

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 **November 25, 2014**.

Committee members present were:

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| Chris Blake, Chairman | Environmental Organization |
| John Bramall, Vice Chairman | Mayors Association |
| Henry Maddux | Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR) |
| Chris Hart | Local Development |
| Marc Mortensen | Citizen-at-Large |
| Bob Sandberg | HCP Administrator |

Absent and Excused:

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Jimmy Tyree | Bureau of Land Management (BLM) |
| Larry Crist | U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) |

Also present were:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Lacey McIntyre | Washington County HCP – Recorder |
| Alan Gardner | Washington County Commissioner |
| Cameron Rognan | Technical Committee (HCP) |
| Ann McLuckie | Technical Committee (DWR) |
| Kristen Comella | Technical Committee (SCSP) |
| Lisa Rutherford | Citizen |
| Paul Van Dam | Citizen |
| Julie Applegate | St. George News |

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chairman John Bramall 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. **October 28, 2014**

MOTION by Chris Hart to remove Declarations of Conflicts of Interest from the Consent Agenda and approve items a. and b. on the Consent Agenda.

Seconded by Marc Mortensen.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

- c. **Next Meeting Date**
 - 1. **January 27, 2014**

MOTION by Henry Maddux to cancel the December meeting and set the next meeting date for January 27, 2014.

Seconded by Chris Hart.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

- 3. **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**
 - a. **None**
- 4. **PRESENTATIONS**
 - a. **None**
- 5. **UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**
 - a. **None**
- 6. **GENERAL BUSINESS**
 - a. **Discussion and possible acceptance of 3rd Quarter Report**

MOTION by Marc Mortensen to approve the 3rd Quarter Report.

Seconded by Chris Hart.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

- b. **Land Acquisition update (Bob Sandberg)**

Bob reported the HCP has been following up on efforts to facilitate the potential land exchange. A contract was issued with BYU Archeology to conduct clearances on the surveys and inventories of 6 parcels. Then, an additional parcel in the Leeds area was added. HRA Archeology out of Las Vegas will be doing the additional 445 acre parcel inventory to ensure there is an adequate supply of property to meet the needs with property inside the reserve. The HCP should have a report prior to Thanksgiving on the first 6 parcels from BYU. The HRA survey and report will be completed by the end of December or early January.

Regarding the Section 6 money, Greg Hansen says they are ready with an agreement

between the state and SITLA to complete that purchase. There are issues between Virgin River Land Trust and the appraiser as to whether the appraiser considered all the elements within the Middleton Wash property. The appraisal came in lower than the price the Virgin River Land Trust offered. They are hopeful it will be worked out soon and completed by the end of the year.

c. Discussion and possible approval of 2015 DWR Coop Agreement

Bob handed out Exhibit 6-c-1 showing the cooperative agreement between the HCP and the Division of Wildlife Resources that covers three scopes of work. First is the tortoise monitoring in the Reserve, which is done every other year. The second scope of work is the Southwest Willow Flycatcher study the HCP helps fund. The third is the systematic clearance if HCP staff needs additional help. The majority of the property adjacent to the Reserve has already been cleared so there is not much of a need for the systematic clearance help. Chris Hart asked if these documents are identical to what was approved last year. Bob answered the dollar amounts are the same for the Willow Flycatcher and the systematic clearances but monitoring has gone up to \$97,300. All other language in the document is the same. The monetary increase in monitoring is due to the lack of increases for many years. The price needs to be brought up to date to reflect salary increases and other personnel increases.

MOTION by Chris Hart to approve the 2015 DWR Coop Agreement.
Seconded by Marc Mortensen.
Discussion: None.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

Chairman Chris Blake arrived at 1:15 pm.

d. Discussion and possibly approval of habitat restoration project (Ann McLuckie)

Ann explained that a couple years ago The Nature Conservancy authored a landscape conservation forecasting document that covered the two NCAs in Washington County. It modeled different management scenarios with the idea of recommending the most cost effective management actions that would help restore the desert back to its original ecological condition. The most effective actions included habitat restoration, fuel breaks, and the removal of exotic shrubs and trees in washes. In the past year the RIT (Recovery Implementation Team) has been asked to identify high priority recovery actions and draft those ideas into proposals.

This habitat restoration proposal is to actively restore and rehabilitate burned areas in suitable, previously occupied, Mojave Desert tortoise habitat. There will be a 100-acre

plot established within the burned habitat on UDWR property. This plot will create a “fertile island” which will act as a seed bank from which native plants can disperse. The area would be treated first to remove cheat grass, a professional will come in to plant small plants, and then the area will be monitored. Previously a method of applying seed was used, which had a very low success rate. In 2006 the BLM spent a lot of money applying seed, yet that effort proved unsuccessful. Implementation of the project will give the burned areas potential to recover and reduce the abundance of annual brome grasses that foster destructive wildfires. The estimated budget for 4 years would be \$90,000. The RIT is asking for 50% to be funded by the HCP and 50% to be funded by the Watershed Initiative. The Nature Conservancy may also be able to fund a small portion of this project. Henry Maddux asked if the monitoring will be focused outside the polygon or on the success inside the polygon. Ann answered the monitoring will be comparing inside the polygon as well as outside to see the difference. Scott Abella is an authority on plantings in Southern Nevada, and he has about 80% success rate on plantings. That is much higher than with just seeding. Ann is requesting HCP funds, but it would be contingent on receiving the Watershed Initiative funds. The HCP would potentially be giving \$40,000 to \$45,000 to this project if other funds come through. Chris Hart asked if this new approach has been tested and successful. Ann explained that Scott Abella was a professor at the University of Nevada, and he published many papers on the successfulness of this method. He heads a private consulting group and is a strong proponent of this method. Ann mentioned it must be done in a controlled fashion by an entity that knows what they are doing. Henry Maddux suggested Ann speak with the Endangered Species Mitigation Fund if TNC cannot put in any money towards this project. Ann acknowledged that was a good idea.

MOTION by Henry Maddux to recommend to the County Commission to approve funding up to 50% of this scope of work.

Seconded by John Bramall.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

e. Discussion and possible approval of 2015 HCAC meeting dates

Bob Sandberg shared Exhibit 6-e-1, which outlines the 2015 dates for HCAC meetings. The proposed meeting dates are January 27, February 24, March 24, April 28, May 26, June 23, July 28, August 25, September 22, October 27, and November 24. Those dates are the 4th Tuesday of each month.

MOTION by John Bramall to approve the 2015 HCAC meeting dates.

Seconded by Chris Hart.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Ann provided a TC recommendation for a new restroom facility in Snow Canyon State Park. The recommendation was to permit the size of the facility as proposed, locate the new 14' x 20' facility on the footprint of the existing 6' x 10' facility, locate electric utilities within the existing gravel maintenance road and parking lot, reseed the temporary disturbance area where the new plumbing will tie into the existing septic tank and leach field, and follow all appropriate Utility Development Protocols while coordinating with HCP staff.

MOTION by John Bramall to approve the Snow Canyon State Park Lower Galoot restroom replacement project.

Seconded by Marc Mortensen.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Ann also discussed the TC recommendation to improve the road in the upper canyon of Snow Canyon State Park. The last 1.5 miles of the Whiptail Trail was not finished and therefore causes a safety concern for users due to competing with cars on the roadway, which is currently the only way for walkers and cyclists to reach the top of the canyon. Since the proposed road shoulder of 4 feet on each side of the road will allow safe passage for walkers and cyclists, the TC recommends permitting the road improvement for the health and human safety of park visitors. Once project funding is secured the engineering designs will be brought back to the TC for review. The TC determined that Snow Canyon State Park Drive is classified as a Level 1 road in the HCP and allows for roadway maintenance and improvements. Henry Maddux mentioned when the TC first brought this to the HCAC in September he drove this section of the Park and agreed that it is a problem and is dangerous.

MOTION by Marc Mortensen to allow Snow Canyon State Park to proceed with the road improvement project.

Seconded by John Bramall.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Ann also mentioned the TC will take a field trip in January to assess a drainage ditch in Eagle Rock. Then they will make a recommendation to the HCAC.

Ann reported DWR and FWS will also be working together to come up with a new translocation plan for the Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit incorporating recent publications and research.

g. HCP Administrator's report (Bob Sandberg)

1. Filling of local biologist position to TC

Bob mentioned Gary Mckell resigned from the TC. With his resignation the commission has appointed Marshall Topham to serve as Local Biologist. Marshall served on the committee before Gary, but he had to resign due to schedule conflicts.

2. HCP Visitor Center south wall

Bob updated the committee that he has had a little interaction with Justine Peterson, who is very interested in having her group help the HCP with a concept and painting for the south wall at the Visitor Center. More details need to be worked out but it is in the process.

3. RIT meeting participation

Bob reported there have been webinars this past week for the Upper Virgin River and Beaver Dam Slope. He wanted to mention the HCP and TC are staying involved and engaged in the efforts. Ann McLuckie has stepped forward to try and get funding for some projects that will benefit the tortoise, such as the restoration project she brought before the HCAC in item 6-d.

4. Preliminary budget acceptance

Bob mentioned the County Commission has looked at the overall County budget, which the HCP budget is a part of, and they have preliminarily accepted the budget. The County Commission will make a decision about final approval of the 2015 budget in the December meeting.

5. Permit renewal efforts

Bob included this on the agenda because at the last meeting Larry Crist said he would have an update for the committee on the permit renewal efforts. Larry could not attend the meeting and Bob emailed to ask if he had anything but did not get a response. The HCP does have a plan in process. The county and Mark Capone are in communication. The listing of the Gunnison Sage Grouse as a threatened species took up Fish and Wildlife Service time and efforts so Mark was unable to follow up with FWS staff. Chris Hart asked when the permit submission deadline is. Bob answered that the permit expires in February of 2016, however, the goal is to have the request to renew turned in by December 31, 2015.

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).

Lisa Rutherford wondered what would make the tortoise go from a threatened to endangered species. Henry Maddux answered the tortoise still has a way to go before it becomes endangered, or in danger of immediate extinction. The tortoise numbers have diminished but are now more steady.

8. MEMBER REPORTS & REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

a. John Bramall commented on how he was pleased to see the County Commission allocate \$200,000 for projects in Confluence Park.

9. ADJOURN

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

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 p.m.
Minutes prepared by Lacey McIntyre.