WASHINGTON COUNTY
UTAH

VICTOR IVERSON, COMMISSION CHAIR | ZACHARY RENSTROM, COMMISSIONER | DEAN COX, COMMISSIONER

January 17, 2017

Mayor Chris Hart
55 N Main
Ivins, UT 84738

Dear Mayor Hart:

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initially listed the Desert Tortoise as an endangered species in 1989 (and later as threatened in 1990, as it currently is), it set in motion a series of actions that would have had significant adverse impacts for the communities that shared the tortoises' critical habitat: stalling and even foreclosing development projects, limiting how private land could be used and developed, hindering public infrastructure maintenance and development, and jeopardizing multiple uses of public lands such as grazing rights, mineral extraction, and recreation.

When the communities of Washington County came face-to-face with the land-use restrictions that the Fish and Wildlife Service was attempting to impose, they talked and listened to each other and came to the realization that it would be far better to deal with the listing collaboratively, in a unified effort, rather than attempting to deal individually city by city and town by town with the bureaucratic red tape of a cornucopia of federal and state regulators.

Committees were established, research conducted, an Environmental Impact Statement drafted, and after almost seven years of negotiations, the Washington County HCP was signed in February of 1996. It was one of, if not the first, HCP's established under the ESA. The HCP, signed by Washington County, the Town of Ivins, BLM, USFWS, and State DWR, called for a reserve of more than 61,000 acres to be established and it freed more than 12,000 acres of critical habitat adjacent to the reserve and opened more than 300,000 acres of other land in the County for immediate development, improvement, and continued private and public use. The permit expired in February of 2016 and the County is operating the HCP under a letter of extension while a new permit is negotiated.

And this brings us to the point of this letter. Times have changed, we now have a different body of commissioners, mayors, and council members than when the original accord was struck. The

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Commissioners, acting more on assumption than personal knowledge, have assumed that all of our communities were still supportive of the HCP and its broader role in each of our communities; and for that, we apologize. We feel that we should continue to involve our communities and better communicate with you, our partners, in determining whether or not a county managed HCP is meeting the needs of our communities and how best to affect a renewal.

The Commissioners would like to meet with each of our communities that have critical habitat within their boundaries in a work or council meeting. This would better allow us to answer your questions, and gather input from you on how we might best proceed. There are a variety of options that could be considered and explored.

It is our belief that working together in a fashion similar to the way we did when the HCP was first crafted would facilitate a better understanding of the HCP itself, and will allow each community an opportunity to feel ownership in its final delivery.

We would appreciate an opportunity to work more closely with you and have the opportunity to explore our options with the HCP's renewal at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMISSION

Zachary Renstrom
Commissioner

Victor Iverson
Chairman

Dean Cox
Commissioner

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