

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 May 9, 2024.

Members present:

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
Steven Scott	Washington County Attorney
Brad Winder	Washington County Weeds
Jason West	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Dawna Ferris-Rowley	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Cameron Rognan noted a quorum existed and called the meeting to order at 1:03.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. March 6, 2024

MOTION by: Mike Schijf

Seconded: John Kellam

Discussion: To approve the minutes.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Continuation of RCDR Habitat Fire Management Guidelines & addition of comprehensive fire management plan

Cameron began the discussion by sharing a map that he had prepared for the document (see *exhibit 3a*). The map was overlaid with tortoise density and past wildfire locations, and then subdivided into three priorities (high, medium,

and low). John Kellam commented that he thought it was a great foundation. However, he did suggest that the higher tortoise density area in Zone 4 should be bumped up to high priority due to it being unburned habitat with a lot of black brush that is 500-600 years' old. Cameron responded that it was still up for discussion. His justification for making it a medium priority was in terms of overall tortoise recovery. It is a smaller area and is pretty fragmented. After some discussion, the TC members agreed that a separate polygon should be created in Zone 4 around the high density area. Cameron will make that change.

The drafted 5-10-Year Fire Management Plan was then put up on the screen so that the TC could continue discussing and working on it as a group. Much of their discussion is reflected on the updated draft which is included in the exhibit.

Table 3 of the document lists the treatment areas with a range of 5,440 – 8,145 acres right now. Adjustments will need to be made on the table where it says treatment area 5-7 in order to reflect the subdivision of priorities for Zone 4. Cameron asked the TC where they would like to see the higher quality habitat in Zone 4 to occur in the sequence of treatments. Both John and Mike Schijf shared ideas on how to change the priority numbers. Cameron confirmed that treatment areas 1-4 will stay the same, 5 will be the interior of Babylon in Zone 4, 6 will be Cinder Knolls, 7 will be the peripherals of Babylon, 8 will be east of Winchester Hills, and what is now listed as 8 will be changed to 9.

Cameron then wondered if the TC were comfortable with the 5,440 – 8,145 acre range per year. John answered that he will talk with Melanie and look at funding resources. He had wanted to do some pre-treatments and layout some transects to gain some efficacy data. For now, their goal is to do larger aerial treatments ranging from 1,000-3,000 acres, but he will go as big as they have money to go. BLM's funding for these treatments may only be available for 2-3 years, because of that, further in the future is hard to project due to the unknowns.

Mike suggested treating "up to" the listed acres with the knowledge that we may not have the resources to do all of the listed acres. John agreed. Once finished, the document will help to acquire funding if we can outline that it is our management plan and what our goals and objectives are that we are trying to meet. It should be OK as long as it is stated in the document that it's not an obligation. Sarah Seegert agreed.

Sarah asked, if fewer acres of a given area/year are treated, would we move on to the next priority area the following year or finish the uncompleted area before moving on to the next one? Cameron answered that he would like to retain flexibility so that we can go back. Ideally we will do as much as we can

in each area/year, but he would like to have the flexibility to go back and add to treatment areas that are insufficiently treated. John agreed, especially for treatment sections 1-4. They may take a higher priority than the other ones, and we may want to keep treating them.

Brad Winder said that drones are becoming a lot more reliable for doing larger treatment areas. He knows of a company that can have 3-4 drones in the air at the same time. They can land and refuel their drones, change battery packs, and have them back in the air every 15-20 min. Currently the company charges \$19-\$25/acre without chemical. Cameron will add drones under treatment methods on table 3. John also suggested adding truck booms to treatment area 4 while he is at it, as booms could be used on the dirt roads. Cameron agreed.

Ron Torgerson wondered if a significant dent will be made during years 1-5, and if so, if years 6-10 should list fewer acres because of it. Cameron answered that he had merely copy/pasted the acreage, but he imagines that we will have lessons learned after those first 5 years and will know ways to do things more effectively for years 6-10. He could leave the acreage blank and note that it will be done as adaptive management to retain full flexibility. The TC seemed to like that idea. Mike thought that anything we identify this far in advance is likely to be reevaluated in the future anyways. John added that we could even have some large fires that could change our priorities.

John made one last suggestion for table 3, which was to change acres to "goal acres" and use a greater-than symbol.

The TC then moved on to discuss fuel breaks and table 1. Not much has changed on the table. Mike said that he still has plans to make a fuel break map to go with the table. Estimated costs, fuel break lengths, and buffer widths still need to be calculated.

Mike will work with Brad to see if they can estimate the costs of treatments. He suggested putting in the cost for Plateau/Rejuvra combo, because that would be on the higher end of what our cost will be and help us plan accordingly.

John asked Brad if he currently has any immediate need for Plateau. Last year he had Ryan Reece order extra chemical with the intent to provide it to Brad for treatments done on BLM land. Brad answered that he did use Plateau/Rejuvra across the Millcreek utility line, with the exception of not using Rejuvra on the BLM treatment areas. He hasn't billed anyone for doing that treatment yet. Brad has been working with Melanie in putting in for a funding opportunity for the next 4 years. That could play into this, but if BLM has some Plateau for him to use on BLM land, he would appreciate it. It would keep Brad from having to bill them.

Mike wondered if anyone has engaged with UDOT on I-15 & SR-18 treatments, and if we know what their treatment schedule is. Cameron answered that he will invite Eric Hanson, or someone from UDOT, to the next meeting. If Eric can't attend, then Cameron will have a conversation with him to see if there is a better way to treat those areas.

MOTION by: Mike Schijf

Seconded by: Elaine York

Discussion: To continue the assignment to the next meeting. In the meantime, Mike Schijf will prepare a map and iron out some of the other elements of the table, including fuel break lengths, estimated costs, buffer widths, etc.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

4. ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

a. SEIS update

Cameron updated the group, saying that BLM will be announcing the draft SEIS to the public starting tomorrow. This will kick off the 45-day comment period. BLM appears to still be on schedule to release the final sometime in fall, and the decision in November.

b. Raven workgroup update

Cameron reported on the HCP's egg oiling efforts over the past month or two. The HCP team treated 12 nests and 64 eggs (averaging 5.3 eggs per nest). A couple eggs hatched before they could be oiled, and a few nests were deemed inaccessible or too dangerous to access. Overall, the efforts were very successful. HCP staff did find 10-12 new nests, so their work is cut out for them next year.

Mike added that he was pretty happy with what they were able to get done, especially considering that they weren't able to hire the drone crew due to finding eggs in raven nests much earlier than expected.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

- a. Possible dates/times remaining for the year, as needed: 6/13/24 (1:00 p.m.), 7/11/24 (9:00 a.m.), 8/8/24 (9:00 a.m.), 9/12/24 (9:00 a.m.), 10/10/24 (9:00 a.m.), 11/14/24 (9:00 a.m.), & 12/12/24 (9:00 a.m.).**

6. ADJOURN

MOTION by: Ron Torgerson
Seconded by: Sarah Seegert
Discussion: To adjourn the meeting.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:41.
Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.