

9/10/2025

TC Assignment

Background:

In 2022, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) created a Translocation Management Plan for desert tortoises in the Upper Virgin River (UVR) Recovery Unit, with input also provided from Washington County HCP and USFWS. In accordance with this plan, since 2023, tortoises displaced from non-federal lands have been translocated into the Grapevine area within Zone 3 of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. Pages 7 and 9 of this translocation plan state that it will be reviewed by agency partners (e.g., UDWR, USFWS, BLM, and Washington County) at least every 3-5 years, and release sites will be reassessed using the adaptive management process (see attached Plan for potential triggers for reconsideration of augmentation sites).

Three years have passed since this plan was created, and there have been some potentially concerning observations in 2025, including the findings of two dead tortoises on I-15 that were translocated into Grapevine within the past year. In addition, UDWRs preliminary springtime 2025 monitoring results show a significant increase in adult tortoise mortality within Zone 3 compared to other (recent) monitoring years. In addition, all of Washington County remains in D1 and D2 drought conditions (as of August 28), which may influence translocated tortoise survivorship.

Also in need of updating is the HCP Clearance Protocol referenced in the Translocation Management Plan (see attached). The Amended HCP requires the County to update these protocols in conjunction with new information from extensive presence-absence surveys on non-federal lands in the County. The HCP imposed a 5-year time-frame for completing updates to the clearance protocols. That deadline is approaching in January 2026.

Assignment:

1. Review the UDWR Translocation Management Plan. Do recent events (road and general tortoise mortality, drought, disease, or other factors) warrant a change to our current translocation/augmentation strategy.
2. If a change in strategy or methods are recommended, use the techniques and processes identified in the Translocation Management Plan, combined with the potential translocation sites identified in the Plan to recommend a new strategy for tortoise translocation in fall of 2025 and beyond.
3. Discuss and analyze the county-wide survey results in combination with other relevant data regarding tortoise distribution and abundance. Consider what areas need to be added or removed from the tortoise “take areas” on non-federal lands. Consider and recommend any other relevant changes to the Translocation Management Plan and Clearance Protocol to the HCAC and other HCP partners for final approval.