

# **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 **May 28, 2025.**

Committee members present were:

Chris Blake, Chairman	Environmental Organization
Chris Hart, Vice Chair	Mayors Association
Jason West	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
George Weekley	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Melinda Bennion (for Kevin Bunnell)	Utah Dept. of Natural Resources (UDNR)
Gregg McArthur	Local Development
Carmen Clark	Citizen-at-Large

Absent and Excused:

Steve Kemp	Citizen-at-Large
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Also present were:

Cameron Rognan	HCP Administrator
Randee Sanders	HCP Executive Assistant
Mike Schijf	HCP Biologist
Devin Snow	Washington County Attorney
Danielle Costantini	USFWS
Alysha Lundgren	St. George News
Gary Webster	Senator Lee's office
Mark Goble	St. George City
Gabe Dixon	BLM Intern

## **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Chris Blake called the meeting to order at approximately 1:04 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. March 26, 2025**

**c. Next Meeting Date**

**1. July 23, 2025**

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

**3. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. PRESENTATIONS**

**a. Diagonal Street Cliffs Trail on St. George City property – Mark Goble**

Mark Goble with the City of St. George has been working with the Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO office) regarding several significant archaeological sites throughout the city. Together, the City and SHPO (through their archaeological grant) would like to preserve some of those spaces and provide some education to the public. The Diagonal Street Cliffs Trail is one of the sites that have some significant archeological petroglyphs and pictographs. The trail is located on city property, but a portion is also within the RCDR boundary. The grant will make it possible to add educational signage. Maps and images showing the locations for the signage and what the trail, safety, etiquette, and interpretive signs will look like were shared in the presentation (see exhibit 4a). A goal for this project is to educate the public and help them understand that the petroglyphs need to be protected. The City will only be adding a total of 6 signs (posts and carsonite) on the Reserve portions of the trail.

**b. Discussion and possible action on Diagonal Street Cliffs Trail**

Cameron Rognan had reviewed the Public Use Plan prior to the meeting, and confirmed that this is an authorized rock climbing area. It's been in use, but it wasn't formalized. This gives us a good opportunity to identify the official trail that users should stay on. He thought the signs more than offset the impacts.

Mark said that no modifications to the trail will be made within the Reserve boundary, all improvements (seen as yellow on the map) are outside of the Reserve. Cameron asked that Mark coordinate with the HCP on those areas. There still may be tortoises there, and HCP staff can move them under the permit. Mark replied that the improvements have already been done. It was

minimal, and didn't require equipment. He simply moved rocks to identify the path and block social trails.

This project hasn't been seen by the TC. Cameron wanted to bring it to the HCAC first, allowing this committee to decide if that would be necessary or not. Chris Hart didn't see the need. He thought it was beneficial in every way. Gregg McArthur agreed. It was his opinion that the disturbance is very little and will protect more than it will disturb. Jason West said that a thumbs up from SHPO is a thumbs up from him.

**MOTION** by: Chris Hart

**Seconded** by: Jason West & George Weekley

**Discussion:** To assign Cameron to work with the City to get the project done.

**Vote was taken:** All voted aye.

**Motion passed.**

#### **c. 2025 wildfire forecast**

The following video was played:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipbQzvPQsC0>

Cameron then read the following email from Heber Heyder (Washington County Fire Warden): "My assessment is that we should anticipate a moderate to busy fire season, likely starting around July. The higher elevation fuels, such as in Pine Valley Mountain and Kolob, appear to be particularly dry and could be susceptible to increased fire activity. In terms of recommended actions, I suggest we continue our mitigation efforts, such as gathering and piling tumbleweeds for winter burning and widening roads or trails in areas with thick fuels. Additionally, any public education or awareness initiatives regarding wildfire preparedness are always beneficial. Finally, continuing our collaborations with partners will be crucial."

#### **d. Discussion and possible action on fire management**

The HCP will put up "No Fireworks" signs again for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of July. Additionally, they will post about firework safety on social media.

Jason said that BLM will be putting fire restrictions in place soon, and he will notify the group when they go into effect.

Chris Hart asked if the recent efforts of spraying invasive weeds will improve the situation. Cameron answered that it will, and there was a good treatment effort this past winter. Chris Hart thought it will be interesting to see what happens. We can't stop Mother Nature striking, and he knows it's a long-term project, but it has the potential to make a big difference. Looking back at history, and all the tortoises lost to fire, it is an important initiative. Cameron has seen that it has

reduced fuels for sure, but we won't know until we see what kind of fires we may get. It does put us in a better position though. He would rather do something than nothing. Jason agreed, saying that fire breaks have been historically proven to slow wildfires down.

## **5. UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

### **a. Hell hole wash in Kayenta**

Ivins City has had some erosion problems where Taviawk Drive crosses the wash at the Hell Hole Canyon trailhead. They requested to do some work to remedy the situation. Mike Schijf conducted a tortoise survey to make sure there were none in the way. The project was all on private land, and is now completed. The work was done at the bottom of the wash to direct the flow back towards the culvert and away from the road. Historically, there are not too many tortoises in that area, but Mike still did a sweep to make sure.

### **b. Projects in Snow Canyon State Park**

Snow Canyon State Park continues to work on developing the new White Rocks trailhead within the SR-18 ROW. Additionally, they have nearly completed the work on the southern entrance station. According to Chris Hart, the access road for that station is in. Cameron had previously reported on all of the other trailhead and parking expansions that were completed months ago.

### **c. St. George City well and tank projects**

St. George City has a couple of continuing projects. The Homestead Well is completed, but they will eventually add a small building on their facility located on their fenced private property.

The City is also starting a well project south of the reserve boundary (with the access road being in the Reserve). HCP staff have cleared it of tortoises, and the City should be working on that project in the coming months.

### **d. Other utility projects**

Jason West reported that the Northern Corridor is still up in the air. BLM hasn't received any direction on where it is, or is not, headed - they only know that there is talk underway. There will probably be something to come out of it, but he just hasn't been privy to those conversations. The administration is looking to either reverse the decision or start a new process.

Jason also gave an update on the Warner Valley land exchange for 89 acres in the Red Cliffs area. It's in its 45-day protest period right now so there is some time for folks to file a protest. Additionally, BLM has been approached by another

land owner within the Red Cliffs area to ask for a land exchange, and they will see if they can use any of their 8-9 million LWCF dollars.

Jason will also be paying attention to the Rejuvra treatments to see how they do. He hopes to be able to do some more treatments this year. Funding is changing with the new administration, so it will be interesting to see if the WRI projects continue to move forward. He is starting to see a little bit of movement with grants and agreements that were previously held, and have now been freed up to move forward. Chris Hart wondered if Section 6 money is going to be nonexistent in the foreseeable future. Jason answered that he didn't know the answer. All of the funding sources were paused and are being looked at. Some of them are starting to be released. IRA funds are now being released, but left over Biden funds aren't being released. Some people are expecting reductions in forces, and BLM has taken a big hit from retirements. The local office was down 30%, but hired one back.

## **6. SURVEYS AND CLEARANCES**

### **a. Detention basins at Industrial Park and Middleton**

The HCP has been working with a couple of different partners on the Detention Basins at Industrial Park and Middleton. HCP staff only found a tortoise near the Industrial Park site. It was outside of the Reserve so it was removed and relocated. The basin in the Middleton area is located in a small disturbed riparian area, and there wasn't any tortoise sign there.

### **b. Santa Clara Drive**

This project is along Pioneer Parkway in a marshy wash area that is not good tortoise habitat. Additionally, it is already well developed all around this project. The HCP wouldn't normally have done this survey, but this project had a federal nexus so they worked with FWS to allow them to use their incidental take permit. The HCP did their due diligence and double checked to make sure there was no tortoise activity there, and there was no tortoise sign found.

### **c. Grapevine Wash LLC**

Grapevine Wash LLC is putting in a large new development in Leeds just north of the Reserve Zone 4. The surveys are nearly completed. To date, HCP staff haven't found any tortoise sign there yet, nor do they expect to. However, Cameron has removed two different Gila Monsters from that property. HCP staff will continue to have a presence out there for a few more weeks before giving the final clearance to Grapevine Wash LLC. They are going to keep moving further southwest, closer to the Reserve.

## **7. OTHER REPORTS & BUSINESS**

**a. TC report – Mike Schijf**

None – No meeting held.

**b. Land acquisition updates**

Cameron reported that he was unable to get a full quorum so the last LAS meeting was cancelled. However, Cameron did provide a short emailed report on the agenda items to the subcommittee, and he wanted to give a similar report to the HCAC.

The updated map shared (see exhibit 7b) shows where each parcel is located. The most noticeable change on the map occurred in the last few months when WCWCD acquired 65 acres from the Heideman family in the southern portion of Zone 3 of the Reserve. WCWCD will be looking for exchange opportunities with BLM for these lands over time, but they will be an easier partner that won't require a quick turnaround. The HCP, BLM, and WCWCD will put their heads together to figure out exchanges or other opportunities to eventually get that property in BLM's ownership.

Jason reported on the Red Cliffs Warner Valley land exchange. The protest period is going on now. It has gone through BLM's digital system, being touched by all 28 people required for approval. They are just waiting for the protest period to conclude, once it does, it should be complete. The actual decision documents are already signed, now they are waiting for this process to conclude so that Jason can sign the final decision. If BLM gets a protest/appeal it will go through the Interior Board of Appeals pending any litigation. So far there has been interest from one conservation group, but they don't know whether or not they will file a protest. Indications are showing there won't be too much slowing down the project. Cameron added that if all goes well, 89-acres of His Family Matters land will come into BLM management.

Chris Hart wondered if WCWCD has started the environmental work yet. Jason answered that the environmental work specifically for the acquisition has been done. However, that will still need to happen for building a potential reservoir after the land exchange. The document has a cultural plan and tribal consultation. There are some concessions that were made for the OHV community at West Rim Trail and for connectivity to BLM's ROW for the upper reaches of the western trail, but engineering and design will come later on down the road. WCWCD will need to do more to get permits further down the road.

Section 6 Grant application for FY25 are being delayed, and everyone is waiting for those announcements to come through. George Weekly has

been looking at the grants tracker, but hasn't seen anything come up yet. It is still delayed with everything going on with the new administration.

George reported on Mr. Doyle's suit against the Federal Government (BLM and FWS) regarding the takings associated with his 70-acres within the RCDR inholdings. The Federal Government won the district court case against Mr. Doyle last year. He appealed all the way up to the Supreme Court, and as of two weeks ago, the Supreme Court declined to take his case. This means he has essentially lost his case regarding the potential takings of his land within the RCDR, and he has no additional opportunities for appeal on that case.

**c. HCP Administrator's Report**

**1. Interlocal agreement with Leeds**

Cameron reported that Washington County has continued to have conversations with Leeds regarding an Interlocal Agreement and potentially becoming participants of the HCP. Devin Snow and Cameron met with them about a month ago to go through some of their questions. They haven't made any decisions yet. Chris Blake asked if there are any other communities that aren't signees. Cameron replied that Apple Valley is not, and probably won't need to be due to their elevation. The County does have an agreement with Rockville where they require developers to come directly to the County so that the City doesn't have to act as a middle man. Virgin is not participant either. Leeds is most important due to its proximity to the Reserve. The County is grateful that Grapevine LLC decided to do a Certificate of Inclusion Agreement, but it would be better if Leeds is a participant.

**2. Raven management updates**

Cameron gave a preliminary report on this year's raven management efforts, noting that some of these numbers may change by the end of the year when the HCP provides a more detailed final report.

Thanks to WRI funding, the project came in at half the cost of the expected budget. They will see if they can roll some of the remaining funds to next year budget for future efforts. Another reason for the cost savings was because the HCP had anticipated utilizing drone applicators. They came out and did a field test of some of their equipment, but their equipment wasn't working and they didn't end up doing any work. The HCP switched gears and spent the money on hiring rock climbers who could rappel to nest sites. They were more affordable. This year's efforts were still successful because they were able to treat more nests than anticipated.

HCP staff and the rock climbers addled/oiled a total of 140 eggs at 25 different raven nests, and some of those (about 6) were re-nests. There was also success in visiting other areas throughout the County to figure out where our new sights could be. They got a lot of assistance from BLM and their staff. Together, they visited over 100 different locations and confirmed new nests at 10 locations.

The HCP's Citizen Science project produced a couple of nest observations too. Cameron thanked the public for participating and sharing information on where ravens are nesting.

### **3. Drone monitoring project with Resi / UDWR**

Cameron had received reports from DWR that they were seeing a potential die-off in Zone 3 of the Reserve. With that alarming information, the HCP decided to transition their drone efforts to Zone 6 instead of doing duplicate efforts in Zones 4 and 5. Cameron doesn't know what the results are for the monitoring yet, but he wanted to inform the HCAC of that last minute change.

### **4. Trail Management with SUU**

Mike Schijf reported that the County has entered an MOU with SUU's Intergovernmental Internship Cooperative (IIC) program to have their interns do some trail work in the Reserve. They did the same thing last year, but this year was a slightly more expanded effort (10 days instead of 8).

This year their interns have been mostly fixing/replacing carsonite signs and fiberglass trail markers that were in rough shape or that had decals in need of replacement. The interns also blocked out illegal social trails. Work was done at: City Creek, Pioneer Hills, Pioneer Rim, T-bone, Mustang Pass, Cottonwood Hills, Spanish Sash, Prospector, Coachwhip, Brackens Loop, and Grapevine. They accomplished a lot. They replaced roughly 60 signs, hundreds of decals, and blocked out a number of social trails. The work was confined to mainly non-BLM lands, but Mike did reach out to BLM and received permission to do a little bit of work on some trails that crossed multiple jurisdictions.

The HCP will make sure to include a comprehensive report in the Annual Report. SUU continues to be a good partner, and the County is happy with the work they have done.

## **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).

None.

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

Jason informed the group that there are five mines in Leeds down Babylon Road that they will be closing. The mines are not deep and they ensured no tortoises, bats, or any other animals are in them. The BLM has a Categorical Exclusion on the project.

There is a well for Leeds below Oak Grove Campground that will be redone. It's underway, and they are waiting for a travel monitor. It will be done on an existing path so there will not be a lot of disturbance. They will only be slightly widening the road. Additionally, the organized district for Leeds is requesting to do a water pipeline project east of I-15. BLM is responding to that request. It would be in a disturbed ROW so Jason didn't see too much getting in the way of that project.

**10. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned without a formal motion at approximately 1:57 p.m. Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.