

TC Assignment 6/10/2026

Consider conservation options for habitat islands and fragmented tortoise populations

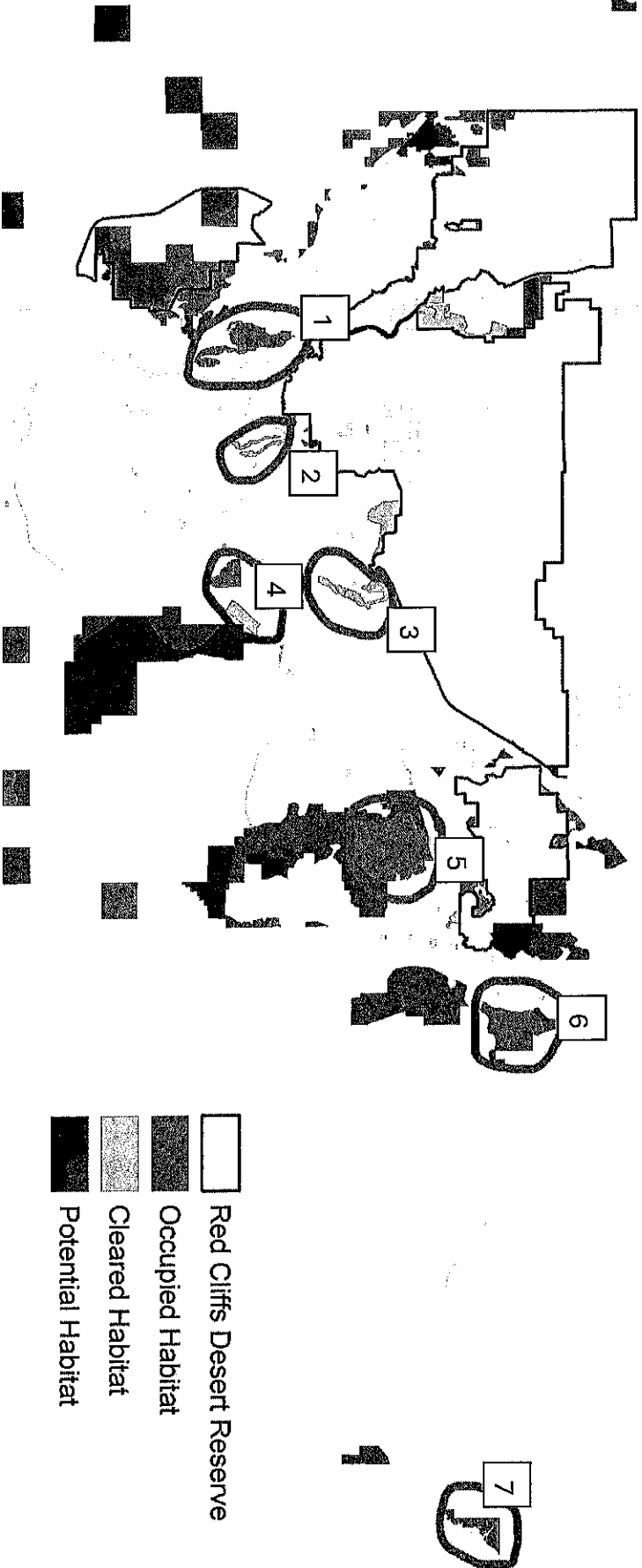
Background:

In recent weeks, HCP staff reported that a portion of tortoise fence at Long Valley was non-functional due to shifting sand dunes and that tortoise tracks were observed entering the adjacent private property. Since that time, the BLM has repaired the damaged fence and HCP and UDWR have been removing tortoises from the private property which is in the process of being developed. The developers expressed frustration at the need for an additional tortoise removal and requested other solutions that will prevent tortoises from entering their property again. This area, and others like it, present conservation challenges due to the fragmented nature of the remaining habitat and unknown number of tortoises they might be harboring.

Assignment:

Review the primary tortoise habitat islands throughout the County's take permit area (Figure 1). Consider best management practices for each location that is fragmented from larger tracts of habitat. If necessary, consider specific thresholds (ie # of tortoises or acres) that should be needed to maintain a viable tortoise population. For areas that do not meet the desired thresholds, consider management options to remove and translocate these tortoises. Identify steps to implement a conservation strategy for each of these locations, such as additional study, culverts or fencing, and additional permitting or authorizations.

Figure 1. Fragmented tortoise populations in the Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit.



Summary of TC Recommendation for Tortoise Habitat Islands

For most habitat islands (2,3,5 & 6), the TC recommendation is to continue removing tortoises from private lands and translocating them to the designated translocation zone. For island 7 in Springdale, the recommendation is to maintain tortoises in this area as much as possible or relocate to Zion National Park. While this population is small and perhaps not viable in the long-term, these animals still serve an important educational function and are beloved by the community members. For area 1 near the St. George Tech Ridge and former airport, the recommendation is to seek guidance from St. George City on how they would feel about possible protection of tortoises on their lands. If approved by the City, collect additional demographic data on tortoises at this location to better inform management strategies. For area 4 in Long Valley, the TC recommends keeping tortoises on BLM lands, but when they are found on private lands, tortoises will be either re-located or translocated based on a pending discussion with USFWS, UDWR, BLM and the HCP. For area 8 along the Hurricane Cliffs, we recommend collecting more data before making any management decisions. This area is under little developmental pressure and could have more tortoises than presumed.

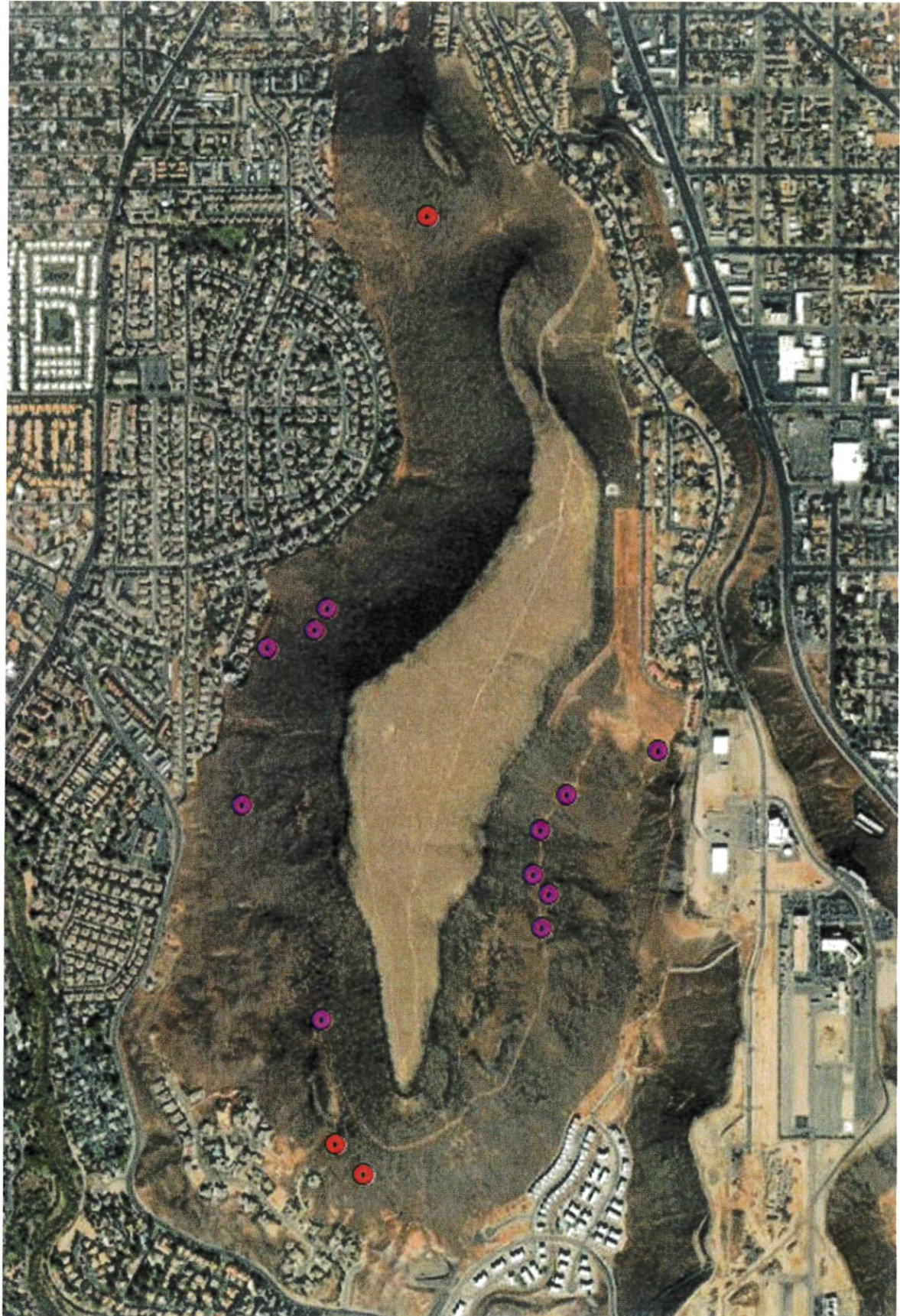
Analysis and TC Recommendations Regarding Tortoise Habitat Islands

1. St. George Black Ridge (non-federal lands)

- 650 acres (2.6 sq km) of open space habitat – nearly all rocky hillsides
- Medium tortoise density estimated at $10 / \text{km}^2 = 26$ adult tortoises
Or high tortoise density estimated at $30 / \text{km}^2 = 79$ adult tortoises
- Residential development expected on top of ridge

TC Recommendation: Contact St. George City for guidance on how to proceed with their possible approval, conditions, or denial. Collect more demographic data on tortoises in this area.





2. Middleton Black Ridge (non-federal lands)

- Most tortoises already removed
- A few sub-adult tortoises may still remain
- Very limited hillside habitat remaining

TC Recommendation: Keep removing all tortoises and translocate to designated translocation zone.

3. Coral Canyon / Sienna Hills (non-federal lands)

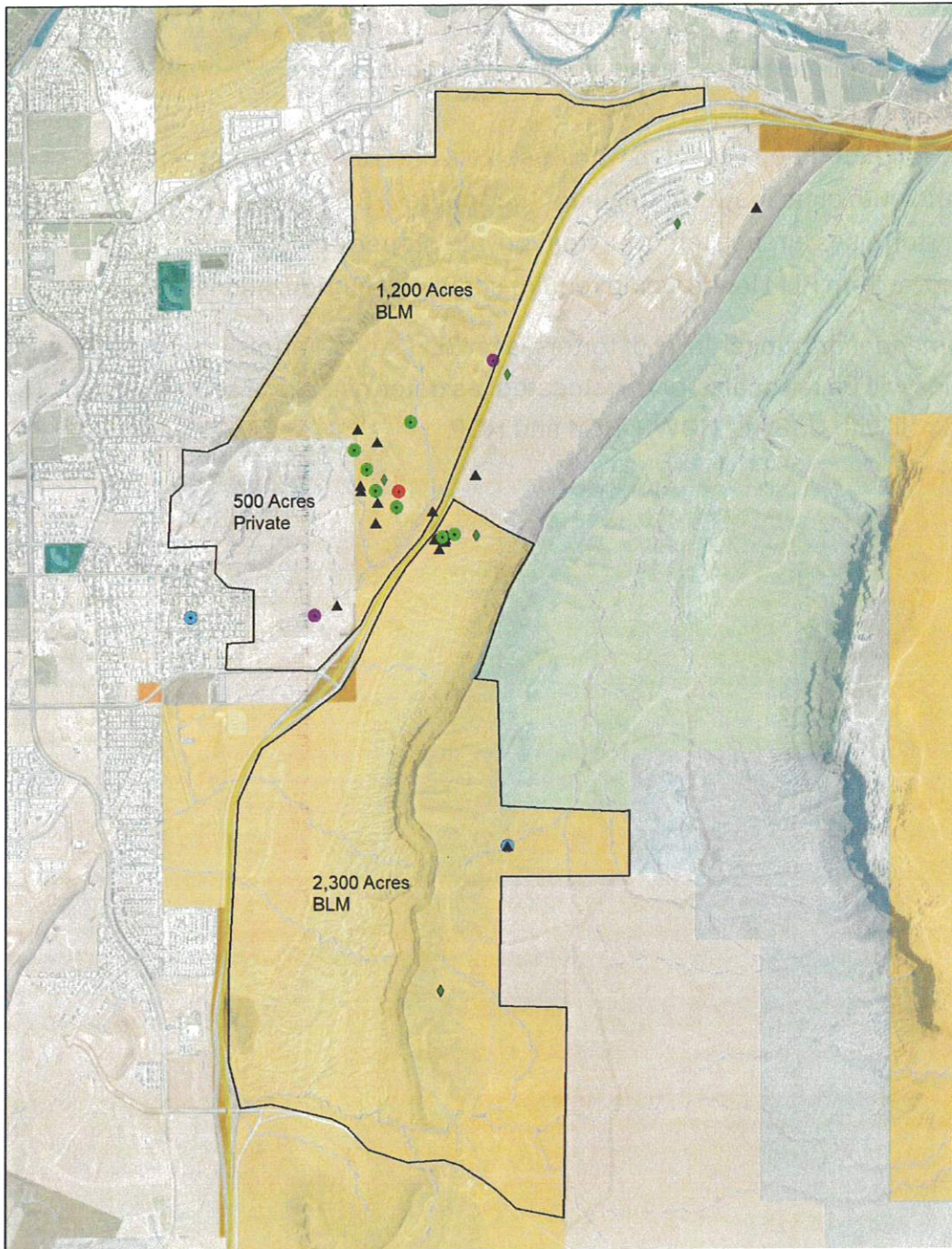
- Most tortoises already removed
- A few sub-adult tortoises may still remain
- Limited habitat remaining, current development threatens the rest of it

TC Recommendation: Keep removing all tortoises and translocate to designated translocation zone.

4. Washington Dome / Long Valley (mostly federal lands)

- High density of tortoises, but in small, clustered locations
- Fragmented by Southern Parkway
- More fragmentation expected with Reservoir, and TLA's development plans
- North/south cliffs may also fragment the southern BLM parcel
- Many tortoises already removed from private property on east side
- Removal from BLM lands would require additional authorizations

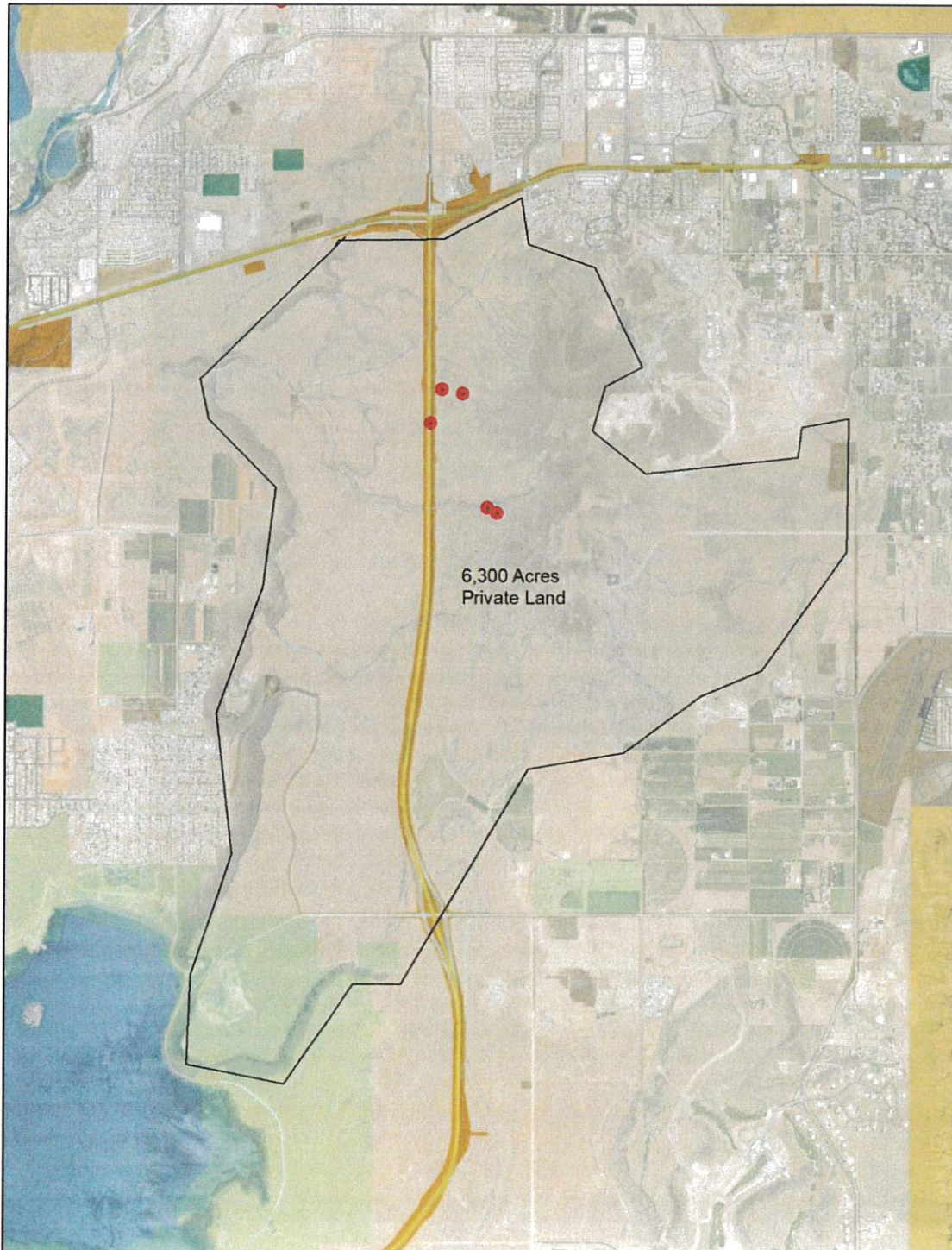
TC Recommendation: No removal of tortoises on BLM lands. Tortoises found on non-federal lands will be re-located or translocated, as determined by a soon-to-be scheduled call with USFWS, UDWR, BLM and HCP.



5. Sullivan Knoll (non-federal lands)

- Fragmented by Southern Parkway and surrounded by private lands
- Very little known about tortoises here
- Large area, but presumed few tortoises, likely clustered near the knoll

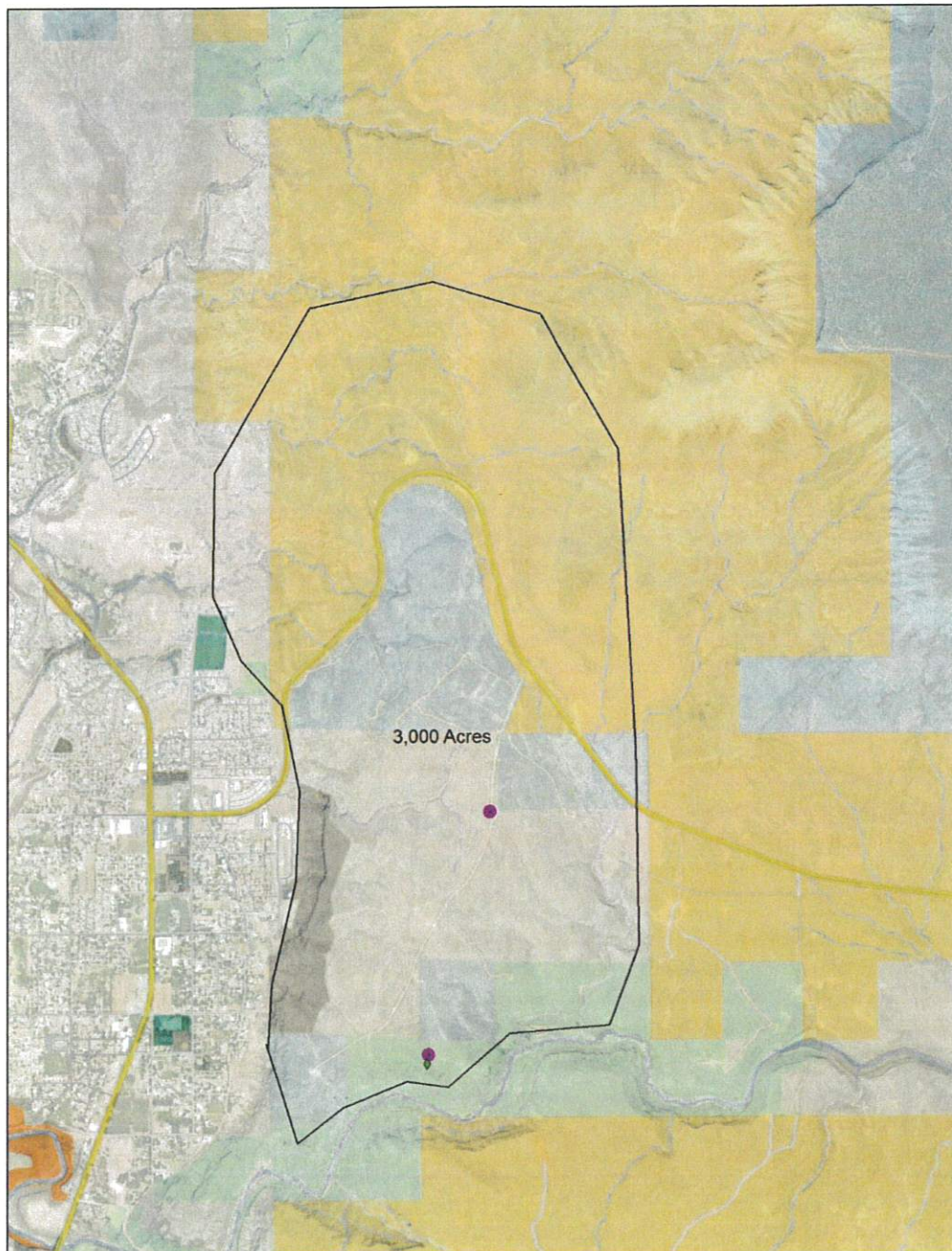
TC Recommendation: Keep removing all tortoises and translocate to designated translocation zone.



6. La Verkin Bench (federal and non-federal lands)

- BLM lands to the north, but likely unoccupied by tortoises
- Presumed small population of tortoises, but not known for sure
- Fragmented by highway and Virgin river to the south

TC Recommendation: Determine if animal is captive or of wild origin. If captive, tortoise should go into the state's adoption program. If wild, translocate to designated translocation zone.



7. Springdale / Zion (federal and non-federal lands)

- Few tortoises over a very small area
- Tortoises managed primarily by National Parks Service

TC Recommendation: Maintain tortoises in Zion NP and nearby for outreach benefits.

8. South Hurricane Cliffs (federal and non-federal lands)

- Presumed small population of tortoises, but not known for sure
- Mostly federal lands
- Less development pressure or immediate threat of loss of habitat

TC Recommendation: Due to low development pressure, no action is necessary at this location right now. However, more data should be collected on the state and adjacent federal lands to determine feasibility of maintaining a possible tortoise population.

