

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 **January 28, 2026.**

Committee members present were:

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

Absent and Excused:

None

Also present were:

Cameron Rognan	HCP Administrator
Randee Sanders	HCP Executive Assistant
Mike Schijf	HCP Biologist
Adam Snow	Washington County Commissioner
Devin Snow	Washington County Attorney
Danielle Costantini	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Alyssa Hoekstra	Utah Dept. of Wildlife Resources (UDWR)
Alysha Lundgren	St. George News
Brooke Larsen	Salt Lake Tribune
Austin Anderson	St. George City
Chad Bennion	WCHS
Loren Webb	WCHS/SUP
Gary Webster	Senator Lee's office
Chris Gorzalski	

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Chris Blake called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m. noting that a quorum was present. There were two new committee members in attendance. Jarett Waite, Mayor of Santa Clara, was nominated by the Mayor's Association to take Chris Hart's seat. Steve Kemp introduced Austin Anderson, St. George City Councilman, whom the City has reassigned to take over Steve's seat on the HCAC.

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. **November 19, 2025**
- c. **Next Meeting Date**
 - 1. **March 25, 2026**
2026 Dates: 1/28, 3/25, 5/27, 7/22, 9/23, & 11/18

Jarett Waite may have some conflicts with some of the meeting dates. There is a Water District meeting for city managers and mayors that occurs at the same time as the HCAC. He was informed they only meet 4-5 times a year, and he thinks that he will only have a conflict a couple times a year. He didn't think it's worth changing everything at this point, but it is something to be aware of and monitor as time goes on.

Cameron Rognan invited Jarett to let him and Randee Sanders know when those conflicts will be so they can propose a new meeting time for just those conflicts. If there are others who have conflicts with changing the dates, we will keep them as-is, but if all committee members can accommodate the change we can look into that possibility.

MOTION by: Jason West
Seconded by: Steve Kemp
Discussion: To approve the Consent Agenda.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

3. **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

None.

4. **PRESENTATIONS**

a. **Sons of Utah Pioneers proposal for monument and trail to historic kiln site**

Loren Webb is a board member with both the Washington County Historical Society and the Sons of Utah Pioneer's Cotton Mission Chapter. Chad Bennion, president of the Washington County Historical Society, was also in attendance. Loren's purpose in approaching the HCAC was to present historical information

on the Middleton Limestone Kiln and to request permission to build a proposed parking lot, trailhead, and monument marker to memorialize the kiln. *Please refer to exhibit 4 which includes the map, slides, and Loren Webb's oral report that he read verbatim.*

b. Discussion and possible action on trail/monument proposal

Loren's top choice is about ½ mile west of 1200 North and 1900 East, where it runs into a cul-de-sac. There's an existing footpath that goes east to the Middleton water tank. Mike Schijf wondered if he was proposing the new parking area to be on the reserve side of the fence. Loren confirmed. Mike asked what size of a parking lot he had in mind. Loren answered that he had submitted a request to Bryce Christensen Excavating on January 12th, and hasn't heard back from him yet so he didn't have all of those answers.

Austin asked how many cars would he like to accommodate at the parking lot, was it five or 50'x60'? Loren answered saying the 50'x60' is the fence line, which would need to be removed. Cameron wondered how much space five cars would require. Austin answered that a stall is 18'x9', so it's pretty small. For five, you would need 25 + 18 x 45. That would require 25' of {drywhile} and 18' of {landmark}. Loren said he thought about going with 2-3 stalls, but looking down the road it could be too small.

Cameron thought if Loren were to go with the second option on Cottonwood Springs Road, he would presume the parking lot might not need to go into the reserve side of the fence since St. George owns that right-of-way. He envisions that vehicles could be parked parallel to the road there. Loren agreed that vehicles could park at that gate, there is quite a bit of room there and it's all flat. Steve thought the city would probably want to see if it's a burrowed pit on either side. If there was parallel parking for four or five cars, they would probably want to come in and put down enough gravel to keep that from sloughing off or creating problems with people getting stuck. Loren admitted that the downside to option two is having to build a new trail that would be ½ - ¾ of a mile.

Cameron suggested, if the Northern Corridor is constructed, it will have a paved trail that runs parallel to it. They could take advantage of that approved paved trail for almost all of it, except for that last little stint that connects to the kiln. In essence, that one actually has the least disturbances, assuming that the paved trail is already going to happen anyway. Mike wondered where people would park, and Cameron answered that they would park and start at Cottonwood Springs Road and take a trail from there.

Jason West wondered if the trail, where it jukes to the north, would go through BLM at all. Cameron answered that the proposal would definitely need some BLM approvals because the site itself is on BLM land by just a few hundred feet. Almost everything else is either in the right-of-way or on city or state land. The

right-of-way should already be approved, so there wouldn't need to be a waiver for cultural resources for it. However, Jason thought that Loren would need to request a waiver for the portion on BLM land. It would have to have a BLM cultural assessment. That doesn't take years to do, though. It's a fairly straightforward, simple process, and that needs SHPO consultation on whether or not the SHPO and the BLM want to interpret the site or not. It would require environmental, social, and public input for the small piece on BLM land.

Cameron wondered if Loren was going to want to do the monument at the site or at the trailhead. Loren answered that he would want to do a monument at the trailhead and at the site, like what was done at the Escalante #2 oil well where ten St. George residents were killed. Loren had worked with Greg McArthur with the Utah State Trust Lands on that project, and Greg was really impressed with it. Loren has been in touch with Kenworthy Monument, and if approved, they could drive the monuments to the location and drop them off.

Jason wondered if the issue will be the new mile of trail construction that would be required. Cameron responded that it won't be a mile as most of it would follow the current waterline two-track road and the utility road that goes east-west. However, there is a couple hundred feet where it drops down to BLM that would require a new trail. There is technically an existing unauthorized trail there now, but it is a matter of authorizing it as an official trail.

Jason recommended that Loren first talk with the BLM archaeologist before moving forward with additional planning or working with the Technical Committee, and the HCAC members agreed.

Kevin commented that he would be pretty nervous about any of the proposals that would be requesting an underpass from UDOT with the Northern Corridor. Based on his experience with wildlife underpasses, that's not a trivial request. It is a hundreds of thousands of dollars prospect to do that. Option two, seems like a much better option because it does not require anything to go under the Northern Corridor. Cameron agreed. He actually reached out to UDOT a week or two ago, and that was the message that they shared with him. They don't have a pedestrian culvert plan, and at this point, they're so far along in their plans of development that it's just not really feasible for them to build one at that location. That would make option one very difficult. Greg added that because option two would have the paved trail, it gives people a reason to use it rather than just traversing the whole area, and it would give them something to look at. That feels like a good win-win for everybody if that paved trail goes in.

MOTION by: Kevin Bunnell

Seconded by: George Weekley

Discussion: To eliminate the two options that would require an underpass under the Northern Corridor, and move the project to the technical committee.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Cameron requested that once Loren has consulted with BLM's archaeologist and the project is ready to move forward with TC review, he would like the archaeologist to attend the technical committee meeting as well.

5. UTILITY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

a. Mill Creek, Bone Wash, and Middleton road repairs

Mill Creek, Bone Wash, and Middleton roads have been undergoing repairs needed from the floods we had later in the season.

b. Grapevine well repairs

Well repairs continue at Grapevine within the fenced in site. Cameron was unsure when they would complete the job, but suspected it would be another month or so.

c. Utility line relocation

This approved project in the Mill Creek Bone Wash area has begun. The HCP accepted a proposal to add perch deterrents on the new utility poles, and agreed to cover the costs since it will be a useful benefit to prevent ravens from perching and preying on hatchling tortoises in that area.

d. Water tank on Cottonwood Rd

This water tank sits just outside the southern boundary of the Reserve, but there is an access road that goes through the reserve. The project is underway within a fenced in area, and work will continue through the tortoise less active season.

e. Other utility projects

The only other utility project that Cameron knew of is staking the right-of-way for the Northern Corridor for the fencing that will go in after. Jason added that a notice to proceed was signed for the staking, and there should be two more notices to proceeds coming (for monument and geotechnical). The contractors called earlier today about a tortoise found within the staking zone, and Jason was happy to report that they are following protocols correctly.

Jason shared that the BLM has received a notice to proceed for spraying on three segments, the main one being on Cottonwood Road. Additionally, there is a contractor picking up fencing from the BLM and moving it to their new ware yard off of Turkey Farm Road, so there will be some activity over there.

Cameron wondered if UDOT is building fence on the I-15 corridor that was not completed during the previous project. Jason answered, saying that they were

waiting for fair weather conditions, but he was unsure if it was completed. George thought it may have been completed because Eric Hansen had told him they were planning to do the work during last November.

6. **SURVEYS AND CLEARANCES**

a. **Southern Parkway (UDOT project with federal nexus)**

The HCP was tuned to this project under a different federal nexus. HCP staff conducted the survey and did not find any tortoises in the impact area.

7. **OTHER REPORTS & BUSINESS**

a. **Submission of 2025 Annual Report. Discussion and possible action on report**

The drafted report and all attachments were shared with the HCAC a week prior to the meeting to allow time for them to be reviewed. Those materials are also available at:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dkKAAemgsx44eZsoXhl08BeLvQfa91dH?usp=sharing>

MOTION by: Greg McArthur

Seconded by: Jason West

Discussion: To approve the 2025 Washington County HCP Annual Report, with the contingency that the committee will re-evaluate via email (by February 20th) if there are any needed changes.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

b. **TC report**

1. **TC recommendation on Zone 3 translocation study**

Mike reported that for many years (up until 2023), the Babylon/Zone 4 area out near Leeds was the primary translocation area for displaced tortoises removed from construction sites or turned in to UDWR and the HCP which were healthy enough for release. Those translocation efforts were wildly successful, and there's now a robust population of desert tortoises that are reproducing from those translocation efforts.

In 2023, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources reassessed the translocation area because the Babylon area was believed to be at or near its carrying capacity for tortoises. They created a new translocation management plan, and the primary preferred locations for translocation were identified in Zone 3 of the Reserve. The first priority

area selected was in the Grapevine Wash area, and between fall of 2023 – fall of 2025, 50 tortoises have been translocated to this area.

At the September TC meeting, the translocation management plan was revisited. Between fall of 2024 - spring of 2025, two translocated tortoises were found dead on the I-15 right-of-way. Those tortoises were released a few miles north of the Grapevine Trailhead at the end of that utility road. If the tortoises are moving that far, the TC wanted to have a conversation on whether or not tortoises should still be released to this area. It was suggested to consider the Cottonwood Wash area as another potential translocation site, as there is some excellent unburned habitat in that area.

In December, the TC met again to further iron out a plan. Ann McLuckie with the Division of Wildlife Resources was invited to the meeting to present a draft proposal to install some satellite GPS radios to track movements of translocated tortoises in both the Grapevine and Cottonwood Wash areas. The Cottonwood Wash would be a new area that UDWR hasn't begun releasing tortoises yet. Up to 10 GPS transmitters would be installed on those translocated tortoises during 2026. Depending on funding, animals will be monitored up to 36 months post-release. If there are not 10 tortoises to be released this spring, the remaining GPS transmitters would be used in the fall.

There are five main project objectives that have been identified, and they're on page 2 of the Translocation Monitoring Proposal (see exhibit 7b1). The findings of this study will evaluate the suitability of potential release sites, identify key post-release movement behaviors, and contribute to risk-to-risk assessments by linking specific behaviors to potential mortality factors. When the new area for translocation was suggested, the TC thought that would be a good way to compare movement of tortoises between those two areas to see if there's an area tortoises might prefer.

The last page of the document includes a proposal for project deliverables and the estimated annual project budget. It includes the HCP funds that have been requested, which will come out of the tortoise monitoring budget. The Technical Committee did make an official motion to approve this proposal, and it was accepted unanimously.

Cameron said that the HCP's estimated costs are \$20,000, which was actually a lot less than the total project. The total project is projected to cost \$60,000 to \$80,000.

The Northern Corridor was approved and it's going to be a significant burden on DWR. UDOT's crews can only find the tortoises. DWR has to actually move, measure, and monitor them. Cameron offered to use HCP funds to support DWR for that effort. For that reason, there was an add-on for an extra \$4,700 for that four-week period (as seen in the Scope of Work).

Kevin confirmed that the Division of Wildlife Resources is comfortable with it, and appreciate the coordination.

2. TC recommendation to amend tortoise clearance protocols

Mike reported that there was a recommendation made to approve a revised HCP Tortoise Clearance Protocol, including updated maps (see exhibit 7b2), while understanding that more survey or follow-up on a couple areas may still be needed. This is because the HCP has received some recent reports of tortoises and tortoise sign in some areas where extensive tortoise surveys haven't been conducted. For the most part, efforts to conduct these countywide surveys are completed.

The HCP had agreed to go out and survey previously un-surveyed areas in Washington County when the HCP was amended in 2021. Exhibit 7b2 includes a map that shows the surveyed areas and where tortoise sign occurred, as well as the Tortoise Clearance Protocol. The HCP did make some minor updates to it to modernize it a little bit. For example, there are some new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protocols that may not have been originally established within those survey documents. The TC did support the amendments that were made to that document.

Cameron added that the areas identified where tortoises do or do not occur are reflected on the new map. If approved by this committee and the county commission, the HCP will take this to the different municipalities to let them know if they have new development occurring in these occupied tortoise habitat areas they will need to ask the HCP to formally do a survey or removal of those tortoises prior to development. This has been five years in the making, and a lot of work went into identifying all these areas. All of the biologists feel really good that it has captured where the tortoises occur and where they don't occur in the county.

c. Discussion and possible action on TC recommendations

Item 7b1:

MOTION by: Kevin Bunnell

Seconded by: Greg McArthur

Discussion: To accept the proposal and approve the expenditures of the funding of the monitoring program as proposed.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

Item 7b2:

MOTION by: Jason West

Seconded by: Kevin Bunnell

Discussion: To adopt the amended tortoise clearance protocols.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

d. Land acquisition updates

Cameron reported that the BLM closed on the Warner Valley Land Exchange in December. 89 acres that were in the Reserve, previously owned by Alan Carter, are now owned by the BLM. 929 acres in Warner Valley are now owned by The Water Conservancy District.

Jason reported that BLM was trying to buy out Mr. Doyle's last in-holdings with LWCF Funds. Headquarters had been telling them all along that there was a bunch of money coming to them. They had \$3 million allocated from last year's budget to help, and were being told that they would be receiving between 9-11 million additional dollars. They had a lot of support, and the County was going to facilitate appraisals as they moved forward.

However, congress just changed the way NLCS funds can be dispersed, which has changed the whole narrative. Now the National Park Service can apply for NLCS funds to address their maintenance backlog, which is a really big undertaking that will take hundreds of millions of dollars. This means the dollars that were promised are no longer promised, and there isn't any indicator on if BLM is going to get even the base \$3 million that was originally allocated last year, let alone the up to \$11 million to make that purchase. Brendan at the BLM State Office has been in weekly communication with Mr. Doyle's attorney and power of attorney, keeping them updated.

Jason said it may have an affect if there needs to be a determination on moving forward on an appraisal or not. Appraisals are a little bit tricky because federal appraisals only last for a year, giving a very slim window

to complete a transaction. There is a caveat that they used in the Warner Valley Land Exchange, wherein if both parties agree to the appraisal when it takes place, it can be held in stasis in writing for an indefinite amount of time in order to be able to work out the end result.

George Weekley hasn't heard anything new on Section 6 funding. The Sullivan parcel was the main target because they thought BLM would be acquiring Doyle's property with LWCF funds. However, Section 6 funds may be a potential option for Acquiring Jim Doyle's land, because it was listed as a potential target. George will check to make sure that is the case. Since there was a land appraisal on Section 6 lands as it related to Northern Corridor, it can give a pretty good ballpark in terms of what the value per acre would be for Mr. Doyle's property.

Jason reported changes with BLM's hiring freeze are allowing them to prioritize some of their positions, such as the Realty Specialist. That doesn't necessarily mean that the position will be approved, but it was the one position that his office was able to get on the list. If approved, land exchanges could come back as a viable option. Cameron thought that if they are going to have to compete with National Parks, they are going to lose out and land exchanges could be the main way to go.

e. HCP Administrator's Report

1. Northern Corridor and Zone 6 update

Cameron reported that the Northern Corridor was re-approved last week, and Zone 6 has been added back to the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. The HCP has been working diligently ever since then, and have instructed law enforcement officers to patrol out there more frequently. Additionally, the HCP will be installing signage and fixing any fence that's been damaged.

This decision also unlocks some funding for the HCP, so they've advertised for two job positions: the Education & Outreach Coordinator, and a part-time Field Technician. Hiring for these two positions should help the HCP manage the additional workload.

2. Recreation planning in Zone 6

Along with the triggering of the Northern Corridor changed circumstance, the HCP will be resuming recreation planning for Zone 6. A part of that decision requires the total number of authorized trails in Zone 6 to be scaled down to under 65 miles. There are a lot of user-created and redundant trails so the HCP will work with recreation groups again to formalize a specific set of authorized trails. The HCP will be kicking that off on February 17th at the Transportation Expo where they will have maps

and information to share with the public. Everyone was invited to spread the word and come and participate. Those unable to attend can get ahold of the HCP if they would like to be involved in the recreation planning.

3. Restoration plan for temporary care facility

The Temporary Care Facility (TCF) was impacted by the retardant that was dropped on a fire in Confluence Park. Using seed from DWR, they will attempt to revegetate the tortoise pens with forage so the tortoises have more food this upcoming spring. A drone will be used to fly over the TCF and the entire burn scar area to drop the seed.

Related to that, the HCP has been working with DWR to target just under 1,500 acres of fuel breaks and Sahara mustard outbreaks for herbicide treatments in the Reserve. They have had some issues securing a contractor, but are hopeful to get one selected this week and start dropping the herbicide soon so that they won't have to wait until next year. A lot of the funding for this project has come from the DWR Species Protection Account, and the County has matched over \$30,000. Additionally, the HCP is supplying most of the herbicides.

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

None.

10. ADJOURN

MOTION by: Steve Kemp
Seconded by: Jason West
Discussion: To adjourn the meeting.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:06 p.m.
Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.