many tortoises that have been there over 12 years. Bob felt that the translocation success should be something that the

HCP should get credit and be recognized for.

When people want to see a tortoise, zone four is a great place because people don't have to stay on trail and typically they can find a tortoise. Tortoises in zone four are all *take*. Chairman McLuckie started working for the county in 1996 when it was understood that there weren't many tortoises in zone four which is isolated from the Reserve by I-15. She stated concern for other Upland Zone areas where tortoise observations are found because people assume like they are not present in those areas. The DWR spends most of their time monitoring areas below 4,000 feet in elevation.

Dave said that when the NCA was created, there were things other than tortoises that were being protected and parts of the Upland Zone needs to be more heavily regulated. 20 years from now the Reserve may be the most valuable open space in the county.

Lynne mentioned that the soil is such that it is really easy to create a trail. The BLM would like to get control over that and make sure the right trails are working. The group talked about the types of users that prefer single-track verses wider trails and making use of already disturbed areas. Many visitors are not using the designated trail system.

The biological opinion (BO) for the PUP is another document that needs to be addressed. There is management confusion for dogs off leash in the Upland and Lowland Zones. Nathan Brown stated the FWS is not opposed to readdressing recreational trails in the Reserve but there cannot be a net loss of habitat. If one trail opens, another one of equal area needs to close.

In the Red Cliffs Recreation Area, numbers have been recorded by the self-pay envelopes. A number of 2.3 is assigned to cars that don't report their numbers. The BLM is noticing that there are rarely vehicles with 2.3 people in them. Many have eight or ten people in them. The average number reported from envelopes is about 3,000 per week. The more realistic number is closer to 6,000 per week. Red Cliffs Recreation Area has become inundated in the last five years. Bob explained that other areas such as Confluence Park are feeling an extra push when Red Cliffs Recreation Area is full.

When the BLM measured the visitors in the Reserve, traffic counters were not placed on illegal trails. The illegal trail use was estimated by the number of tracks observed. The group discussed that there should not be any net increase of trails in tortoise habitat. Nathan stated that if the trails are done correctly, they can proceed. Getting rid of the Upland and Lowland Zones will never be a perfect fit but people need to know where they are at.

Dawna Ferris-Rowley asked why Red Mountain was included in the Reserve instead of another area of higher tortoise habitat. Chairman McLuckie explained that the Reserve was designed to be one contiguous area. Years ago the DWR and SWCA completed over 1,000 triangular transects to determine where the tortoises were located. The higher densities are north of St. George. Bob added that when the Reserve was

designed it was thought that the Red Mountain and Kayenta area was sort of like a tortoise corridor from the Beaver Dam Wash to the Reserve.

The BLM has the linear disturbance data that can be sent to the HCP, FWS and DWR. The information will be released to the public at a later time. The BLM is working on a trail management plan which encompasses all public lands in the county. The transportation planning encompasses everything from paved roads down to single-track trails.

The Upland zone has a lot of potential for great trails. In the future, if the zones are designed such that people are supposed to stay on trails in the Upland Zone, then the trails will be designed to take people where they want to go. It would alleviate pressure off the urban interfaces. Right now many people won't drive up Cottonwood Road because the road becomes rough.

Cameron mentioned that recent linear disturbances not on the map include illegal trails from the Green Springs area to Mustang Pass and Ice House trails . Dave concluded that the 2012 aerial photos will be coming in soon.

b. Tuacahn Fence

Chairman McLuckie recounted the Tuacahn fence situation which bisects the Reserve and excludes tortoises from their habitat. Kristen Comella has been in contact with Parks and Recreation in Salt Lake City and they seem receptive to the idea from previous TC meetings. If a full range fence with tortoise mesh is cost prohibitive, reducing it to tortoise mesh is an alternative option. When Kristen walked the area she saw fresh tortoise scat north of the fence line. Kristen felt SCSP could possibly cost share and she wants to make sure the trails are accessible and not blocked. Cameron Rognan reported that the fence in the wash was put in to better withstand floods. The fence has been designed to fall forward in a flood and can be put back up fairly easily.

c. Padre Canyon Trail Seasonal Closure

The TC tabled this agenda item.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. SUU Trail Monitoring

Cameron Reported that he and Lynne Scott (BLM), met with Briget Eastep (SUU) about trail monitoring in the Reserve due to NAU being unavailable this year. SUU is optimistic and open to customizing and exploring different options. Briget wants to make sure that students have as many opportunities as possible. SUU has the ability to help with specific projects and they also have access to students from Dixie State University. They anticipate monitoring in early May. Lynne stated that this year SUU will concentrate on the lowland zone. In later years if SUU continues monitoring, they

will concentrate on the whole Reserve.

b. TCF Tortoises

Chairman McLuckie mentioned that during a DWR educational program, they observed a tortoise taken from the Temporary Care Facility (TCF). Cameron Rognan added that the TCF was broken into and the tortoise was taken out. HCP staff discovered the break-in and reported the incident to law enforcement. There may be other tortoises that were also taken out. The TCF is inventoried every the spring and fall when the tortoises come out of their burrows. HCP staff will do a thorough inventory this spring once all tortoises wake up.

c. Goats on Cottonwood Road

Currently there are goats grazing along Cottonwood Road, establishing a firebreak. Chairman McLuckie reported she has seen goats out of the fence. Bob Sandberg explained that as a whole the goat herder is keeping everything within the fence and is doing what needs to be done. The goat herder has hand-raised pet goats which he occasionally allows out of the fenced-in area. The goat herder is using an electric fence to keep the goats inside a specified area. The right-of-way (ROW) fence is on the shoulder of the road and the Environmental Assessment allows the goats to go out 50 feet from the edge of the roadway. Chairman McLuckie has observed times when the electric fence is not being used and four or five goats have roamed outside of the right-of-way. She observed the goat herder having a hard time with one of the goats going through the fence into the Reserve and eating marigolds. The goat herder needs to keep the goats within the ROW.

The previous day Bob asked the goat herder to tighten up his management and keep the goats in the fence. Tim Croissant stated the goat herder feels the goats would eat the russian thistle if they graze in the fall. The goats are grazing six miles of Cottonwood Road on both sides of the road, costing over \$8,000. It would cost the same amount if the goats come back in the fall. The thistle could be removed inside the ROW but if there is a crop in the Reserve, they will blow against the fence and the seed base would be right there. Tim mentioned there are not a lot of options for spraying cheat grass which is one reason the goats are nice. There are a couple of options for spraying russian thistle.

Chairman McLuckie felt the goats are doing a great job of getting everything out but they are creating a ground disturbance and making a great seed bed. At some point she would like to wean away from the goats. Bob added it would be good to put seeds down in front of the goats which would allow the goats to push the seeds into the ground. The timing to rid the cheat grass and plant seeds is a difficult thing.

Dawna stated the BLM didn't get emergency stabilization funding from the fire last year. Funding priorities have gone to burned areas which put communities at high risk such as higher flooding possibilities. The BLM is looking at purchasing seeds and trying to

decide how to apply the seed and what time of year it will be most effective.

Chairman McLuckie reiterated that the goats will always create fertile ground for growth and there will always be a seed bed unless the seed source is removed. She felt it would be a good idea to spray the ROW and use seed balls in future years. It would be good to have DSU do a study comparing different methods with long term impacts. She would like to see some sort of long term monitoring results. Cameron added the seed source will remain on the Reserve side of the fence. Tim mentioned he would like to spray a few areas along the road and have the goats come again so he can compare the differences.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **April 25, 2013, Discussion and Update on FWS HCP Review**

Nathan Brown explained he will be at training on April 25th and the TC rescheduled this meeting to May 9, 2013 after the regular TC meeting.

6. **ADJOURN**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.
 Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.