

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, **September 11, 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)
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.
Jodi Borgeson	Washington County Attorney's Office

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ann McLuckie noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 11:05 AM.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. July 18, 2013

Page 4, paragraph 6, sentence 1: changed,

From: "Mr. Rognan thought there would be small amount of tortoises especially where we are releasing more into the wild..."

To: "Mr. Rognan thought there would be small amount of tortoises especially where we may be releasing more into the wild..."

Page 5, paragraph 5, sentence 2: changed,

From: "He felt that the cheat grass along the fuel break can be sprayed with ~~lmazapyr...~~"

To: "He felt that the cheat grass along the fuel break can be sprayed with plateau herbicide."

Page 5, last paragraph, sentences 1 & 2: changed,

From: "~~Ms. Comella felt Chair McLuckie's observations should be logged. She didn't~~"

feel the goat project should be abandoned, but that the contract needs to be tightened up.”

To: “Chair McLuckie expressed concern about goats getting out of the right of way and into the Reserve on several occasions. She didn’t feel the goat project should be abandoned, but that the contract needs to be tightened up so goats are properly contained.”

Page 7, paragraph 5, sentence 6, deleted:

~~“...and the FWS has concern moving forward with renewing the HCP for more than 15 years.”~~

Page 7, paragraph 3, sentence 1, changed:

From: “Ms. Comella and Mr. Brown discussed ~~upgrading~~ the current plan.”

To: “Ms. Comella and Mr. Brown discussed revising the current plan.”

Page 8, paragraph 4, sentences 10 & 11, changed:

From: “They are looking into the possibility of getting a new water tank and placing it just below the existing tank to help ~~with the flow~~. They will be using a track hoe on the project. There will be a 14-foot zone of impact off the shoulders of ~~each side~~ of the roadway for about 2 ½ miles.”

To: “They are looking into the possibility of getting a new water tank and placing it just below the existing tank to help reduce high water pressures in the Park. They will be using a track hoe on the project. There will be a 14-foot zone of impact off the shoulders of the roadway for about 2 ½ miles.”

MOTION by Kristen Comella to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Discuss Field Trip to Cottonwood Road

Chair McLuckie stated the TC looked at tumbleweeds along Cottonwood Road. The TC didn’t see any tumbleweed in the area where the goats grazed. However, the north end of Cottonwood Road has a considerable amount.

a. Tumbleweed Removal Update

The TC talked about different methods to remove tumbleweed such as goat grazing, removing by hand and chemical treatments by experimentation in designated areas. The TC would like to extend the fire break further along the roadway. They also want to address tumbleweed buildup along the fence line and tumbleweed growth in the burn areas. The road is owned by the County and the property along the fence is primarily BLM.

When Snow Canyon removes tumbleweed they typically use a six man crew from purgatory that works a combined total of about 30 hours a day. If this crew is used early in the year when the tumbleweed is small, they can either be sprayed or pulled by hand and dropped on the ground to wither. Later in the year when the tumbleweed is thick and robust it won't wither when pulled and dropped, it would need to be hauled out and burned. Chair McLuckie stated that it would be nice to pull out the massive amount of tumbleweed from a wash west of the fence-line. Cameron Rognan suggested having the BLM burn the piles.

MOTION by Nathan Brown to have Cameron Rognan and Bob Sandberg work with the County to clean out the tumbleweed before next fire season. They should look into using the prison crews to clean up tumbleweed along the road and have the BLM investigate possibilities of burning the tumbleweeds in piles.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: Accomplish this before June 2014.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to continue with targeted goat grazing, adding an experimental aspect using plateau (chemical treatment) on one side of the road.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: Tim Croissant will try to figure out which areas will be the best to spray.

Chair McLuckie added that concerns with goats getting out of the right of way need to be addressed. Kristen stated the fire break needs to be extended along Cottonwood Road using the combination of target grazing and herbicide.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The group talked about NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and EA (Environmental Assessment) measurements for invasive weed control in the Reserve. All funding opportunities should be pursued for restoration purposes. The group talked about the NEPA Tim has done. The TC felt they should identify areas where funding would be best used. Tim stated the initial plateau application should be completed before other decisions are made. If it works then another EA should be done to treat all weed types and a NEPA can be done for other projects in the Reserve. Cameron explained that the landscape forecasting Nature Conservancy (TNC) study was conducted to help the BLM go after funding for projects. The TC talked about treating the whole Reserve instead of only the corridors. They discussed aerial application and

ground crews with backpack sprayers. On ground crews would need an off-road component because backpack sprayers won't hold enough chemical. The BLM has access to a special UTV with low tire pressure, which leaves a small impact.

MOTION by Nathan Brown to have the BLM start preparing a NEPA for chemically treating tumbleweed and cheat grass and other non-native vegetation throughout all of the Reserve.

Seconded by Cameron Rognan.

Discussion: none.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

b. Discuss Potential Translocation Sites

Cameron Rognan explained places where potential translocation sites could be.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to have a map with potential translocation sites submitted to the UDWR for their consideration as translocation sites as they work to amend the translocation plan.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: none.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

c. Health Assessments for Tortoises

Cameron Rognan explained there is a paradigm shift with the recent release from USFWS regarding health assessments and translocation. The thought is that tortoises who test positive for the upper respiratory tract disease have merely been exposed to the pathogen and don't necessarily have the disease. It may be okay to release these tortoises into the Reserve if they are healthy. Cameron understood from a USFWS webinar that they have enough science and research to feel comfortable translocating these positive tested animals and they have assessed the risk and are ready to move forward with this change.

Chair McLuckie agreed that there is a paradigm shift. In Nevada there is a preliminary study on tortoises that are in the Conservation Center. Some sick tortoises are being euthanized but those who test positive with no outward signs of the disease are being translocated to a site that has few to no tortoises. The UDWR will watch this study closely and incorporate the results and recommendations into the current translocation plan. Chair McLuckie felt it is too soon to translocate ELISA positive tortoises into the Reserve.

Chair McLuckie stated we need to be conservative and cautious when considering

projects and proposals that use positive tortoises. The disease is one of the issues that resulted in the decline of tortoises range-wide. The current protocol says that tortoises taken from incidental *take* areas are blood tested. If they are negative they go to Zone 4. If they are positive they stay in the temporary care facility (TCF). A program has been established between UDWR and the Reserve to adopt these positive tortoises and reduce their stay at the TCF. Tortoises that test suspect are retested. If the second test is negative they can be translocated. If positive, they stay in the TCF until adoption.

Kristen Comella stated that even with this new direction, the current protocol has not changed. Until the DWR and FWS revise the plan we should stick to our current protocol which says that positive tortoises are not translocated, they are adopted.

Nathan Brown explained the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office (DTRO) has assessed the situation and they want to translocate the healthy positive tortoises. He felt that if the DTRO is comfortable translocating these tortoises then it should be done to help recover the species.

Chair McLuckie doesn't feel comfortable translocating positive tortoises into the Reserve which has one of the highest densities of tortoises range-wide. She stated, "Is the focus on protecting resident tortoises for a healthy population, or to worry about a few positive tortoises found outside the Reserve?" It would be great to boost the population; however, if more animals are put inside the Reserve the problem of fires and drought (some of the biggest threats impacting the habitat) are still not solved. This area has a high density compared to other areas across the range. We have decreased over the years because of fires and droughts. You cannot boost carrying capacity in an area where the habitat has been so heavily impacted by fires. Chair McLuckie explained that mycoplasma exists in tortoises for years and is expressed during times of stress, such as fire and drought.

Cameron added that disease is prevalent throughout the Reserve, so no matter where they are put there will be diseased animals. Some of these animals will breed and repopulate other areas. By not putting them in the Reserve we run the risk of not recovering the animals.

Cameron said that often times tortoises will stray from the Reserve and end up in a *take* area. Those tortoises will typically go back to the Reserve but if it tests positive it won't go back to the Reserve and is removed from the Reserve's population. He suggested as part of the translocation revisions, they should consider how far out from the Reserve tortoises can be found and still be allowed back into the Reserve.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to amend the earlier motion to allow Cameron Rognan to continue looking for translocation areas he hasn't had a chance to look at and submit those areas for consideration.

Seconded by Cameron Rognan.

Discussion: Tim Croissant felt this may be a good time to look at the viability of translocating tortoises to the Beaver Dam wash. Nathan said the DWR has the authority to move tortoises. If there is no ground disturbing activity by the BLM then it should be a state action.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Bob Sandberg reported that comments on the HCP review have been sent to Larry Christ who will send them on to Nathan Brown.

e. HCP Grant Update

Bob Sandberg reported that the HCP has had conference calls with the UDWR and USFWS. The HCP received some direction on how to proceed with the grant. The HCP will spend the whole \$1.5 million of the grant and complete the deal before reimbursement will be given. Bob increased the budget by this amount with an explanation to the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee who then approved and recommended the budget to the County Commission.

The BLM recently received money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and was able to purchase 22.4 acres from Bob Brennan (he donated an additional 11.20 acres) and approximately 20 acres from Alan Carter. The Trust for Public Land facilitated the land acquisition for the BLM.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

Chair McLuckie reported that the DWR had additional State Wildlife Grant funds leftover and she will be able to purchase remote cameras to monitor the five culverts along Red Hills Parkway next spring.

Kristen Comella reported that Rocky Mountain Fencing has been out by Tuacahn, buttoning up the wash on the north and south end. They submitted a fencing quote of about \$8,000 to fence along Tuacahn in order to make a portion of the Reserve accessible to tortoises. The HCP has agreed to cost share.

Kristen also reported that Ivins will have a scoping meeting to determine the long-term maintenance needs of the old detention basins. The HCP will attend the meeting.

The group talked about a road that is being widened in Ivins using some federal funds. They talked about the HCP permit and the mitigation for the Reserve. The Reserve was set aside as mitigation so that the areas outside of the Reserve (which is also tortoise

habitat) could be developed. Creosote is hard to grow and it can be difficult to see the resilience of good habitat patches being developed since the habitat inside the Reserve could be easily lost to fires, drought or something else. *Take* areas require a tortoise clearance and parcels outside *take* areas do not require a clearance. This area in Ivins was cleared only because it was specifically requested as a part of their federal funding process. It was suggested the FWS could consider using the good habitat patches for translocation or conservation areas to maintain tortoise populations.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **October 10, 2013**

6. **ADJOURN**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35 PM.
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks