

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 **February 11, 2026.**

Members present:

John Kellam
Danielle Costantini
Mike Schijf
Reed Soper (for Scott Chamberlain)

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Washington County HCP Biologist
TLA, Local Biologist

Members excused:

Alyssa Hoekstra
Elaine York

Utah Division of Natural Resources (UDNR)
Nature Conservancy, Biologist-at-Large

Also present were:

Cameron Rognan
Randee Sanders
Brooke Larsen
Brendon Botosan (briefly)

Washington County HCP Administrator
Washington County HCP Executive Assistant
The Salt Lake Tribune
Conserve Southwest Utah

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. December 10, 2025

Page 3, Last Paragraph, Sentence 3:

Change from: “It would be good to know if translocated tortoises move twice the distance during one of the windows.”

Change to: “For example, it would be good to know if translocated tortoises move significantly longer distances during one of the two translocation windows.”

MOTION by: Danielle Costantini

Seconded: Mike Schijf

Discussion: To approve the minutes with approved changes.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

3. GENERAL BUSINESS

a. Annual review of RCDR Habitat Fire Management Guidelines

Cameron thought it would be helpful to have Mike Schijf give a refresher on the current project. It may play into what is done next year, especially if there are any data gaps or needs to switch the methods or strategies currently being used. Mike obliged, reporting that he is currently working with an herbicide treatment contractor named Casey with Mountain Meadow Ag. When this project was initially up for bid, they only received one bid who later backed out at the last minute. This left them scrambling. Kristen Comella with Snow Canyon State Park got the project on Casey's radar, and he was willing to put a bid in on the project and was awarded the contract.

The Habitat Management Plan was used as a guideline for the project, in conjunction with the amount of money that they had to work with this winter. With the help David Montague, DWR, they were awarded a Watershed Restoration Initiative (WRI) grant through the state, and both the County and BLM purchased chemical to be used as in-kind match.

They worked together over email on a few different versions of what they might want to treat, and ultimately decided on roughly 1,300 acres to treat. As established in the Habitat Management Plan, the focus is on existing roads and right-of-ways for fuel breaks. However, they are also targeting some smaller polygons of Sahara mustard as well in areas near Rusty Cliffs, Red Hills Parkway, and Highway 18. The width of the treatment areas varies depending on if it's a major road, such as Red Hills Parkway and Highway 18, which have 100-meter treatment widths. The minor interior utility roads, like Middleton Waterline Road, have 40 or 50-meter treatment widths. Depending on the area, they will use Rejuvra and Panoramic or Plateau. The contractor has already started to treat Cottonwood Springs Road, working south to north covering 100-meter widths along the roadway. Mike expressed his thanks to all the different players involved in these treatments.

John Kellam pointed out that the drones being used for these treatments are flying at a much lower elevation than helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft could. It's kind of an exciting tool where they can fly about 30 feet off the ground and really focus on an area, even with light wind.

As stated in the BLM Integrated Management Plan, the original goal was to do these treatments outside of the Mojave desert tortoise active season, which begins on February 15th. However, because of contracting constraints, treatments will continue past this date. Drones work quickly so they hope the treatments will wrap up by the end of February. John also expressed his thanks to everyone involved. He is glad to have WRI as a tool because it's really hard for the federal government to go through contracting for flights or drones.

Cameron also thanked everyone, saying it's been a great collaborative effort. More was identified for treatment than had been anticipated. That was

somewhat on purpose. It is going to be a rough year for invasives. Originally, the plan was to cover 575 acres, but they will be able to nearly triple the amount and knock out a lot of priority areas 2 and 3.

Cameron asked the TC to reconsider the order of priorities now that Zone 6 is a part of the reserve again. The asterisk next to it on table 2 states that Zone 6 should revert back up to priority two if/when this happened.

John suggested adding two more columns to table 3 to compare estimated to actual for the treatment area and cost. Cameron agreed that that would be good to see. Mike suggested clarifying when the treatment took place on that same table, since they can carry over a bit into the next year such as what happened this year. Cameron agreed, suggesting using language like “Winter 2025/2026”. Mike hopes that next winter they will be able to treat in December or possibly earlier. Unfortunately, they've been a little bit behind the last couple years. Cameron thought this is partly due to DWR’s staffing change.

As Cameron alluded to, currently they are doing some treatments in *prior* treatment area 2, and they worked on area 3 during the previous two treatment windows. Mike reminded everyone that the document is considered a guideline, because there are going to be some additional areas that could have treatment potential. For example, they are finding a lot more Sahara mustard out in treatment area 3 that might end up being a priority for next winter. Kristen Comella may have additional needs in treatment area 2 as well. He emphasized that he would like some flexibility year to year based on what is collectively decided as the number one priority.

John noted that there are some areas, such as the wash bottom at Twist Hollow, where we wouldn't want to directly spray. However, WRI has the capacity to hire Ace crews that could pull and bag up all the Sahara mustard and bring them closer to SR-18 to be picked up and transported.

Danielle shared that FWS has funding in the NFWF fund (mitigation dollars from projects). If there is additional funding needed, she thought this rises to a priority. Cameron suggested that be added to the document under funding sources, and asked Danielle to draft up the language for that.

John thought WRI is working out really well, and he is likely to get a relatively decent sized amount of money this fiscal year. It's much easier for him to do a purchase request and send money directly to WRI for an existing project like was done this year (\$32,500). If the partners can keep a WRI agreement going every year for these kinds of treatments, it's really easy for John and Danielle to put money in.

Mike thought it's shaping up to be a really bad winter for Sahara mustard, maybe the worst he's seen in terms of how widespread it is. He believes there is a need for better mapping. For example, going up north on Mill Creek where it hits Middleton Powerline Road, there is a lot of Sahara mustard on the big basalt ridge that runs north of there. There really is a need to figure out the extent of how far north that goes. It could even potentially go up into the wilderness area, which might create its own set of challenges mapping-wise.

The HCP has two drones. Cameron, Mike, and Dylan Thomas are all certified, however, they don't necessarily have the experience on how to do vegetation mapping. It could be helpful to find an avenue or individual who specializes in vegetation mapping. We often don't even know what's out there, especially for a plant like Sahara mustard, which we've only seen popping up in the county over the last 7-8 years, and it continues to become more widespread. Mike thought any noxious weed that's problematic for tortoise habitat should be mapped out when it starts becoming a problem. John agreed. He only has one technician this year, but thought it'd be easier if they had a drone to do some mapping with a GPS track log of where it's finding them.

Although not a TC member, Randee Sanders recalled assisting Brad Winder on a grant that utilized a mapping program. She suggested checking in with him to see if he already has the data. Mike responded, saying that the program is called EddMapS. It is one of the ways that Brad helps to track any invasive plant that gets reported. He manages it on the back end, and can see when invasives get reported on it. It has been used for previous treatments. Mike agreed that mentioning working with Brad Winder, the noxious weeds manager, and utilizing EddMapS may be good. On top of that, he thought there is definitely need for some additional mapping. Cameron suggested adding it as objective 1.5, and tasked Mike with drafting the language for it.

Zone 6 was downgraded to priority 9 when it was removed from the Reserve, but now it's back in the reserve and should automatically trigger it back up to priority 2. Cameron thought it's probably worth treating this year, since they were unable to do anything the last couple years. Mike agreed, but on an as-needed basis. He doesn't think there is as much cheatgrass and other invasives there as some other parts of the reserve. He doesn't know why that is, but he would support treating Zone 6 if the need is there. He just doesn't want to treat it for the sake of treating.

Cameron wondered when the ROW's were last treated. Mike answered that Brad Winder treated Navajo Drive up past Bear Claw Poppy. He believes that was done sometime around 2021, but he would have to double check to be sure. Cameron wondered if the road up to the water tank by Green Valley

Gap area was treated. Mike didn't think that it was. Cameron thought that it would be worth considering, as well as Stucki Springs Road. Mike agreed. He thought it's at least worth scouting to see how bad the cheatgrass and other invasives are out there.

Cameron reviewed the TC's proposed updates to the plan as follows: (1) to move Zone 6 back to Priority 2 under Table 2; (2) to add columns in Table 3 to show the actual expenses and coverage completed each year; (3) to change the year on Table 3 to indicate the winter in which those treatments occurred; (4) to add NFWF funding as a funding source; and (5) to add bullet point 1.5 regarding habitat mapping. Cameron suggested these updates would be easier to do offline and then submit/discuss over email.

MOTION by: Mike Schijf

Seconded by: John Kellam

Discussion: To approve the Habitat Management Plan, adopting the changes discussed in this meeting (as summarized by Cameron in the above paragraph).

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

b. Review and consider fire management priorities for winter of 2026-2027

As far as priorities go, Mike said he would like to continue targeting the Sahara mustard yet to be treated up in area 3, as well as coordinate with Kristen Comella on anything leftover in Snow Canyon State Park that still needs to be treated. As Cameron discussed earlier, it would be good to see what the needs are in Zone 6. Mike offered to check it out this winter to see what should be prioritized for the next treatment window.

Cameron asked when Zone 4 was last treated. Mike responded, that he wasn't sure if BLM have done anything out in the Zone 4/Babylon area, but Mike hasn't been a part of any treatments out there. Cameron thought if they could complete Zone 2 and Snow Canyon State Park, it would be good to also treat Babylon Road. John concurred. Even though BLM spoke about it being a potential treatment last year, it did not occur. With all the development and exponential increase in vehicle use down that road, it would be good to do a narrow band immediately adjacent to the road. Mike agreed that Babylon should be a high priority area.

Mike asked John if the road leading to the Red Cliffs Recreation Area and campground has been treated. John answered that BLM usually treats it every year, however, they lost Ryan Reese so it was not treated in 2025. He was unsure if it's in queue for this year, but agreed that it should be a high priority. Cameron wondered if the last time they treated it was before Rejuvra was authorized. If so, it's probably due. John believed the last time it was done was in 2024, using Plateau along both sides of the road.

Everyone agreed that Zone 6, Zone 2, Zone 4, and Red Cliffs Recreation Area is probably enough to keep them busy. Those priorities will get refined as the year goes on and they prepare to work with David and submit a WRI proposal. Additionally, Mike suggested it may be good to do some additional Sahara mustard treatments in Zone 3.

MOTION by: John Kellam

Seconded by: Mike Schijf

Discussion: The TC members agree to update the priority treatment areas for next year as discussed. It's a work in progress, and they'll collectively work together this year to coordinate the effort for treatments for next year.

Vote was taken: All voted aye.

Motion passed.

4. ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

a. Raven management plans for 2026

The raven oversight group has been meeting infrequently to figure out their priorities and raven management plans for the upcoming year. They will continue with nest treatments. The permit allows up to 50 territories to be treated as a buffer, although they don't think they'll get close to that. The HCP will continue to monitor nests and look for new nests in new areas, and John Kellam will have a dedicated intern that will help identify new nesting territories in the NCA that may have been missed over the years. Additionally, Mike Schijf will continue his decoy study.

Cameron reported that he observed a raven carrying some sticks in the Reserve yesterday. He followed it to a tree that had a large nest in it. It was probably a nest that has been used by ravens previously. He thought it was pretty early to be seeing nesting behavior, so it might end up being an even earlier year than last year.

John said that his intern will begin on Monday, and he will have him start going out to check on some nest sites, including the one near Rusty Cliffs. He suggested he and Mike talk about other priority areas. Mike agreed, saying that the Rusty Cliffs nest would be a good one to check as it is historically one of the earlier nests.

b. Update on Northern Corridor Record of Decision and lawsuit

The FWS and BLM rendered their decision regarding the Northern Corridor about a month ago, and have re-approved the Northern Corridor, which also re-established Zone 6. Approximately a week ago, the environmental groups challenged that decision and have already filed for a preliminary injunction to

stop some of the progress on that road. They are also challenging the County's HCP. Unfortunately, that means the County will be involved in litigation over the course of the next couple of years. In the meantime, Zone 6 is protected. Cameron's reading of the preliminary injunction is that it won't stop anything that the HCP is doing in Zone 6, so they are going to continue to manage and protect Zone 6 as if it's a part of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve.

c. Sons of Utah Pioneers proposal for access to a historic kiln site

At the last HCAC meeting, Loren Webb presented a project proposal from the Sons of Utah Pioneers for a trailhead, monument, and trail access to a historic kiln site. The HCAC did feel comfortable with the proposal. A lot of the access is along non-federal lands within the reserve. However, the site itself is on BLM land. Loren was encouraged to work directly with the BLM first, and if they find a pathway to get approval for the kiln site and the monument on BLM land, then it will come back to the TC to review the access route to the site. It is something that might be a future agenda item.

Mike asked Cameron if he received any clarification on whether the Middleton Waterline Road will persist with the Northern Corridor. Cameron answered that he did reach out to Kade with St. George City Water Department, who has been in communication with UDOT to figure out access for the waterline. Kade is aware, which might help to resolve the puzzle on whether or not there will be access preserved there for a trail.

John read in the POD that there will be three recreation underpasses, one at T-Bone, one at Middleton Waterline Road, and the other at Cottontail. He wondered if there has been a change from that. Cameron answered that he was unaware of one at Middleton, but he thought there should be one there. When he inquired, he was told they didn't think there would be one there. It will get resolved, especially if BLM finds a pathway, then the TC can figure out the most appropriate access for them. The trail might be longer than they want if one of those isn't available, but there are different ways to get there.

Danielle said one of the project alternatives was to potentially have the trail access from the Northern Corridor (if it ends up happening). The FWS' BO explicitly states that only the underpasses would provide recreation access, so if it could tie into an underpass that would be ideal. The TC agreed.

5. NEXT MEETING DATES

- a. 2nd Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m., as needed. Possible dates/times for 2026: 3/11, 4/8, 5/13, 6/10, 7/8, 8/12, 9/9, 10/14, 11/10, 12/9.**

6. ADJOURN

MOTION by: Mike Schijf
Seconded by: Danielle Costantini
Discussion: To adjourn the meeting.
Vote was taken: All voted aye.
Motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:47.
Minutes prepared by Randee Sanders.