

HABITAT CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A **regular** meeting of the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee (HCAC) was held at the Washington County Administration Building on **September 26, 2023.**

Committee members present were:

Chris Blake, Chairman	Environmental Organization
Chris Hart, Vice Chair	Local Development
Josh Rasmussen	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Kress Staheli	Mayors Association
Gregg McArthur	Citizen-at-Large
Carmen Clark (Zoom)	Citizen-at-Large

Absent and Excused:

Kevin Bunnell	Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR)
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Also present were:

Cameron Rognan	HCP Administrator
Randee Sanders	Washington County HCP Executive Assistant
Mike Schijf	Washington County HCP Biologist
Steven Scott	Washington County Attorney
Adam Snow	Washington County Commissioner
Brad Winder	Washington County Noxious Weeds
Alysha Lundgren	St. George News
Zach Valois	Conserve Southwest Utah
Richard Spotts	Citizen
Curtis Roundy	UDWR
Cristian Edwards	UDWR
Cameron Cutler	St. George City
Paul Stead	St. George City
John Kellam	BLM
Ray Allton	Rosenberg Associates
Heber Heyder	UT, FFSL
Danielle Costantini (Zoom)	USFWS
Ron Torgerson (Zoom)	SITLA
Rick Fridell (Zoom)	UDWR
1435....463 (Zoom)	

1. CALL TO ORDER

Reminder to speak directly into the microphones so that Zoom captures all dialog for those attending remotely and comments can be recorded effectively.

Chairman Chris Blake called the meeting to order at approximately 1:02 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 Meeting Minutes**
 - 1. **July 25, 2023**
- c. **Next Meeting Date**
 - 1. **November 28, 2023**

MOTION by: Chris Hart
Secinded by: Gregg McArthur
Discussion: To approve the Consent Agenda.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Chris Hart declared a conflict of interest on item 5b on the agenda, due to being the mayor of Ivins City. Kress Staheli likewise declared a conflict of interest on item 5a, due to being the mayor of Washington City.

4. PRESENTATIONS

a. Fire restoration and prevention efforts – UDWR, Curtis Roundy

After introducing himself, Curtis Roundy shared a presentation on DWR’s fire restoration and prevention efforts, including graphs and photos (*see exhibit 4a*).

UDWR is specifically focusing on cheat grass, because it seems to be the culprit for a lot of the fire intervals here in Washington County. We need to look at where can we protect, what are the areas still intact, what can we preserve, and where do we need to restore in order to help identify where money is best spent, where efforts are best to go toward, and what areas should be avoided.

There are a couple of chemicals that exist to help with interrupting the life cycle of cheat grass by stopping its growth and reproduction. Perennials are good. They have a deeper root system and the chemicals used allows them to maintain on the landscape. Annuals, however, are the culprits that fuel wildfires.

Rejuvra penetrates the top ½" - 2" of the soil profile. Timing is important, as rain is needed shortly after being sprayed so that it will set into the soil and stay put where placed. Depending on where you are at in the growth cycle, you may use Plateau, Rejuvra, or some combination of the two. Full grown plants can be treated with Rejuvra and Roundup. The chemicals can be applied by helicopter or with a boom sprayer.

A project is already lined up in the WRI database to spend about \$125,000 to spray and protect areas not previously burned in order to remove cheat grass out of the understory and thereby keep it intact.

UDWR seeded the Turkey Farm burned habitat with a broadcast seeder behind an ATV, and drug a carpet harrow to distribute them into the soil. This is an area where tortoise burrows and tortoises are found, so they timed it when the tortoises were denning in their burrows during the less active season. Along with Ann McLuckie's help, they walked and surveyed the area first to make sure no tortoises were active in the treatment area.

In order to avoid negative impacts to the tortoise, there was no chaining or heavy handed treatments within the Reserve along Icehouse Road. However, outside of the tortoise habitat they aerial seeded and chained it using a high diverse seed mix with perennial grasses and forbs was used. Afterward they observed very little invasive annual grasses. Curtis recommended that when/if wildfires occur in the Reserve in the future, that the committee and partners be open minded about the ability to use a chain in precise locations. It doesn't have to be a 250' chain and two dozers. It can be a rubber tire tractor with a 20-50' chain. Fire prevention and restoration does require commitment, and we need to anticipate maintenance, monitoring, and retreating areas.

When asked about the cost of these treatments, Curtis responded that chemical currently costs about \$40-60-acre. That will fluctuate along with the price of fuel and the production of the chemicals. These chemicals are to be applied when tortoises are denned up and underground to be safe. Post fire seeding currently costs approximately \$60-90 per acre for the purchase of seeds and \$8-10 per acre to apply. Generally speaking, any time you can disturb the soil profile when seeding, the more success you will have.

b. 2020 Cottonwood Trail Fire RCNCA Habitat Rehabilitation Project Update – BLM, John Kellam

John Kellam shared an update on the 2020 Cottonwood Trail fire habitat rehabilitation project. Maps, graphs, and photos were shared (*see exhibit 4b*).

In the spring/summer of 2005 and 2006, wildfires burned significant portions of the Beaver Dam Wash and Red Cliffs Nation Conservation Areas in southwestern Utah. By destroying perennial plants, which are critical resources

to desert tortoises for protections and burrow sites, and altering forage quality and quantity, wildfires are changing the habitat conditions and complicating desert tortoise recovery efforts. As a result, tortoise populations within the NCA's have declined up to 50% in some areas due primarily to mortality and habitat degradation. Without active management, nonnative grasses and forbs are expected to increase at the expense of native shrub lands. Habitat rehabilitation can increase desert tortoise survivorship and fecundity in burned areas and help recover desert tortoise populations. Since 2016, NCA staff have annually coordinated and implemented habitat rehabilitation research projects in the NCA's.

In 2020, four human-caused wildfires burned approximately 12,900 acres within the Red Cliffs NCA, including the 1,631-acre Cottonwood Trail Fire that burned 919 acres of designated desert tortoise critical habitat. In the summer of 2020 the NCA biologist, ACE biological interns, and UDWR staff systematically searched for fire-killed and injured tortoises within a 618-acre area of the burned tortoise habitat on public land to determine direct tortoise mortality and injury as a result of the Cottonwood Trail Fire. They encountered 20 tortoise remains (14 directly attributed to fire), 4 live tortoises (including 1 injured by fire), and 133 active or good condition tortoise burrows.

The loss of individuals in long-lived species with low reproductive capacity, such as tortoises, can lead to population-level effects. For example, McLuckie et al. (2007) estimated that 15% of the adult tortoise population died due to the 2005 fires within the Red Cliffs NCA region where the 2020 Cottonwood Trail Fire occurred. Subsequent biannual tortoise population monitoring between 2006 and 2019 indicated the tortoise population has not recovered to pre-2005 population levels. Kellam et al. (2022) estimated that approximately 16.3% of the local adult tortoise population within the 618-acre Cottonwood Trail Fire survey area died directly from fire.

In fall of 2020, an approximately 150-acre habitat rehabilitation focus area was identified based on: 1) the density of live tortoise, tortoise remains, and burrows, 2) friable soils and topographic/hydrologic features benefitting plants, and 3) site access. Habitat rehabilitation project goals were to revegetate fire-affected desert tortoise critical habitat within the Red Cliffs NCA, in plots, to create "fertile" islands that can act as seed banks from which native plants can disperse to surrounding fire-damaged lands.

The general strategy was to plant 2,814 plants within a 25-acre plot with two topographic variables (slope-base, valley floor). Species used were White bursage, Ephedra, and Creosote. Each plant was wrapped in a chicken wire cage and given 2 liters of water. All plants received an additional 2 liters of supplemental water on July 01, 2021. There were extreme drought conditions that persisted from the time of planting (November 2020) through the time of the

1-year survivorship counts. The extreme near record-breaking temperature conditions during summer 2021 likely affected plant survivorship.

Data from the large-scale (4,389 plant) 2016 Beaver Dam Wash NCA habitat rehabilitation research project showed a 4.5% decrease in survivorship from 1 year to 4.25 years, which means plants that survived 1 year had a good chance of surviving more than 4 years. A 1-year survivorship of 65.3% for the 2020 Red Cliffs NCA plants met project goals by producing robust plants that create seed banks from which native plants can disperse—thereby, providing important food and shelter resources for desert tortoise and other native wildlife species in the NCA.

Other BLM actions related to the 2020 Red Cliffs NCA fires include the purchase of 8,000 native plants (6,500 globemallow, 1,000 brittlebush, and 500 creosote plants) from the NPS Lake Mead Song Dog Native Plant Nursery for 2021/2022 habitat rehabilitation projects in 2020 RCNCA fire burn areas. BLM also purchased over 200 lbs. of native seed and coordinated with community volunteers to hand-rake the seed within fire-affected desert tortoise critical habitat in the 2020 Cottonwood Trail Fire burn area. BLM coordinated and assisted with planting 400 mature (2–3-year-old) native plants that UDWR purchased from UNLV within fire-affected desert tortoise critical habitat in the 2020 Lava Ridge Fire burn area. BLM collected over 200 desert tortoise scats for a Southern Utah University DNA study examining the diet of tortoise in fire-damaged and unburned habitats in the RCNCA/BDWNCA.

Fire emergency stabilization and rehabilitation plans were created to stabilize soils and restore native vegetation on the fire-damaged lands, actions included the aerial reseeding (~66,500 lbs.) within the Cottonwood Trail Fire and Turkey Farm Road Fire burn areas, using six native species (Globemallow, Sideoats Grama, Blue Grama, Galleta, Indian Ricegrass, and Sandberg Bluegrass).

A 22-month survivorship of 35.0% for the 2021 Red Cliffs NCA plants met project goals by producing robust plants that create seed banks from which native plants can disperse—thereby, providing important food and shelter resources for desert tortoise and other native wildlife species in the NCA. Through their ongoing plant-habitat rehabilitation research, they have learned which plant species, planting methods, and topographic/hydrologic features benefit plant survivorship. Their goal is to increase survivorship through research and expand the scale of future habitat rehabilitation efforts to mitigate the devastating impacts wildfires have on desert tortoise and other wildlife species in the Red Cliffs and Beaver Dam Wash NCA's.

During December 2022, NCA staff completed an Integrated Weed Management Plan and Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the control and eradication of nonnative noxious and invasive plant species in the Red Cliffs/Beaver Dam Wash NCA's.

Since then, NCA staff purchased 50% of a large-bed UTV, a 100-gallon tank weed sprayer, and over 125 gallons of herbicide (including Imazapic and Glyphosate) for the treatment of brome grasses and Russian thistle/Sahara mustard in the NCA's. BLM staff conducted herbicide treatments at Cottonwood, T-Bone, Yellow Knolls, Black Gulch, and White Reef trailheads. BLM staff also provided herbicide and worked together with Brad Winder (Washington County Noxious Weed Control Supervisor) to treat the road edges along the entire length of Cottonwood Springs Road from the NCA boundary to Black Gulch.

Additionally, BLM interns treated road edges and treated/pulled/bagged Scotch thistle plants at multiple infestation sites in and adjacent to the Red Cliffs Recreation Area. NCA staff has also added \$40,000 to a BLM-State of Utah WRI agreement to acquire a youth corps crew to assist with outplanting 3,000 native plants in fire damaged tortoise habitat in the NCA's in November/December 2023. In late January 2023, BLM provided an ACE crew to assist a UDWR project that used WRI funds to reseed rehabilitation plots on public land in the 2020 Cottonwood Trail Fire burn area. During spring 2023, NCA staff coordinated a project that pulled and bagged 18,391 noxious/invasive Sahara mustard plants in a 10-acre infestation/treatment study plot area in critical habitat that will also be treated with BLM-approved/provided herbicides during the fall/winter of 2023.

John shared that there is an EIS that the federal government is in the process of completing. He had put language in the weed management plan and EA allowing them to follow the guidelines within the EIS as soon as it gets approved. He is eagerly awaiting that approval so BLM can begin using Esplanade/Rejuvra on NCA lands. For now, he is using Plateau and Roundup.

For a long time, they knew weeds were a problem, but there was not much they could do about it. With some of these other chemicals/technics becoming available for use, there is a path forward to create fire breaks and do treatments. The mortality and survivorship from the 2020 fires is unsustainable and we need to do something.

Chris Hart asked if there is evidence of the maturing outplantings self-seeding. To which John replied in the affirmative. Those plants are flowering and seeding, and after a few years we are already seeing young plants coming up.

Curtis cautioned John to allow those plants to get established and get their roots down in the areas where they have recently planted. Disturbed soil seems to soak the chemicals down deeper and could have a different effect. He suggested they wait to spray in those areas for about a year, or they could see bad effects on those new plants.

Cameron Rognan wondered what the cost per acre was. John answered that the plants are not expensive (about \$3.50/\$4.00 apiece), but the labor can be very

expensive. It costs about \$15,000 for a 10-person ACE crew working 10 hours a day for 8 days. The crew can plant over 1,000 plants in that time. With 40-50% survivorship, and the need to outcompete non-native plants, they plant more.

c. Weed management and fire breaks – Washington County, Brad Winder & Mike Schijf

Mike Schijf shared a presentation on the herbicide applications, fuel breaks, and treatment monitoring done by himself and Brad Winder in the Reserve. Wherein he said that wildfire is considered one of the top threats to Mojave Desert tortoise habitat in Washington County. Large wildfires in the Reserve have been fueled by invasive grasses.

The two primary goals identified in the 2019 RCDR Habitat Management Plan are to protect the remaining unburned tortoise habitat and restore the burned tortoise habitat. The plan also identifies seven priority action items: which are 1) treat roadsides and maintain firebreaks, 2) control nonnative species, 3) create islands of vegetation, 4) maintain communication between fire agencies and the public, 5) monitor treated areas, 6) research and monitor methodology to reduce fuel, and 7) soil stabilization.

Herbicides used in the County treatments included Indaziflam (Esplanade/Rejuvra), and Imazapic. A map was shared showing where/when treatments were applied as well as before/after treatment photos (*see exhibit 4c*).

2020/2021 roadside treatments appear to have been very effective in controlling growth of invasive grasses and most other annual species, and fuel loads are generally reduced. Russian thistle appears to rebound more quickly than other invasives, especially in burned habitats along Middleton Powerline and Mill Creek utility roads. Some stress was observed to creosote bush and other shrubs in twice-treated areas.

Esplanade/Plateau treatments in Pioneer Park have ongoing effectiveness for invasive grasses and Sahara Mustard. There was a stark reduction of dry fuels in treated areas compared with 2019/2020, especially along Loop Road. Russian thistle is rebounding more quickly than other invasives. There are noticeable differences in treated vs. the remaining untreated areas. New Sahara Mustard growth is already appearing in untreated areas.

This fall/winter HCP will be working with UDWR on aerial treatments of up to 1,300 acres of state lands in Zone 3. Additional treatment priorities (pending coordination and approvals) could include the following: SCSP, Reserve boundary areas (near roads, industrial areas, residences, etc.), Red Cliffs Recreation Area road, Babylon Road, BLM portions of Middleton Powerline and waterline roads, edges of busy trailheads, BLM land adjacent to Pioneer Park,

basalt slopes at west end of Middleton Powerline, and BLM portions of Navajo Drive and Zone 6.

Brad Winder added that Sahara mustard has really spread. Utah State did a number of surveys on the west side of Quail Lake Road showing that it is really taken off and gone up the hill pretty heavy. There is concern that it will go over the hill, jump I-15, and enter the Reserve. Curtis responded that UDWR is planning treatment around there that will hopefully create a barrier.

Brad continued that it is also moving hard and heavy into Hurricane, and identified as far east as 2400 West and State Street. He worked hard to get UDOT to spray the SR-9 ROW's, but they ran out of money doing snow plowing last spring and weren't able to do much weed abatement. This year, Brad has been told by the State Weed Board that he can go ahead and spray if UDOT doesn't. They will then try to hold the private property owners accountable when weeds jump over their property toward 600 North and into the Reserve.

d. Discussion and possible action on fire management and weed control

Cameron Rognan wanted to highlight how widespread fires have been in the County, especially in the Reserve, as well as how significant of an impact it is for the tortoise. It is the biggest obstacle we have for tortoise recovery in our area. After thanking everyone for their presentations, he opened things up to any other brainstorming ideas on how we can do better and get ahead of the problem.

Chris Hart said that many on the board are not experts on weeds or herbicides, and rely on the experts to recognize where the problem areas are and to make the decisions on what should happen. What we do know is that fire is by far the most devastating thing to the tortoise population. This is a policy recommending board, and he suggested that the policy should be to do everything we can to get rid of the invasive weeds by focusing as much money needed to do as much of the work as possible. He also recommended that the board be open minded to some of the more invasive procedures (such as raking in seed). Doing so during the less active season. He proposed that the policy of the board should be that the experts be allowed to do everything they can do that does not ascend beyond a level of safety to the tortoises, and that next year's budget show a massive increase to allow this work to be done. The rules have changed, there are products accessible, and more can be done now than ever before to go out and do these treatments in a much more massive scale. He is in favor of getting rid of fire material and restoring the habitat.

Chairman Chris Blake said that there is a budget discussion later in the agenda where it can be discussed further.

5. UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

a. Washington City road repairs

The HCP was approached by Washington City, who indicated that there are some road repairs needed in the Millcreek area due to the recent rains. Some of which may need to be done on an emergency basis. HCP staff will coordinate with them to ensure no harm comes to any tortoise.

b. Ivins City / Tuacahn detention basin

Maintenance was required on an emergency basis at the detention basin in Ivins. HCP staff went out to make sure that no tortoises were in harm's way. There were a few in the area, but the repairs were made while steering clear of those tortoises.

c. St. George City well construction

Work continues on the city's well site up by Turkey Farm. They are completely fenced in as they conduct the work, so there are no issues there.

d. Other utility projects

UDOT is going to be working on re-fencing a big portion of I-15, and HCP staff will be coordinating with them.

Rocky Mountain Power is coordinating with BLM on a conductor replacement along Cottonwood Rd.

St. George City will be meeting with BLM to coordinate on another project along Cottonwood Rd. This one is to address a fire hazard near the substation.

6. SURVEYS AND CLEARANCES

a. Zone 6 boundary adjustment proposal

The HCP recently surveyed a few potential incoming and outgoing parcels for the Zone 6 boundary proposal. They found tortoise sign on the potential incoming parcels, but none on the outgoing parcels.

b. Divario / Green Valley

DiVario has begun another phase of development, and HCP staff did not observe any tortoises when they went out to survey and clear it.

c. Sienna Hills in Washington

Sienna Hills is an area that the HCP has had to continually revisit due to tortoises returning the area. Another survey was recently conducted with no sign of tortoises observed this time around.

d. Black Desert in Ivins

Black Desert is another area that the HCP revisits. Another survey was recently conducted, and a tortoise was removed from the area.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Land acquisition subcommittee report (none – next meeting in Oct)

b. TC report – Mike Schijf

1. Submission of TC Review form for Zone 6 boundary adjustment

Included in exhibit 7b are the survey results as well as the TC's evaluation form for the HCAC's consideration (which contains the TC's recommendation in full).

During the July 2023 HCAC meeting, Rick Rosenberg presented an updated plan for a utility easement to access the St. George City substation located just outside Zone 6. In subsequent meetings with the City and other local developers, it became apparent that there were several small boundary changes in this same area that could incorporate the easement road along with other minor changes to reduce utility impacts and improve recreation management while maintaining or improving the Reserve biological values and size.

When the Reserve Zone 6 was initially created, the east boundary followed the alignment of a 2-track utility road under a set a major power lines. Since then, a more current development plan proposes a straightened realignment of this boundary road. If approved, this road could establish a new and more defined eastern boundary for the Reserve and ensure that future utility access and maintenance activities occur outside of the Reserve. The road would also provide entry into a City substation without passing through the Reserve.

The developers are also planning to provide better recreation management in Moe's Valley. Currently, parking for Moe's Valley occurs within the interior of Zone 6 and results in many habitat impacts. While camping is not allowed, some illegal camping still occurs and is difficult to enforce. The proposed plan include an established parking area to access Moe's Valley within their development and provides for a privately managed campground outside of the Reserve.

Combined, the project proponents are currently proposing to offset 6.4 acres of habitat loss at the boundary, by adding 6.4-7.8 acres in the same general area. The TC ultimately recommended the full 7.8 acres.

On September 6-7, HCP staff conducted 10-meter belt transect surveys on all of the parcels proposed for possible inclusion in the boundary adjustment. No tortoise sign was observed along the utility road or south of the substation. Tortoise sign was observed, however, in three of the potential incoming parcels.

In December 2021, USFWS provided specific guidance to evaluate Reserve boundary modifications. This guidance was previously used to authorize a similar boundary adjustment in the Grapevine area in 2022.

Mayor Hart wondered if the TC's recommendation is agreeable to the proponents. Cameron Cutler said that St. George City is, but they can't speak for the developer or for SITLA. There are still some negotiations and conversations that need to take place. Their parks department is okay with the Box Canyon parcel, but he would still need to run it by the city council. There is also some SITLA open space property south (not shown on the map) that could potentially be negotiated with SITLA. If so, it hasn't been evaluated by the TC yet.

Gregg McArthur said that SITLA is willing to work with the city and the developer to be part of this. However, SITLA is not interested in having their lands identified and moved into the Reserve as a trade without it being made whole in some other way.

Cameron Rognan said that Ryan Thomas, with Quality Development, has since informed him that they would prefer the isolated parcel. The TC had evaluated it, but due to it being fragmented and requiring a culvert, they placed preference on the contiguous piece. Cameron added that he is now being told that the contiguous piece may be less available.

2. Submission of 2024 adaptive management budget

Cameron had presented the proposed 2024 adaptive management budget to the TC during their last meeting. The TC members approved it, but with some additional language to allow flexibility in using funds to implement the Raven Management Plan, once finalized.

c. Discussion and possible action on TC Report / recommendations

MOTION by: Chris Hart

Seconded by: Kress Staheli

Discussion: To accept the TC's recommendation and continue the discussion while the details are worked out in order to have something to take to the County.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

MOTION by: Chris Hart

Seconded by: Gregg McArthur

Discussion: To take the TC's recommendation under advisement & move it into the budget discussion.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

d. Discussion and possible action on draft 2024 Budget and work plan

Cameron started off the discussion by reminding the HCAC that the baseline budget is what is budgeted in the HCP. There is a pretty extensive contingency budget to account for changed circumstances. Currently, the Northern Corridor ROW is the most significant one that were operating under. There is litigation that may impact that, and if that circumstance is no longer triggered those funds are technically unavailable for use. Fire and drought are other examples of changed circumstances that could be triggered someday. On the drafted budget (*see exhibit 7d*), there are some highlighted items for things that can be changed, reduced, or are no longer necessary, but for the most part it is similar to past budgets.

Mayor Hart said that after hearing today's presentations he would suggest that the HCAC increase the fire restoration and rehabilitation budget above and beyond the TC's recommendation, even if we have to draw into reserves in order to do so. He never thought we had the capability to do more than we were doing until now. This is the one thing that has killed more tortoises than any other issue, and if there is a possibility of reducing that risk it would be the most responsible thing we can do with these resources.

Curtis chimed in that of the \$125,000 that they have sitting in WRI to do this project, \$25,000 came from the County. The project didn't happen last year, so the money was transferred to WRI and carried over to be used this year. The County's funds were used as leverage to acquire the ESMF funds available through that program. If there are more areas in need of treatment, Curtis could go back to them and let them know that this group is willing to double down and spend a lot more than the original \$25,000 contribution and use that as leverage to utilize even more funds from WRI. He recommended that we meter the contribution from this group as

leverage to pull that money in and maximize the funding sources to do the best we can do.

Cameron agreed that this is definitely the highest priority. It's also one of the most difficult challenges to see success in. He assumed that when the commitments were negotiated in the HCP, because the County is not a significant land owner in the Reserve, it was assumed that the State and Federal agencies would primarily fund to care for their own land. However, the County has been willing to help facilitate this. There is a long term budget in the HCP that allows up to \$324,000 of funds to be spent for the life of the 25-year permit. The County does not have unlimited funds, if we spend more now, we may have less available in the future.

Gregg wondered, if this is the highest priority, are there other places in the budget we can take a little bit from so we are not digging into our reserves, or are these funds restricted in any way? Cameron answered that some could be moved around, but it will take some discussions. Ultimately, FWS would need to approve of those changes because a lot of negotiation went into the budget of the HCP. That's why we have the adaptive management budget, so those items can be moved around if needed.

Mayor Hart wondered about the maintenance of this project. To which Curtis replied that the long term sustainability of Rejuvra at maintaining the treatment efficiency is 5-7 years. So once you've treated it you have those years of effective treatment, then you start to see those plants coming back in. It will require a full treatment scale again. Curtis estimated that \$125,000 each year would get the entire Reserve treated in 7 years. He is not sure if the WRI funds will be available for all 7 years in perpetuity though. He wouldn't suggest treating the entire Reserve in one pass, but would support a phased approach focusing on the priority habitat first, and then moving out from there in a systematic approach.

John chimed in saying that BLM is really going to be a partner now that they have the NEPA done. Instead of avoiding BLM lands, as was done in the past, BLM can work together with the other agencies. He likes the idea of a phased approach, and thinks the TC needs to be involved. Dawna added that there will be other funding coming through, that Shawn Peterson knows about. Curtis responded that Shawn will be excited to utilize tools that have been off limits in the past.

Mayor Hart said that we don't always get the grants we go after, but that can't be the gauge on how we invest in these resources. The point is getting it done, and if we have to pay out of pocket we should. He would leave it to the experts to determine the phasing and approach.

Curtis cautioned that there might be some other species that need some attention in the interim, requiring the need to treat those that pose significant fire fuels separately.

Both Cameron and Curtis agreed that the budget being talked about now will go towards next Nov-Jan treatments. However, the \$125,000 or WRI funds will be used this fall/winter.

MOTION by: Chris Hart

Amended by: Gregg McArthur

Seconded by: Carmen Clark

Discussion: To approve the budget with an increase for fire restoration and rehabilitation to \$25,000 and its contingency to \$175,000, and to evaluate the budget to see where we can find those funds in the next budget cycle.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Dawna suggested that “fire prevention” be added to the descriptor for fire restoration and rehabilitation. The committee seemed to be in agreement.

e. HCP Administrator’s Report

1. Engineering services for culverts on Cottonwood road

As a reminder, the HCAC had approved the culvert locations that the TC had identified for further analysis. Since then, the HCP has hired Bowen & Collins to estimate at the costs and to draft the potential designs for those specific locations. The HCP is working with them now, and Cameron hopes that by the next HCAC meeting he will be able to produce an update on how that’s developing.

2. Recreation planning for Zone 6

The HCP has continued to collaborate with recreation user groups to aid in the recreation planning for Zone 6. To date, they have met with rock climbing, mountain biking, and equestrian groups. Additionally, they have a meeting schedule for this week to meet with a hiking group. The goal is to figure out what the user groups envision for this plan. The HCP has plans to have an open house this fall, where the communities close to Zone 6 as well as the general public can be invited to share their input.

3. Fencing progress in Zone 6

The HCP is working with DiVario to work out an agreement to fence their property boundary where it touches the Reserve. Cameron hopes the fence can be installed this winter. If the Box Canyon parcel is approved as

part of the boundary adjustment, it will be fenced in at the same time.

4. Field Technician position

The HCP recently hired Dylan Thomas to fill in for Justin Neighbor on a part-time basis. Justin hasn't officially said he isn't coming back, but Chris Blake suggested that if that is the case, the board would like to do something to recognize Justin for all he has done in the many years he was involved with the Reserve.

5. HCP litigation update

Steven Scott provided an update on the court filings. Eric Clarke came to the last meeting to inform the HCAC where this was at. Since then the County and UDOT filed their oppositions to the motion to remand and vacate. The DOJ has now filed their reply in opposition on the County and UDOT's position. Additionally, the County has been made aware that BLM is moving forward as though a remand is pending and the settlement will be executed.

Commissioner Adam Snow added that the County and the State are in full opposition to the supplemental EIS and the things going on with the lawsuit. It's not a critique of the local partners, as the County values those relationships. The County plans to use every option they possibly have to make this as painful and vocal as possible around the country to declare "not do business with the Department of the Interior because they will yank it back from you". The County firmly disagrees with how this is being handled. Commissioner Snow added that he thinks its short-term win for some groups, and a long term loss (if the priority is the tortoise). Having met with SITLA, who has a laser focus on providing money for the school kids (as they should, it is their mandate), if Zone 6 goes away people want to build where there is perpetual open space for a long time. If you want to know what Zone 6 is going to look like, it won't look good for the tortoise, SITLA will sell it and it will become like Desert Color. It has a lot of value and they will make a fortune. He concluded, that if we care about the tortoise this is a ridiculous and asinine decision.

8. 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).

Richard Spotts shared his support for everything that was said at this meeting about the fire prevention and habitat restoration. The ultimate fate of the tortoises in Washington County depends on successful reversal of the current situation. He wondered how important the first couple inches of soil are to the tortoise and their nutritional needs, and if there could be long-term effects to the dietary health of the tortoise in using some of the chemicals discussed. He also wondered if

any of these treatments could pose issues with potassium levels for the tortoises. Adding that tortoises stop eating some native plants that are higher in potassium due to being unable to excrete it when they need to hold their water in times of drought. Lastly, he said that he read an Interior press release announcing significant funding for flagship ecological restoration projects throughout the west. He suggested it could be a legitimate funding opportunity that would go perfectly with fire prevention and restoration projects.

Zach Valois shared that he will be curious in the future, as far as comparing the impact of fires verses ravens, if the HCAC will reconsider some of these fire approaches in order to not forget about raven management as well. As devastating as fire can be, if you were to add up the fire intervals compared to the sustained predation of ravens that would be a curious metric to see.

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

John Kellam wanted to let Richard Spotts know that he devoted last year to writing the integrated Weed Management Plan and EA. In it, there is a lot of complex analysis about the impact to tortoises, which is mitigated by different conservation measures. The BLM does support broadcast and using aerial, but there will be a lot of thought put into how it is done, including the potential impacts to tortoise and making sure that there is available forage. It will not be done in a way that it's too much or too little, nor will it waste resources.

10. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by: Chris Hart
Seconded by: Gregg McArthur
Discussion: To adjourn the meeting.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:40 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.