

# HABITAT CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A **regular meeting** of the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee (HCAC) was held in the Washington City Council Chambers on **February 24, 2015**.

Committee members present were:

Chris Blake, Chairman	Environmental Organization
Larry Crist	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Henry Maddux	Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR)
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Chris Hart	Local Development
Marc Mortensen	Citizen-at-Large
Bob Sandberg	HCP Administrator

Absent and Excused:

John Bramall, Vice Chairman	Mayors Association
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Also present were:

Lacey McIntyre	Washington County HCP – Recorder
Cameron Rognan	Technical Committee (HCP)
Ann McLuckie	Technical Committee (DWR)
Jodi Borgeson	Deputy County Attorney
Jim Raines	Land Development Consultants
Susan Crook	Citizen
Willa Pate	Citizen

## 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. **January 27, 2015**
- c. **Next Meeting Date**
  1. **March 24, 2015**

**MOTION** by Chris Hart to approve the Consent Agenda.

Seconded by Marc Mortensen.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

- a. None

4. **PRESENTATIONS**

- a. **Southwest Willow Flycatcher nesting success report – Christian Edwards**

Christian Edwards from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, UDWR, presented Exhibit 4-a-1 on the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher status, reproductive success, and habitat use along the Virgin River in St. George, Utah.

Recovery actions are being used to increase and improve currently and potentially suitable habitat. UDWR has been monitoring the Virgin River area in St. George since 2008. The team does population surveys, nest monitoring, and microhabitat/vegetation research to determine habitat characteristics that influence occupancy and reproductive success. They found the numbers of both males and females slightly increased in 2014.

There are two main causes for concern to the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. First, the Tamarisk Leaf Beetle affects the nest site microclimate, increases predation, and decreases hatching success. Because of this beetle, there was a large Flycatcher habitat shift, causing Flycatchers to nest in willow rather than tamarisk. Secondly, the Brown-headed Cowbird has been an increasing problem. The Cowbird is a nest parasite that often removes a Flycatcher egg from its nest and lays their own in its place. They can also lay their own egg on top of a Flycatcher egg, causing the Flycatcher to abandon the nest. To combat this, the UDWR uses a system of removing the Cowbird egg and replacing it with a dead Cowbird egg. They also addle the egg, or shake it to break the embryonic membranes and kill the egg, and set the egg back in the nest. They do not just remove the egg because the Cowbird could come back and lay another or a missing egg can cause the Flycatcher to abandon the nest. For Cowbird control, the group has also removed adult Cowbirds from the nesting site using a trap. In 2014 they observed 16 active Flycatcher nests, 10 parasitized nests, 7 failed nests, 9 successful nests, and 18 total fledglings.

The Flycatcher prefers higher shrub density and lower tree density, near water, and in our area, nest in tamarisk more often than willow. Tamarisk shrubs are most valuable when mixed with native vegetation for complexity. UDWR is reducing tamarisk density by 60-70% and replanting thinned areas with a mix of native species that provide understory structure. Future work includes habitat restoration and continued Southwestern Willow Flycatcher monitoring.

5. **UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

- a. None

**6. GENERAL BUSINESS**

- a. **Discussion of Southwest Willow Flycatcher report**

Bob gave his thanks to Christian for coming to give his report to the HCAC. The committee funds the study and appreciates getting an update each year. Larry asked about the overall population of the Cowbird. Christian answered that they do not know the total population, however it seems to him there were fewer this year from the previous year.

- b. **Election of chair and vice chair positions**

**MOTION** by Chris Hart to nominate Chris Blake to serve as Chairman.  
Seconded by Dawna Ferris-Rowley.  
Discussion: None.  
Vote was taken: All voted aye.  
Motion passed.

**MOTION** by Marc Mortensen to nominate Chris Hart to serve as Vice Chairman.  
Seconded by Henry Maddux.  
Discussion: None.  
Vote was taken: All voted aye.  
Motion passed.

- c. **Discussion and possible action on 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter and Annual Reports for 2014**

**MOTION** by Chris Hart to accept the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter and Annual Report for 2014.  
Seconded by Larry Crist.  
Discussion: None.  
Vote was taken: All voted aye.  
Motion passed.

- d. **Update on Land Acquisition efforts – Bob/Dawna**

Bob updated the committee on the Section 6 acquisitions being worked on by the State. The State is close to acquiring both the 90 acre parcel from the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) and 11.6 acre parcel from the Virgin River Land Preservation Association. Chris Blake mentioned that most of the

paperwork for the Virgin River Land Preservation Association is in and that acquisition should be completed within 30 days.

Concerning the land exchange, there have been cultural inventories done and rough information on potential mitigation costs on each parcel being considered. The cost of mitigation is in the millions of dollars to complete all mitigation that would be required due to archeological sites on several parcels. The HCP is proceeding with the Long Valley parcel, the Sand Hollow parcel, and is also still looking to see if there are any other parcels worth considering. Larry mentioned he met with Bob Brennan, the State Director, and the State Associate Director to discuss the best way to proceed. The consensus was to move the Long Valley and Sand Hollow parcels forward. Long Valley is on track, but Sand Hollow will take longer due to mitigation and more processes and difficulties associated with that parcel.

**e. Update on permit renewal**

Larry reported the Fish and Wildlife Service, FWS, has received the permit renewal application from the HCP. One thing Larry suggests, as part of the permit renewal, is for a plan to be written outlining how to proceed with the remaining land acquisitions. Larry plans to have a draft of the response done by next week.

**f. Request for funding BLM realty specialist – Dawna**

Dawna would like to pursue funding for a BLM realty specialist. The BLM originally had three realty specialists in their office. Currently there is only one, with many actions that need to be handled through the Lands and Realty program. The only way they would be allowed to hire a second realty specialists would be to get contributed funds from non federal entities. The Washington County Water Conservancy District has agreed to provide some funding for the position. Dawna will bring a written proposal to the next HCAC to officially request funding from the HCP.

**g. Technical Committee Report (Cameron Rognan)**

Cameron Rognan reported that the TC elected Kristen Comella as Chair and himself as Vice Chair at the February meeting.

The TC also had a field trip to Pioneer Park to assess a proposed trail that begins at the Desert Garden and goes to a viewpoint. The TC gave a recommendation to the HCAC, Exhibit 6-g-1, to approve the amended map, Exhibit 6-g-2, outlining new trail plans with the following provisions:

1. Keep the Overlook trail as far west as possible, to keep people away from sensitive desert tortoise habitat (referred to as the “bowl”).
2. Reduce multiple trails to the Overlook to a single entrance to reduce trail redundancy and impacts on tortoise habitat.

3. At the BLM boundary the City and/or BLM should consider placing “No Hiking Beyond This Point” or similarly worded signs to direct the public away from the “bowl” and sensitive tortoise habitat.
4. Place secured markers on the slick rock portion of trail to help guide visitors up and down the slick rock.

In addition, the TC discussed placing educational kiosks (to be funded by the HCP and other partners) at the entrance of NCA/Reserve to help educate the public about endemic plants and protected animals (e.g., tortoise, Gila monsters, etc.).

The TC also discussed the SUU human impact monitoring report that was given at the HCAC in January. At the March meeting, the TC will be discussing future restoration project possibilities for the SUU group to complete this spring.

#### **h. Discussion and possible action on Pioneer Park trail**

**MOTION** by Henry Maddux to approve new Pioneer Park trail.

Seconded by Larry Crist.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

#### **i. HCP Administrators report (Bob Sandberg)**

##### **1. Desert Tortoise Council meetings report**

Bob reported to the committee that he and Cameron attended the Desert Tortoise Council meetings in Las Vegas. Tim Croissant from BLM and Ann McLuckie from DWR also attended. The Desert Tortoise Council is a non government entity that was set up forty years ago by a group of people who focus on the welfare of the desert tortoise. They were instrumental in getting the tortoise listed as a threatened species. They meet to share experiences, recovery efforts, and to find ways to help the desert tortoise.

Ann mentioned they had habitat restoration presentations that spoke about the success rate of using local seed. Scott Abella from UNLV encouraged us to use locally collected seed to increase the chances of success for our upcoming habitat restoration project.

Henry Maddux asked what the biggest challenges for the desert tortoise currently are. Bob mentioned most of the same issues from recent years including habitat degradation and disease. Tim also mentioned, with the increasing presence of people, the presence of the tortoises' chief predators such as coyotes and ravens is increasing as well.

##### **2. Income and expense update**

Bob submitted Exhibit 6-i-2 showing a graph of the HCP impact fee revenue compared to expenses since 2000. From 2008 to 2012 the expenses equaled or exceeded the revenue. In the years 2013 and 2014 revenue exceeded expenses. Chris Blake mentioned he would rather see the expenses higher if there is a need to do more for the HCP. Bob believes the HCP is meeting their goals and doing well using the budget.

### **3. Status of south wall mural**

Bob submitted Exhibit 6-i-3 to the committee showing a few ideas for the south wall mural, with the possibility of a small design on the north wall as well. Marc Mortensen suggested the Gila monster have his mouth closed and not look so aggressive. He would like to see a whole desert scene with the sky, plants, and animals that would fit with the historic nature of downtown St. George. Bob mentioned the designers wanted to minimize the background to make it look as though the animal is coming out of the building. He asked for the HCAC members to send him suggestions and ideas by the March meeting.

### **4. Potential field trip to Desert Garden in March**

Bob asked the committee if they would like to take a field trip to tour the Desert Garden in March. Mark Goble with St. George City mentioned the educational signs may not be up by March so the committee decided to wait and see how much is done by the next meeting date. If it is done they will take a field trip in March, but if it is not the field trip will wait until April. Bob will keep in touch with the city and let committee members know the status of that field trip.

### **5. Status of property purchase for addition to Confluence Park**

Bob mentioned there was effort in acquiring property adjacent to Confluence Park to include as an addition to the Park. Bob wanted to know if Chris Blake had any information on that purchase. Chris answered they are most likely internally working out some issues on that property, but he does not have a solid answer. There will hopefully be a report within a couple weeks on the status.

### **7. 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).**

Willa Pate, Sand Hollow OHC patron, asked if other parcels are being considered besides Sand Hollow for the land exchange. Larry answered there are other options, such as Long Valley, being considered. Sand Hollow is an important option but not the only one being considered. Willa asked who pays for purchasing the land. Larry

answered it is a land trade where no actual dollars are exchanging hands. The parties of the HCP are responsible for getting the land trades completed. Willa wanted to know where she could voice her objections to exchanging the Sand Hollow parcel. Dawna answered that, assuming that exchange goes forward, there will be an Environmental Assessment prepared and the public would have an opportunity to comment on that analysis. The BLM will have a public hearing concerning this issue, if it does go forward, that Willa should watch for and attend if it moves to that point.

**8. MEMBER REPORTS & REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

**a. None**

**9. ADJOURN**

**MOTION** by Marc Mortensen to adjourn the meeting.  
Seconded by Chris Hart.  
Discussion: None.  
Vote was taken: All voted aye.  
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.  
Minutes prepared by Lacey McIntyre.