

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, **July 18, 2013.**

Members present were:

Ann McLuckie, Chairman	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Nathan Brown, Vice Chairman	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Tim Croissant	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Cameron Rognan	Wash Co. Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)
Kristen Comella	Snow Canyon State Park (SCSP)

Absent and excused:

Gary McKell	Local Biologist
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Also present were:

Bob Sandberg	Washington County HCP Administrator
Doreen Bowers-Irons	Washington County Recorder

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ann McLuckie noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. June 20, 2013

Page 2 under General Business, paragraph 2, sentence 2: changed,

From: "During the first year a tortoise is adopted, the Division wants to offer shots for sick tortoises."

To: "During the first year a tortoise is adopted, the Division wants to offer ~~shots~~ vet care for sick tortoises."

Page 3, under b. Fuel Reduction on Cottonwood Road paragraph 1, bullet point, sentence 1: changed,

From: "Money has been spent to remove fire fuel from the roadway and now there is a lot of tumbleweed (Russian thistle) buildup next to the fence."

To: "Money has been spent to remove fire fuel from the roadway and now there is a lot of tumbleweed (Russian thistle) buildup next to the fence from previous years."

Page 3, under b. Fuel Reduction on Cottonwood Road paragraph 1, bullet point 2,

sentence 2: changed,

From: “Sometimes the mother will abandon her babies when ravens attack them.”

To: “Sometimes the mother will abandon her babies ~~when~~ then opportunistic ravens could attack them.”

Page 3, under b. Fuel Reduction on Cottonwood Road paragraph 3, sentence 3: changed,

From: “Not very many chemicals will kill one species without killing everything else as well.”

To: “Not very many chemicals will kill one species of broadleaf plant without killing ~~everything else~~ all other broadleaf as well.”

Page 3, paragraph 5, sentence 3: changed,

From: “Kristen Comella asked if controlled burns can be done this year to eliminate much of the fuel load along...”

To: “Kristen Comella asked if controlled burns can be done this year to eliminate ~~much~~ of the old tumbleweed fuel load along...”

Page 4, paragraph 1, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Cameron Rognan added that the recently installed culverts along Red Hills Parkway are obstructed by tumbleweed.”

To: “Cameron Rognan added that the recently installed culverts along Red Hills Parkway are obstructed by dried tumbleweed.

Page 4, paragraph 1, sentence 2: changed,

From: “There needs to be some kind of program to get rid of tumbleweed.”

To: “There needs to be some kind of program to get rid of tumbleweed both old and new growth.”

Page 4, paragraph 2, sentence 2: changed,

From: “They will get an opinion from BLM firefighters and pursue viable options of physically removing the tumbleweed.”

To: “They will get an opinion from BLM ~~firefighters~~ specialists to assess whether tumbleweeds are reducing the effectiveness of Cottonwood Road as a fire corridor and

pursue viable options of physically removing the tumbleweed.”

Page 4, paragraph 4, sentence 1: changed,

From: “There has been a lot of interest from various users to extend and open a trail along the rim for all users to enjoy the views of the canyon below.”

To: “There has been a lot of interest from various users ~~to extend and open a trail to~~ move the three quarter mile section of trail along the rim for all users to enjoy the views of the canyon below.

Page 5, paragraph 2, sentence 3: changed,

From: “Chairman McLuckie would like more information from the recovery office, geneticists and experts before assigning another translocation area.”

To: ““Chairman McLuckie would like more information from the recovery office, geneticists and experts before ~~assigning another translocation area~~ translocating out of the recovery area.”

Page 5, paragraph 4, sentence 5: changed,

From: “If the temperature is extreme and the tortoise doesn’t identify a burrow then it can be lost.”

To: “If the temperature is extreme and the tortoise doesn’t identify a burrow then it can ~~be lost~~ die.”

Page 5, paragraph 5, sentence 1: changed,

From: “Chairman McLuckie continued, spatial distribution of mycoplasma agassizzi is present closer to urban areas and sick tortoises are generally clustered together with some urbanization factor.

To: “Chairman McLuckie continued, spatial distribution of “*Mycoplasma agassizzi*” is present closer to urban areas and sick tortoises are generally clustered together with some urbanization factor.

MOTION by Kristen Comella to approve the amended minutes of June 20, 2013.

Seconded by Cameron Rognan.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Draft HCP Budget 2014

Chair McLuckie stated the discussion of the 2014 calendar year budget from the previous meeting was captured excellently in the minutes. Kristen Comella felt satisfied with the budget. Bob Sandberg stated the question he had was that he did not know where they were in the discussion to approve funds for DWR to provide inoculation of tortoises for potential adoption. The budget does not have it specifically identified and it's not the county's responsibility to care for them long term. However, it may help to get them adopted. Ms. Comella stated this is an effort to get them out and adopted. It fits by making a onetime offer to help with costs.

The committee discussed the \$2,000 appropriation in the budget for tortoise care which included how and where the funds would be spent.

Cameron Rognan stated it would be easier to send the money if we knew how and where the funds would be used. Several of the tortoises we have, even the captive ones, have been exposed to the disease and we have never had to take them to the vet. If there is no need to spend the money we can control it. We can offer it in special cases when needed and avoid giving them a lump sum of money without knowledge of how it is spent.

Nathan Brown stated he thought adding \$2,000 towards tortoise care would be a small amount of money and would help with costs. Ms. Comella asked if it was possible to get the funds. Chair McLuckie commented it could be on contingency as needed.

Ms. Comella suggested having Krissy Wilson, with DWR, come up with a billing system for "X" amount of money within "X" amount of time. Mr. Rognan stated doing it on an as needed basis gives the HCP more control over the way the funds are spent. The committee thought that would be a more appropriate way to control the funds.

Mr. Rognan thought there would be small amount of tortoises especially where we may be releasing more into the wild that may have the disease but do not show any symptoms or signs of it. He stated personally he would rather see as many tortoises returned to the wild as possible for recovery. The committee had a short discussion on the length of time tortoises are held in the temporary care facility (TCF).

Mr. Brown stated it is only a couple of thousand dollars which is not much money to allow the DWR in Salt Lake to have the adoption program. That is how it is done in other states as well. He thought it was a small amount of money and helps them get the issue of tortoise adoption worked out.

Ms. Comella stated she felt something should be formalized. They could even increase the amount of funds being provided as long as something is formalized and in place on

how the funds would be spent. Krissy Wilson can submit a proposal which would protect the County in the event of an audit.

Chair McLuckie reported on an incident that occurred a few months ago where the TCF was broken into and someone stole a sick tortoise. Those sick tortoises that are in the TCF for long term could pose a threat to the outside population.

MOTION: by Kristen Comella to approve the 2014 HCP Budget to increase line item 433-000 Tortoise Care from \$2,000 to \$6,000 knowing that \$4,000 of that may potentially be reimbursed to DWR and contingent on that increase, that Krissy Wilson put together an adoption program proposal and submit that to HCP Administrator and staff.

Seconded by: Tim Croissant.

Discussion: A short discussion regarding formalizing the intent of the funds occurred.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

b. Tumbleweed Removal within the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve

Chair McLuckie asked Mr. Croissant if he was able to get the fire crews to drive along Cottonwood Road to assess potential fire issues.

Mr. Croissant stated they did not make a specific trip but were familiar with the area. He spoke with Shane McCormick who has been on nearly every fire within the County for the past four years. Mr. McCormick agreed that when the tumbleweed builds up it reduces the fire break width.

Mr. Croissant stated he researched different chemical options and the only thing he could think of was that in looking at the life history of the tumbleweed, it goes to seed later in the year than the native or annual plants do. He felt that the cheat grass along the fuel break can be sprayed with plateau herbicide in the fall which will knock the majority of grasses back but not affect the dicots. During the spring, herbicide will not be applied and the broadleaf's and annuals will germinate, grow, and go to seed. Then after the natives have gone to seed the tumbleweed can be sprayed.

The TC felt that spraying the tumbleweed would be a good idea and physical removal would also be required. The spraying of herbicides and the types to be used along with the dates to spray was briefly discussed and indication was that the tumbleweed would be sprayed in June or July.

Mr. Rognan stated if they only spray one area it won't be cost effective and they would still get the build up from other areas. Spraying everywhere would help control the problem but that is not feasible. Mr. Sandberg stated the tumbleweed is coming from both inside and outside the Reserve.

Chair McLuckie expressed concern about goats getting out of the right of way and into

the Reserve on several occasions. She didn't feel the goat project should be abandoned, but that the contract needs to be tightened up so goats are properly contained. Chair McLuckie said the majority of the tumbleweed is coming from the Cottonwood Road area; either from the disturbance with the new fence that was built and or the goats grazing. Mr. Rognan reported it is from the burned area.

Ms. Comella stated we won't be able to spray everywhere but if there is growth within the corridors that is something that is obtainable. Mr. Rognan reported the wet tumbleweed is not as much of a fire hazard as the dried tumbleweed.

The committee discussed removing the dead old growth and the new growth and what would be the best remedy and most the cost effective. This discussion included how much tumbleweed has invaded the area from the burned areas and the disturbance from the new fencing lines.

Mr. Rognan will pursue options to physically remove the tumbleweed along the corridor. He will also look into what has been done to reduce weeds along SR-18, Red Hills Parkway, and Cottonwood Road and future options for tumbleweed issues if they become a problem.

c. Updated Translocation Plan

Chair McLuckie showed exhibit 3-c-1, an assignment written for the TC. She wondered why this translocation plan assignment was made. Mr. Sandberg explained that Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have come out with new guidelines. The current draft review of the FWS indicates that a revised translocation plan should be completed prior to the renewal of the current permit. In addition, we have all the tortoises discussed earlier. Mr. Rognan added that the translocation window is coming up in August/September and it would be nice to have something prepared to know the disposition of those tortoises.

Chair McLuckie stated we have found that in Zone 4 the majority of the tortoises are centered along Babylon Road because that is where it was easiest to translocate tortoises. When they monitored Zone 4 this season, they did the entire zone and there are areas on the far west that would be good to translocate tortoises to. When they monitored 40 kilometers of Zone 4 they only picked up seven tortoises which is not many. They will need to look at and calculate the density estimate in relation to what was recommended by Kim Field for maximizing density. Mr. Croissant stated that when translocating there needs to be fewer than 10.4 tortoises per square kilometer.

Mr. Rognan provided some overlay maps (exhibit 3-c-1) he prepared of the Reserve from a habitat model that Jason Jones of DWR made a year ago showing where tortoises are located. He explained the areas and habitat densities of the Zones. There are other areas and options to explore inside and outside the Reserve. We know the disease is prevalent in Zone 4 and is potentially even widespread in Zone 4. There was a bad outbreak a few years ago in Zone 4, which is something that should be considered when translocating tortoises to that area. One of the biggest considerations

in the report was translocating tortoises to a disease free or a low percentage of disease area that would substantially reduce the risk of translocated animals contacting the disease.

Chair McLuckie concurred and stated there has also been disease outbreak in Zone 3 and tortoises that have been observed with disease in Zone 2 as well.

Mr. Rognan reiterated the importance of looking inside and outside the reserve to translocate the tortoises. The Leeds area looks promising with quality habitat and no tortoises there. The area was acquired for the Reserve and fits most of the requirements for translocation.

Ms. Comella asked if the existing translocation plan was put together by DWR. Chair McLuckie answered it was put together in combination with the DWR and the University of Nevada Reno. Ms. Comella then asked how much of the existing plan is still functional. Chair McLuckie answered basically all of it. She explained the plan was based on research conducted by Dick Tracey. Translocation should be done in either the spring or fall but not in times of drought. Last year during the spring window, translocation didn't happen because there had not been rain for a number of weeks. We primarily translocate in Zone 4, however, we have changed in a sense that if there are tortoises that come off *take* areas adjacent to the Reserve and there are opportunities to translocate them on the other side of the fence within the Reserve, that is done. She gave an example of where tortoises were translocated around Ivins area in Snow Canyon State Park, Paradise Canyon, and Shivwits. Based on Dick Tracey's research, translocation is successful when there are tortoises already in the area. She gave a brief history of when translocation started back in 1999 and reported over 400 tortoises that have been successfully translocated.

Mr. Rognan concurred with Chair McLuckie. He questioned whether the TC would like to adopt unilaterally their suggestions or create a preferred document in relation to that of the FWS.

Ms. Comella asked Mr. Brown how familiar he was with the FWS' existing translocation plan. Can the existing plan be updated and amended? Mr. Brown answered there are several things to be considered. There is a current HCP plan regarding translocation. The de facto method has been to put them in Zone 4. There is an opportunity to populate other areas.

Ms. Comella and Mr. Brown discussed revising the current plan. Mr. Brown stated in order to move the tortoises into other areas, a separate plan should be written up with FWS in conjunction with Washington County HCP. It would not hold up the renewal process in any shape or form. The plan would just need to indicate other areas that have been identified as suitable habitat for translocation. The other option is to recognize repopulation areas such as Beaver Dam Wash and other suitable places within the Reserve but outside of Zone 4.

Mr. Brown stated the DWR and FWS will be moving forward to prepare a translocation plan. The plan will be amended for translocating tortoises. Mr. Sandberg stated if amending the plan is acceptable to FWS, we should look at other areas to repopulate tortoises.

The Committee discussed the maps Mr. Rognan submitted that would be suitable for translocation. Mr. Rognan indicated the maps are not ground truthed for habitat. Zone two appears to have the largest density of tortoises but other areas should also be considered. In addition, recreational impacts should also be considered for any revisions to the existing translocation plan.

MOTION by Kristen Comella that DWR in conjunction with agency partners works to amend the plan then bring back to the Committee for review and input looking at intra-Reserve translocation beyond Zone 4. In addition, that there is reference made for future plan for intra-recovery unit translocation.

Seconded by Tim Croissant.

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Ms. Comella asked if there was a target FWS timeline. Mr. Brown answered this process will take a couple of years so the timing is perfect to talk about it now. Mr. Rognan stated if meeting recovery goals is the purpose, the sooner they start the better. There are a few tortoises waiting for translocation and they could be placed in strategic areas.

d. Snow Canyon State Park Waterline Replacement

Ms. Comella reported the existing water line in Snow Canyon State Park needs to be replaced. She explained the project and location of the lines being replaced. Water is pumped up from St. George to a buried 30,000 gallon storage tank, then the water is gravity fed along the east side of the road to the campground. The water line is about 40 years old. It has a concrete lined interior, steel lined exterior, and they have had many breaks and problems with the line. There is a possibility of funding to replace the waterline. She provided an overview map to show the waterline and tank locations. They will replace the lines adjacent to the roadway. The new line will begin at the pump house along the west side of the road all the way up the edge then cross the road and run up the east side along Snow Canyon Drive. They are looking into the possibility of getting a new water tank and placing it just below the existing tank to help reduce high water pressures in the Park. They will be using a track hoe on the project. There will be a 14-foot zone of impact off the shoulders of the roadway for about 2 ½ miles.

The TC discussed the location of the project for clarification. Ms. Comella noted that the project timing is dependent on funding. The first step is to get through this approval process with requirements for mitigating impacts. They are trying to determine all costs associated with the project. They hope to start after the active tortoise window, hopefully

in December with completion before mid February. The line will be buried 30-inches and with the lava features there are bound to be some unknowns happen. The area will be revegetated when the project is completed.

Mr. Rognan commented he liked the fact the line is being moved closer to the road as opposed to creating more of an impact to the area. He and Mr. Croissant were satisfied with the project as it is closer to the road and would not create a large impact. Chair McLuckie stated the recommendation from the TC is to follow UDP protocol and keep the TC informed on the status of the project.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

a. Mr. Croissant stated the geotechnical tests have been completed out at White Reef but he did not have the results. The testing company wanted to drill two more holes, which they were allowed to do, closer to the Interstate. Dawna Ferris-Rowley is pushing for a 100-foot long bridge at the lower end, which she feels would have a lower impact. The BLM is looking at a 100-foot and a 75-foot bridge but either one would still be at the same grade. The 75-foot bridge would need to have built up ramps to get the grade level. If they go further out with the 100-foot bridge, they would be closer to the hill and would not need as much of a buildup. The project will still go through NEPA.

b. Mr. Croissant stated UDWR is looking at replacing the guzzler off the Diamond Valley East trailhead. The existing guzzler has not been functional for a number of years. The same footprint will be used but will have a different design. It will have three 1,800 gallon tanks attached to the apron with the tanks buried with a surface spigot to provide water for deer and other animals. Mr. Croissant provided pictures of the trail and explained the access. There would not be much of an impact from the road as it is a clear area and outside the elevation range of the tortoise. It will go through NEPA. The trailhead is located on BLM land but can be accessed from the Forest Service Road or from the Diamond Valley road. There is no time frame for the project at this time.

c. Kristen Comella stated the tumbleweed is not too bad except for Tuachan Wash where it is pretty dense. She will work with Ivins City and the Prison Crew to manually remove the weeds and clean up the area. Usually staff will cleanup but sometimes they get volunteers to cleanup the weeds. When it is bad they have the prison crew come in and do the work. The prison crews are appreciated.

d. Cameron Rognan stated the HCP was awarded a 1.5 million dollar grant. The TC discussed an article that was in The Spectrum regarding the grant.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

a. August 08, 2013

The next TC meeting was changed to August 22, 2013 at 9:30 AM

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by Cameron Rognan moved to adjourn the meeting.

Seconded: Kristen Comella

Discussion: None.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:19 AM.
Minutes prepared by Doreen Bowers-Irons