

HABITAT CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A **regular meeting** of the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee (HCAC) was held at the Washington County Water Conservancy District Office on **June 24, 2014**.

Committee members present were:

Chris Blake, Chairman	Environmental Organization
John Bramall, Vice Chairman	Mayors Association
Henry Maddux	Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR)
Bob Sandberg	HCP Administrator
Larry Crist – via teleconference	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Absent and Excused:

Jimmy Tyree	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Chris Hart	Local Development
Marc Mortensen	Citizen-at-Large

Also present were:

Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP – Recorder
Cameron Rognan	Washington County HCP – Biologist
Alan Gardner	Washington County Commissioner
Ashley Gilreath	Citizens for Dixie’s Future
Briget Eastep	SUU
Lisa Beck	Frontline Public Involvement - UDOT

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Chris Blake called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. noting that a quorum was present.

2. CONSENT AGENDA

The Consent Agenda is a means of expediting routine matters which come before the committee for approval. The consent portion of the agenda is approved by one (1) non-debatable motion. If any member wishes to remove an item from the consent portion of the agenda, then that item becomes the first order of business on the regular agenda.

- a. **Approval of Agenda**
- b. **Review and Approve Regular Meeting Minutes**
 1. **May 27, 2014**
- c. **Next Meeting Date**
 1. **July 22, 2014**
- d. **Declaration of Conflicts of Interest**

MOTION by John Bramall to approve the consent agenda.

Seconded by Henry Maddux.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. PRESENTATIONS

a. SUU Human Impact Monitoring report and proposal (Briget Eastep)

SUU professor Briget Eastep presented Exhibit 3-a-1, SUU's Human Impact Monitoring report along with a proposal for a future partnership. Briget explained that HCP staff and the Technical Committee had provided SUU with desired conditions they would like to see within the Reserve. SUU conducted a pilot study during spring 2013 and full scale monitoring during fall 2013. With one year's worth of information, SUU created line data to give a visual idea of impacts and found that most impacts occur close to cities. SUU's data provides an unbiased, consistent view of impacts. Trails marked in red are due to more than five visual disturbances in a ½ mile interval. Yellow trails are less than five visual disturbances per ½ mile interval and green trails are less than two disturbances per ½ mile interval. The GPS-tagged photos can be compared to future data collected at the same points.

Briget continued, SUU assigned every trail a severity rating. SUU then reviewed the desired conditions and evaluated how each trail met those conditions. The evidence of desired conditions that are being met include camping restrictions, climbing restrictions, little human waste or litter, motorized vehicles on designated roads, no paintball activities, and no target shooting. The desired conditions that have not been met include unauthorized trail use, off-trail impacts, unauthorized access points and dumping. Most unauthorized social trails lead to view points and attractions.

For future monitoring efforts SUU proposes a partnership approach. The proposal, goals, timeline and budget is outlined in exhibit 3-a-1, page 12-15.

4. UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

a. Update on Red Hills/Bluff Street intersection (Lisa Beck)

Lisa Beck with Frontline Public Involvement has been contracted by UDOT for this project shown on Exhibit 4-a-1. Lisa's group handles public relations such as inquiries and presentations. They also work with homeowners impacted by construction and maintain an updated website and newsletter to stakeholders. Wadsworth Construction is a contractor on the project and every morning they have a safety briefing. They have all been tortoise trained and are reminded daily to observe the tortoise fence and report to their supervisor if there are any impacts to the fence or to the Reserve.

Each of UDOT's projects has an environmental assessment (EA) done to determine any impacts known such as impacts to the Reserve, noise, water, etc. The EA is available for the public to view at the Hurricane office. After an EA is completed, UDOT focuses on their goals:

1. Preserve Infrastructure – UDOT is not changing the intersection that is currently at Snow Canyon Parkway, Red Hills Parkway and Bluff Street. UDOT is building two overpasses over them.

2. Optimize mobility
3. Safety (zero fatalities)

John Bramall asked about box culverts. Lisa answered that UDOT works with Southern Utah Bike Alliance to accommodate trail use and motorized vehicles. This project will separate surface and commuter traffic and will reduce the traffic in the intersection. Four box culverts will be built under the overpasses to assist pedestrians and cyclists.

4. Strengthen Economy – The majority of this project is funded by the state of Utah and St. George City. The EA was partially funded by the federal government. By keeping St. George easy to navigate helps to bring different events to the area. When visitors enjoy their experience here they are more likely to return which strengthens the economy.

The project is on schedule to pave in September and be completed in October. The Sunset/Bluff Street interchange project will start in the spring of 2015.

Deer migration has not been an issue discussed. If there are impacts to deer, it would be in the EA. In the winter time the deer typically come off the Reserve and go to the golf course. Deer will more likely cross Red Hills Parkway than at this intersection.

UDOT typically builds as far out into the future as funding allows. There is a large Bluff Street plan which this intersection is a part of. The plan will eventually widen Bluff Street and will redesign the intersection at Bluff and the Boulevard. Most UDOT plans accommodate 20 years into the future but it also depends on how many people move here. Currently there are about 150,000 people in Washington County.

Urs Rutishauser is a volunteer trail steward for the Reserve. He walks along the west fence line and looks for fence impacts. He seems pleased and there haven't been complaints. Wadsworth Construction has hired a tortoise monitor who checks the fence regularly. UDOT's personnel also monitors the fence.

5. **GENERAL BUSINESS**

a. **Discussion on SUU Human Impact Monitoring proposal**

Larry Crist questioned if SUU's proposal will address the shortfalls that occurred in 2013. Briget stated that it does, each monitoring year will provide an opportunity to verify and ground-truth each trail. The severity ratings will help determine if a trail has changed from one year to the next. Henry Maddux stated that one purpose of this data is to identify problem areas and then make corrective actions. Bob Sandberg stated that the data also helps to document the impacts. The 2013 results come as no surprise and it helps document and focus on priorities. The HCP has trail stewards who focus on trails with heavy impacts such as Paradise Canyon. Cameron Rognan, the HCP biologist, continually marks both the authorized and the illegal trails with signs.

The monitoring report will clearly make recommendations on corrective actions. Cameron agreed that the problem areas are no surprise. This data will provide trends to see how fast impacts change over time. We react to problems the best that we can but there are always challenges because we work in partnership with the BLM and State Park Service and they want to manage their areas in their own way. Ann McLuckie added this type of monitoring brings an important unbiased approach.

Chairman Blake asked if the budget needs adjustment. The committee agreed it would be good to adjust the budget to include more remediation as corrective action (including habitat recovery) is important. They would also like the TC to review the proposal.

Cameron added that the upland zone wasn't monitored because people are allowed to go off-trail there. The HCAC talked about how people want easy access to the trails. Education and more training could help them stay on trail more often.

Nathan Brown stated that several years of data are needed for it to be useful. This may not need to be funded indefinitely but the power of the data increases with each year. The FWS can use this data when going through the BLM's resource management plan process. It would be helpful if SUU students don't have access to the past year's data in order to keep the data unbiased. John added that if remedial work is done every year then after a few years we should start to see some results.

b. Discussion on Red Hills/Bluff Street intersection

See agenda item 4-a.

c. Discuss fieldtrip to the Desert Gardens

The HCAC talked about the Desert Gardens project and how it will benefit and educate the public. St. George City, Washington County Water Conservancy District and the Virgin River Project have been good to give updates and briefings on the progress. Chairman Blake stated one of the goals of this project is to educate the public on the Virgin River. There are a lot of things that happen in the river and this project will point that out. The completion date should be sometime late this fall after the stream channel is lined and the river bottom is placed. Plantings will occur in the fall after the weather cools down. Right now the Virgin River is very low and fish are hard to find. Once the river rises it will be easier to stock the Desert Gardens stream.

d. Land acquisition update (Jimmy Tyree /Bob Sandberg)

Bob Sandberg reported that Jimmy Tyree is absent today because the BLM's state director is here for a briefing on what the BLM needs in order to pursue land exchanges. John Bramall added he met with the Director of Utah State Parks, Wayne Monroe, the

Southern Region Director. They're not excited about potentially losing part of the BLM's Sand Mountain area where people recreate with ATVs near Sand Hollow.

Bob added the County HCP has been working with the BLM and has completed an MOU to support land exchanges. A draft request for proposal has been put together for cultural surveys and inventories of six parcels, one of those being near Sand Hollow. The County is willing to pay for this facilitation so it can provide the BLM with information and data they need to make a decision on whether those lands are suitable for exchange.

e. Technical Committee Report (Nathan Brown)

Nathan Brown reported the TC reviewed the 2015 draft HCP budget. \$80,000 has been set aside for the DWR to monitor tortoises and they are requesting up to \$20,000 more to cover employee costs.

The TC talked about the dams at the toe of Red Mountain in Ivins which are not up to state code and will need to have vegetation removed. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been working with Ivins City and the County HCP to secure the dams. The TC discussed the process and the fact that the dams were existing before the Reserve was created. If the footprint to fix the dams comes outside the existing structures then they will need to mitigate and use the MOG formula. If they put more dirt on top of vegetation where it's not at now then they may need to mitigate. Nathan and Cameron Rogan will work with the consultant.

At the next TC meeting the group will come up with concrete ideas for habitat work in the Reserve for fire management and invasive species management. The thought is to have the County, BLM and State Parks create a proposal for Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) funding to rehabilitate the Reserve. The Reserve has a lot of cheat grass and we don't want to have another wildfire like in 2005.

Bob Sandberg is working with Chuck Gillette on the Tuacahn Dam mitigation fencing requirements. Snow Canyon State Park shares a fence line where the mitigation will occur and the TC wants to make sure the commitments are met.

f. HCP Administrator's report (Bob Sandberg)

1. Update on tortoise adoption program through the DWR

Bob Sandberg reported that 20 tortoises were adopted through the DWR. The TCF is currently holding a few tortoises that are waiting for blood testing or for better weather so they can be translocated into the Reserve.

2. Cultural inventory proposal on potential exchange parcels

This was explained in agenda item 5-d. Bob added we need to make sure all bases are covered for the BLM. Nathan Brown asked for an update with the Section 6 land acquisition funding. Bob answered that the DWR sent out bids for proposals. Three proposals were returned. Due to the set criteria, only two were valid. Those two were from SITLA and the Virgin River Land Preservation Association (VRLPA). The DWR is working towards appraisals and surveys. The VRLPA is a land trust which facilitates sales by acquiring land in anticipation that it will be bought from them. They use money from the sale to purchase other property and do it again.

3. HCP office south wall update

Bob reported on some options for a sign or mural on the south wall of the HCP office. A banner will be the cheapest option but will need continual upkeep. Metal lettering would be more expensive and would last the longest. A mural would cost the most and would only last 3-5 years. If schools are involved then we'll need to wait for school to be back in session.

Henry Maddux asked what the next step is to consider building next to the Desert Gardens on Red Hills Parkway. Chairman Blake said it's a good time to decide if the HCP office should be moved there or stay where it is. The committee agreed they'd hate to miss the education opportunity that would come from that location. Bob explained that the County Commission has been concerned about revenue during the recession and didn't feel it was appropriate to move the HCP office. With two new commissioners coming on board soon, things may change. The long term plan has been to build a new county administrative building where the current administrative building is at and use the rest of the county owned property on the block as parking. The HCP building will probably disappear at some point. Henry suggested planning a work meeting after November when the new commissioners are on board. Bob said that initial plans have been put together with the County Public Works department and money is allocated in the budget for a conceptual plan on a new building.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

This item is reserved for items not listed on this agenda. No action may be taken on a matter raised under this agenda item (three minutes per person).

No public comment was given, the chairman moved the agenda.

7. MEMBER REPORTS & REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

No items were discussed, the chairman moved the agenda.

8. ADJOURN

MOTION by John Bramall to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Henry Maddux.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.