

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, **June 12, 2014.**

Members present were:

Nathan Brown, Chairman	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Kristen Comella, Vice Chairman	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Cameron Rognan	Washington County HCP
Gary McKell	Local Biologist

Absent and excused:

Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
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Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	Washington County HCP Administrator
Amber Stocks	Washington County HCP Recorder

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Nathan Brown noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. April 10, 2014

Page 4, paragraph 3, sentence 2: added,

From: "The dramatic population drop in 2003 came after a drought; the tortoises with Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD) became more vulnerable and are probably the ones that died off."

To: "The dramatic population drop in 2003 came after a drought; the tortoises with Upper Respiratory Tract Disease (URTD) became more vulnerable and are probably the ones that died off first."

Page 4, paragraph 4, sentence 4: added,

From: "All recovery units have a decline with exception of the Northeastern Mojave recovery unit."

To: "Across the range of the desert tortoise, all recovery units have a decline with exception of the Northeastern Mojave recovery unit."

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

From: “Cameron Rognan asked if other units repeat the same transects yearly ~~or if the transects are random~~. Ann answered that a large pool of permanent transects ~~were randomly selected the first year, but only a portion of those transects are monitored yearly.~~”

To: “Cameron Rognan asked if other units repeat the same transects yearly. Ann answered that from a large pool of permanent transects, a portion of those transects are monitored yearly due to funding limitations.”

Page 5, paragraph 1, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Ann reported ~~that fencing verses tortoise mortality data is anecdotal information.~~”

To: “Ann reported on tortoise mortality data using anecdotal information.”

Page 5, paragraph 3, sentence 4: changed,

From: “The data seems to show that the population of juveniles ~~appears stable.~~”

To: “One of the assumptions of the technique (all animals on the line are detected) is violated when analyzing juveniles.”

Page 6, paragraph 2, last sentence: added,

“When analyzed by year, small sample size and dichotomous data would impact the gender pattern.”

Page 7, paragraph 1, sentence 2: changed,

From: “Cameron reiterated that in years when there is a high encounter rate there are also ~~better densities and the densities are lower when the g_c is lower.~~”

To: “Cameron reiterated that in years when there is a high encounter rate there are also higher densities.”

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Kristen Comella.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Review and possible action of the 2015 HCP draft budget

Bob Sandberg showed exhibit 3-a-1, the proposed 2015 HCP budget. A recommendation on this budget will need to be given to the HCAC in July or August. Ann McLuckie mentioned the DWR would like to increase the amount given to them for tortoise monitoring up to \$20,000 more so their monitoring crew can be paid at 2014 dollars. Last year the DWR used eight people for seven weeks to complete monitoring efforts. The DWR will provide more specific information on what they need. Bob mentioned that in the beginning the DWR was given around \$60,000 for monitoring and currently they are given \$80,000.

Cameron Rognan asked if the budget should be adjusted closer to the actual expenditure amount and raise the contingency to cover unexpected expenses. Bob felt it can be looked at and explained the contingency budget has been put in place to cover extra expenses without having the county commission re-open the budget. There are many unknowns, like fires, that may cause us to spend the contingency money. Kristen Comella felt that the budget makes sense.

Bob showed line item 710-002 land purchase, which has \$1,600,000 in the contingency budget. The FWS will reimburse this amount in full through a Section 6 grant after the land purchase has been completed. Ann McLuckie added that \$100,000 has been set aside by the state in Endangered Species Mitigation Funds (ESMF) to help process the land purchase.

b. Discussion on Ivins Dam rehabilitation project

Chairman Brown explained there are detention dams within the Reserve at the bottom of Red Mountain in Ivins. These were existing structures before the Reserve was created. Ivins is required to keep these dams up to code with safety guidelines. They had some geotechnical testing done and now need to rehabilitate the dams.

Kristen Comella mentioned there was a large document sent to all the partners. She hasn't had time to read through it and is unsure what is being proposed. Chairman Brown said there will be a separate biological assessment which will address tortoises. He has been working with the consultants and NRCS. Part of the safety guidelines call for removing all the vegetation off the dams to make them stronger. This removal will not cause any new disturbances because they are existing structures.

Protocols will be followed, clearance surveys can be done, and the TC felt that since the dams are existing structures, Ivins shouldn't be dinged for bringing them to code. If Ivins significantly modifies the dams by moving the footprint then they will need to apply the MOG document for new disturbance. It has been known that the vegetation will need to be removed and Ivins will reduce their impact the best they can.

On June 25th Chairman Brown, Cameron and Kristen will go to Ivins to meet with Ivins City and their engineers regarding the rehabilitation project. Kristen felt that while they

are meeting with Ivins they should be pulled aside and reminded of their mitigation requirement for the detention basin near Tuacahn. Their mitigation was to add more fenced habitat into the Reserve. The current Reserve fence in that area needs maintenance and we don't want to fix it if it's going to be moved soon. Bob mentioned that someone needs to hold a conservation easement on that property and the DWR didn't want to hold the easement. There is now a conservation easement drafted between Ivins City and Washington County attorneys. The easement has been taken to the City Council and was tabled. Assuming it is approved by the city council, the project will move forward with some resolution.

c. Discussion and consideration of pursuing possible funding for restoration projects; identify post-fire rehabilitation projects for grant proposals

Bob explained that the HCAC talked about rehabilitating the burned areas in Reserve and mentioned Watershed Funding which is available at the state level to help with landscape rehabilitation projects. The HCAC would like the TC to come up with ideas that can be submitted for this funding. The TC felt that the Habitat Management Plan which was created a few years ago and the TNC's Landscape Forecasting document could be used to help come up with ideas. The TNC's document outlined the most cost efficient rehabilitation efforts to reduce cheat grass and improve the quality of habitat.

Chairman Brown explained that the due date for applications is the beginning of January. All federal agencies and the state pool money together for this funding which primarily funds range-improvement projects involving animals with hooves. If a good proposal is written with a wildlife and fire management angle then it's possible to get this funding. It may be good to hire a consultant to draft the proposal.

MOTION by Cameron Rognan to have the TC pursue this Watershed funding and projects to address the problems of fire rehabilitation.

Seconded by Gary McKell.

Discussion: Kristen Comella would like to base the projects on the Habitat Management Plan and the TNC's Landscape Forecasting document.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Chairman Brown further explained that NEPA will need to be completed before funding will be given, even on state lands. The TC will bring the TNC's document and the Habitat Management Plan to their next meeting and come up with an outline for projects. Ann McLuckie added that Elaine York might be able to provide financial support through the Nature Conservancy. Tim Croissant should be able to provide information on the BLM's efforts with goats, fire breaks, spraying herbicide, etc.

4. OTHER REPORTS FROM TC MEMBERS AND REQUESTS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Ann McLuckie mentioned the DWR has over 4,000 tortoise posters which can be given away for distribution to the public.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

a. July 10, 2014

The TC decided to meet on July 3rd instead of July 10th.

6. ADJOURN

MOTION by Kristen Comella to adjourn.

Seconded by Gary McKell.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 p.m.
Minutes prepared by Amber Stocks.