

WASHINGTON COUNTY HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Technical Committee of the HCP was held **October 20, 2011** in the Public Works conference room at the Washington County Administration Building, 197 E. Tabernacle, Saint George, Utah

Members present were:

Renee Chi – through conference call	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS)
Cameron Rognan, Chairperson	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Ann McLuckie	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)
Tim Croissant, Vice Chairperson	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	HCP
Amber Stocks	HCP
Pete Kuhlman	Washington County Emergency Services

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Cameron Rognan noted there were at least four voting members present, a quorum existed, and the meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. with Renee Chi attending via conference call.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. **September 8, 2011**

The following changes were made:

Page 3, paragraph 1, sentence 2: changed,

From: “Ann felt that fencing ~~in~~ high-use areas such as the pavilion and the parking lots would be beneficial.

To: “Ann felt that fencing out high-use areas such as the pavilion and the parking lots would be beneficial.

Page 4, paragraph 2, sentence 4: inserted,

From: “Renee stated it would be worthwhile to get an estimate on how much it would cost to install a culvert and it would be nice to have an estimate on the record in case it is needed for mitigation actions in the future.

To: “Renee stated it would be worthwhile to get an estimate on how much it would cost to install a culvert on Cottonwood Road and it would be nice to have an estimate on the record in case it is needed for mitigation actions in the future.

MOTION by Tim Croissant to approve the minutes as amended.

Seconded by Renee Chi.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. **GENERAL BUSINESS**

a. **Ivins City Dike and Gate**

Chairperson Cameron Rognan briefed the committee on a meeting Kristen Comella organized with Search and Rescue. The meeting was held in regards to a problematic area near the Ivins City dike. During this meeting safety issues were discussed. Search and Rescue expressed a desire to have a gate along Tuacahn Road next to the Layton property for easier access and exit.

In addition, Kristen commented that emergency personnel talked about places where emergency vehicles can drive to, how to enter and exit, and where they can turn their vehicles around. Two options were discussed during this meeting. Option 1: have a single access on one end of the dike area where emergency vehicles can drive through and find a spot to turn around. Option 2: have access on both ends so emergency vehicles can drive in and out without turning around.

Kristen reported that Ivins City officials have given the okay for emergency vehicles to drive across the top of the dike. However, the City doesn't want to see vehicles on the slopes, impacting the detention basin. In the short term for quick access, emergency personnel could snip the fence at a point on Tuacahn Drive to get their vehicles in. For a long term solution a gate could be installed.

Pete Kuhlman, the Washington County Emergency Services Director, mentioned there are many ways people are coming off the top of Red Mountain. Some people coming off trail will drop into a deep canyon and get seriously injured. There is an average of three to five rescues each year in this area.

There has been talk of marking the route on the top to direct the people coming down. Kristen reiterated if Search and Rescue drives across the dike they need a way to get in and out without turning around since there is not much room to do so. There is an old road bed that goes through and comes out on Tuacahn Drive and is part of private property. If the property owners are willing to allow access on their property, this would be the easiest and cleanest way to have access/exit points. If the property owners are not interested in allowing access, emergency personnel deems it would be best to keep access points in a public area.

In a previous discussion between Bob Sandberg, Pete, and Kristen, Pete pointed out that it will be easiest to put someone in front of the vehicles to look for tortoises if access is on top of the dike.

Option 1 would be to pursue something with the private property owner. It was agreed to have the HCP contact the Layton property owners to find out the possibility for emergency personnel to use the property for emergency purposes.

Option 2 would be to put in a gate immediately adjacent to the Layton property. Produce standard operating procedures between the county and Search & Rescue, stating that if needed, emergency personnel can enter from 200 East, drive across the dike to the new gate on the Tuacahn side then continue to drive across roughly 150 feet of habitat before picking up the old road bed.

Renee asked what the tortoise concerns are and Kristen remarked that emergency personnel would receive the same training and maps as the fire crews do each year. Cameron offered to go to their quarterly coordination meetings to offer the tortoise trainings. With any emergency response, it is imperative to give pertinent information to help protect tortoises and habitat during rescues and fires.

The committee agreed that unlike fires where the desire is to have crews go into the Reserve to reduce further damage to tortoises, Search and Rescue is an added potential risk to tortoises, being generated from human recreational activities. A member of the TC questioned whether there should be trails in that area. The committee felt it would be good to evaluate human safety, emergency resources, and impacts from recreational use with the BLM.

b. Detention Dam Basin Update

In regards to the Ivins Detention Basin and the hardening of Toe Trail proposal, Kristen reminded the TC of initial estimates for the trail. The engineer is now looking for cement materials to be used. Kristen reported she hasn't had a chance to pursue any grants yet. She believes those who give the grants will look at the price tag on 1,800 feet of trail and feel it is too expensive. She recommended, as Ann suggested, that the TC find out if Ivins would be interested and willing to allow the trail to be shorter, connecting to Abigail Park instead of ending at Tuacahn Road given the uncertainty of obtaining grant money for that length of trail.

The committee discussed estimates from the Ivins City Engineer, Chuck Gillette, which were brought to the September HCAC work meeting. Chuck's estimates were almost half of what the SCSP engineer brought in. Kristen declared this is a state park project and SCSP needs to be the ones to monetarily pursue the options. Given the poor economy, it is possible prices could come in lower; however, the estimated cost of materials is pretty accurate.

The TC conversed about the September HCAC work meeting. During the meeting the HCAC became interested in having the HCP purchase the detention property. Ivins would use the money from the sale of property to build the hardened portion of Toe Trail. The HCAC asked the HCP to get an appraisal of the detention dam property.

Ivins was supposed to contact Kristen, have discussions, and start a process of pursuing the trail.

Regardless of who puts up the money to build the trail, the TC needs to have conversations about impacts and whether they are acceptable. There are three surface alternatives: asphalt with the most impact, trex boardwalk, and concrete elevated. Kristen will outline the impacts of each alternative for the TC to review. She proclaimed the TC should not look at cost figures, like always the TC needs to look at biological impacts only. State Parks needs to be the ones to decide what material will be most appropriate for long term maintenance and stability.

Ann replied a boardwalk trail would be beneficial in the nursery area because of the curve. If the trail is on the edge of the Reserve then there is no difference in biological impact for either boardwalk or asphalt trail. It was discussed that an elevated boardwalk adjacent to the edge of the Reserve may be permanent take and would need to be offset.

Kristen stated that although this may be true with asphalt, SCSP may be better served by using something like a trex or a concrete in the long term because asphalt is going to have more long term maintenance. She called attention to the fact that SPSP needs to be the one to assess long term costs associated with maintaining the various proposed surfaces.

Ann suggested the TC recommend a combination trail from a biological standpoint, not a monetary standpoint. The recommendation is not motivated by cost. Cameron mentioned Ivins understands if there is "take" of habitat they will have to mitigate with additional properties. Ann concluded an elevated boardwalk may have maintenance issues if sand fills up under the boardwalk and there is no passage of animals.

c. Red Hills Parkway Expansion

A preconstruction meeting will be held October 25th at 9:30 a.m. which Cameron will attend. Ann commented she did a survey of the area on October 19th. She completed two of the four polygons and removed three tortoises. The tortoises were put further into the Reserve but there is a chance they will return back to their burrows in the clearance area. She explained every polygon needs to be treated as though the tortoises will go back to their burrows. Any tortoises encountered along the roadway should be marked so there is information on them.

Ann recommended that a bobcat should not do work on the Reserve side of the fence from a high likelihood of encountering tortoises. Once the new fence is installed, those polygons will need to be cleared to make sure tortoises aren't in harm's way or trapped between the permanent and temporary fencing. The fence work should be done by November 1st. The engineers know that everyone working on the Red Hills project needs tortoise training and they're supposed to make sure the contractors know about it.

d. Fencing Update

Cameron explained how St. George City has been concerned with fencing in Pioneer Park because they didn't have all the details on where the fence will be. After talking with the City, concerns were resolved and they are now ok with the TC's recommended fencing plan in Pioneer Park. Renee will verify if fencing was identified in the HCP as part of mitigation actions. Then she wants to see if there's a specific way that to go about it. If the County was going to put in a certain type of fence, addressed in the HCP, then St. George could put in a higher quality fence to justify the mitigation. Another scenario would be to have the HCP put the fencing up, but St. George would cover the additional expense for a nicer fence, a nicer stepover, extra signage, etc. Renee will check with the regional office to find out what is appropriate.

Cameron informed the committee that fencing has been repaired at the Tuacahn wash boundary. Tortoises have been going up and down the wash and some probably live on the Tuacahn side now. Assuming there are tortoises now blocked out of SCSP, those tortoises will need to be removed during the spring and brought back to the park with permission from Tuacahn.

Cameron added that a fence is being installed north of the dike on SCSP property, not on the dike. Fencing should be done early next week and 3 tortoises will be returned to the area.

Tim Croissant reported the BLM will start fencing along Cottonwood Road on November 1st and crews will have tortoise training before their work begins. The BLM will be staking out the fence but not long in advance of the crews. Renee mentioned a portion of fencing along Cottonwood Road looks like someone ran over the tortoise fencing. Tim stated eventually the BLM would like to have tortoise mesh and range fence reach as close to the forest service boundary as possible, but at least to Black Gulch.

Tim stated when BLM is done with travel management planning and NCA management training it would be a good time to start working towards proposals with the Mojave Desert Initiative (MDI).

e. UDWR Plantings

The DWR ordered 800 plants from the shrub lab at Northern Arizona University. They ordered creosote, sand sage, and desert almond. The University delivered 1,500-1,900 plants and the additional plants were freebies. On Saturday, October 14th some dedicated hunter volunteers, Rhett Boswell (UDWR habitat biologist), Cameron, and some Red Cliffs Desert Reserve trail stewards went out to plant in the Turkey Farm area. There wasn't as much help as was anticipated so they went out again on Tuesday, October 18th to plant on DWR property along the Middleton Powerline in a burned area. The plants were raised in harsh conditions, getting water intermittently so that when they are transplanted into the desert they are more adaptable. There is still some good habitat in the burned areas for the tortoises. Two tortoises were observed

along with several burrows and pallets.

Overall the plants looked healthy, but some were a little stressed. Although specific plant locations were not GPS'd, Ann knows the general area of the plants and can go out to occasionally monitor their growth. She will find out how much these plants cost and what kind of monitoring the DWR plans to do.

4. **OTHER BUSINESS**

a. **Snow Canyon State Park Signing**

Kristen informed the TC of signs that have been put up in SCSP. On the Toe Trail from Tuacahn Drive to 200 East, SCSP had an employee put up 18 signs on the spur and illegal trails as well as restoration signs. SCSP is hoping that new signs and law enforcement will help keep people on the trails.

b. **TC Biologist Position**

The committee discussed who should fill the TC vacancy (local biologist) and replace Marshall Topham. Bob announced he has been in contact with Jeff Norton who is now the most likely candidate. Jeff is willing to serve and will be introduced to the HCAC next week, and may then be recommended to the County Commission to fill the TC vacancy. He has a biology background, has worked for the DWR, and is now in the landscaping business.

5. **NEXT MEETING DATES**

a. **Thursday November 10, 2011**

b. **Field Trip**

A field trip was scheduled to see the fencing work along Cottonwood Road and to see the DWR plantings at the Turkey Farm. The Committee will meet at the T-bone trailhead at 9:00 am on November 10, 2011.

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by Renee Chi to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded by Ann McLuckie.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

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