

HABITAT CONSERVATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

for the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

A regular meeting of the Habitat Conservation Technical Committee (TC) was held remotely using Zoom on **Nov 9, 2023.**

John Kellam	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Danielle Costantini	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Mike Schijf	Washington County HCP Biologist
Ron Torgerson	SITLA, Local Biologist
Elaine York	Nature Conservancy, Biologist-at-Large
Sarah Seegert	Utah Division of Natural Resources (UDNR)

Members excused:

Also present were:

Cameron Rognan	Washington County HCP Administrator
Randee Sanders	Washington County HCP Executive Assistant
Alyssa Hoekstra	Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Jeff Shepherd	Rocky Mountain Power (RMP)
Mark Dallon	Rocky Mountain Power (RMP)
Jake Norlin	Transcon Environmental

1. CALL TO ORDER

Cameron Rognan invited Sarah Seegert to introduce herself as UDNR's newest representative on the TC. Afterward, participants from Rocky Mountain Power and Transcon Environmental were also invited to introduce themselves. Cameron then called the meeting to order at approximately 1:02 p.m. A full quorum was present.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. September 12, 2023

MOTION by: Mike Schijf
Seconded: Elaine York
Discussion: To approve the minutes.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. TC Assignment – Rocky Mountain Power Utility Maintenance Project

Cameron began the discussion by reading the TC Assignment (*see exhibit 3a*) and giving a summary of the preparatory work done on the draft evaluation form.

John Kellam then thanked Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) and Transcon for attending both the site visit and this meeting.

A lot of the poles were placed 15-20 years ago, and in so doing, many dirt roads were created. Since they didn't require regular maintenance, many of those dirt roads are now naturalized. RMP recently approached BLM and the County regarding regular maintenance needed to replace many conductors requiring replacement.

The power line is within an authorized BLM ROW, so RMP has been working with BLM staff in order to follow all ROW guidelines and environmental conservation measures and standards as outlined in a recent EA done for RMP's project off of Winchester Trail and Cottonwood Road. They will be following what the reclamation plan details for temporary disturbances. RMP would be responsible for re-contouring, raking in seeds, and controlling any weeds that come up within the disturbed ROW's.

Some of the equipment will be wide and long, requiring areas where they can turn around. They will be going to places where vehicles have not been in a long time. Under Section 7 obligations, BLM is having RMP go out and do a survey with a 300 ft. buffer to figure out where all the tortoises are in that area. A Transcon biologist will be doing that work, and that information will be used to identify where to focus monitoring efforts throughout the duration of the project.

Mike Schijf added that this project does cross multiple land management jurisdictions (including BLM, municipal, private, State, & County). If BLM wasn't involved, the project would simply follow the Utility Development Protocols (UDP's). However, BLM has its own process that is very similar and covers all requirements set under the UDP's. For this reason, the County is deferring to John and the BLM process on this project where it overlaps with federal land.

Cameron added that the TC evaluation form was created when the HCP was renewed and amended to track impacts over time for projects within the Reserve and to record how many acres have been disturbed. Its most relative and helpful for permanent impacts, but we still need to go through the process to record this project and its impacts.

The TC then worked on the evaluation form together. Their thoughts and discussion is reflected on the spreadsheet which is included in the exhibit. Cameron invited the TC to send in any independent comments, if any, to him.

MOTION by: Mike Schjif

Seconded: John Kellam

Discussion: To move the evaluation form, with the approved edits, to the HCAC (pending any possible TC member evaluations that may be submitted).

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

4. ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

a. Culverts on Cottonwood Rd

There is ongoing litigation which is likely to affect Zone 6 and the mitigation measures to offset the Northern Corridor. Because of this, Cameron shared that he has been asked to take a step back on moving forward with the installation of the culverts for the time being. Prior to this, however, progress was made. Eight locations were sent to the engineers, and initial estimates and drawings were received back from them.

Two culverts were discovered to already exist. One at the first location visited which is owned by St. George City. The other is located by the old dam. Cameron already submitted those locations to SHPO, who were aware of some of the issues at the 'culvert #4' location, but they saw no reason why we couldn't move forward. Cameron is hoping to modify the fencing to tie into those culverts with the hope to create some passage under Cottonwood Road in the meantime. He will speak with the City and BLM with the hope to gain permissions from them. He will keep this group updated on how all of that progresses.

Elaine York inquired on when the litigation decision is expected. Cameron replied that he doesn't know an exact date. He hasn't been directly involved in a lot of the discussions and meetings. His understanding is that the Department of Interior has signed an agreement with the environmental groups that would result in a remand of both the ITP and Northern Corridor ROW. In the case of the ITP, we will be able to keep our permit intact during the re-analysis and will keep operating as normal. As for the Northern Corridor, the agreement spells out a remand and vacature of the permit. If that happens, Zone 6 and all related actions will no longer be required. It hasn't been signed off by a judge, but BLM and FWS are moving forward with the supplemental EIS and have hired contractors with a deadline to issue new decisions by November of next year.

b. Zone 6 boundary adjustment

St. George City hasn't gotten back to Cameron on what they want to do with the boundary adjustment. The HCAC accepted the TC's recommendation at their last meeting, but did not provide one of their own. The HCAC wanted to wait and see what happens with SITLA, who reportedly felt uncomfortable with putting acreage in the Reserve until knowing how they might be compensated.

c. Fence maintenance

Fence maintenance is an ongoing project. Among other projects currently going on, HCP staff has been assisting with repairs where a big chunk of fence was taken out by a car accident along SR-18. There have been conversations with BLM, FWS, and SCSP to identify funds to help provide for the fencing needs in the Reserve, and a sub-group will be talking about it in the next few weeks.

Mike said that John Kellam had mentioned to him that he may have some potential funding coming in, so Mike felt it is important that we get together and be thinking about fencing prioritization. A lot of this old fence was installed back in 90's and we are having issues now. Cameron said that he has talked to Ann about this as well. DWR plans to submit an ESMF application, and the County wants to be a partner with that.

Danielle Costantini is in full support a sub-group for fencing and prioritization, and thinks it is good to make sure were all in alignment and aware of what others are doing. She offered to coordinate a meeting, and will try to get it scheduled prior to the end-of-year holidays.

d. Raven work group update

Danielle reported that, under the direction of the HCAC, a sub-group has been meeting monthly to discuss raven management. They have made good progress and have identified the need for looking at Raven's across the County as well as solely in the Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit. The surveys done over the past few years that have identified Raven densities and nests of concern around tortoise habitat have been helpful with these discussions. A USFWS Migratory Bird Depredation Permit is being sought to allow for subcontracting out egg oiling on a certain number of nests that we have identified as being high priority. These nest are near high Desert Tortoise densities and good quality habitat. They are on track to have some actions lined up that can hopefully be done as early as next Spring.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

- a. Possible dates/times remaining for the year, as needed: 12/14/23 (9:00 a.m.).**

6. **ADJOURN**

MOTION by: Elaine York

Seconded by: Ron Torgerson

Discussion: To adjourn the meeting.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:52.
Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.