



What is the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve?

The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve is a 62,000-acre scenic desert area dedicated to the protection of the desert tortoise and other rare or sensitive species of wildlife.

The reserve also protects the region's quality of life by setting aside spectacular open space for future generations to enjoy immediately adjacent to growing communities. There are over 130 miles of shared-use trails in the reserve for hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking. Washington County, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Snow Canyon State Park have developed trail heads and installed trail signs. The county has published a reserve map which is available at several locations throughout the county.

In exchange for setting aside the reserve, a permit was issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to Washington County that allows thousands of acres of privately owned habitat in participating communities to be developed.

Common Questions

? What is the distinction between the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)? The HCP was developed by local communities in 1996 after the desert tortoise and its habitat were protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The plan outlines actions to protect the desert tortoise and other unique wildlife while also permitting the development of tortoise habitat outside the reserve in and near adjacent cities so economic growth can continue. The 62,000 acres of protected habitat designated by the HCP for tortoises and other wildlife is called the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve.

? How does the HCP benefit people and development needs in Washington County? The plan enabled the USFWS to issue a permit to the county which "unlocked" over 300,000 acres of desert habitat on private property outside the reserve so it could be developed. Thus ended—by compromise—a contentious issue. To date, thousands of acres from Ivins to Springdale have been developed as a result of the HCP, including shopping centers, a regional hospital, a freeway interchange, and major residential and commercial areas. The HCP also stipulated that 1,169 tortoises could be "taken" or removed from these properties or accidentally killed as long as certain processes were followed.

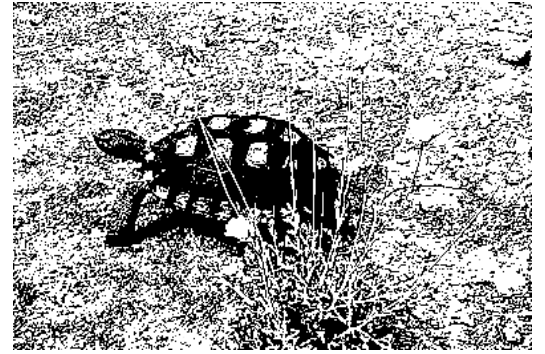
? How does the reserve – the 62,000 acres which cannot be developed – benefit people? It provides extensive open space with over 130 miles of trails and 17 trailheads for hikers, horseback riders and other users. Hunting is also allowed in parts of the reserve.

? What would happen if there was no HCP? There would be economic chaos because land owners in tortoise habitat would be required under the ESA to apply for their own *individual* permit. This could cost each landowner thousands of dollars in compliance fees and would require years for the USFWS to process. The Washington County HCP provides one "blanket" permit that covers everybody so long as the individual city has signed an interlocal agreement with the county.

? Which cities chose to sign the interlocal agreement and are covered under the HCP? Ivins, Santa Clara, St. George, Washington City, Hurricane, Rockville, and Springdale. The unincorporated portions of Washington County are also covered.

? What happens if someone outside the above cities develops property in tortoise habitat? They are required under federal law to consult directly with the USFWS to obtain their own permit or face significant fines.

? **Who administers the HCP and how is it funded?** Washington County administers the plan and signed an agreement in 1996 to comply with and enforce the conditions of the plan. Other signatories to the plan include the USFWS, BLM and Utah Department of Natural Resources. The county's plan only authorizes tortoises to be displaced on private properties outside of the reserve. It does not exempt landowners from other applicable federal and state laws. Each participating city collects two kinds of impact fees when development occurs; \$250 per acre for subdivided property and 2/10ths of one percent of new construction costs to build a house or commercial building.



? **What happens to tortoises on property planned for development?**

Before the property is developed, the developer coordinates with county staff, then county and state employees remove tortoises out of harm's way at no cost.

? **How long does the HCP permit last and what happens when it ends?** The permit that allows development to displace tortoises in participating cities expires in 2016, unless it is renegotiated and extended. At that point it is uncertain who will administer the reserve— the county or a federal agency such as the BLM. Regardless of who administers it, the 62,000 acres of reserve land will remain protected for wildlife, people, and open space.

? **What happens if a city decides to withdraw from the HCP?** The citizens of that city will have no protection for violations that will occur under the ESA.

? **Will there be a highway through the middle of the reserve between St. George City and Washington City?** The HCP does not permit a new highway through the reserve. The recently improved "Red Hills Parkway," approved as a 4-lane road, (also called Skyline Drive or the Northern Corridor) was allowed under the HCP; no others are permitted.

? **Are tortoises native to the valley or were they all brought in from Arizona and Nevada?** The wide distribution of tortoises throughout the valley, their comparatively unique appearance, and two Indian petroglyphs depicting tortoises indicate that tortoises have been here for thousands of years. It is also true that people released hundreds of pet tortoises in the valley before they were considered threatened.

? **What happens to tortoises which are removed from developed areas?** They are blood tested to see if they are healthy. If they are healthy, they are released southeast of Leeds in an isolated part of the reserve north of the Virgin River. So far over 400 tortoises have been processed by the county to allow for development.

? **What else does the Reserve protect?** It also protects scenic vistas, historical sites (pioneer and native American), ancient dinosaur tracks, and more recent events of note, such as famous movie locations (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *They Came to Cordura*, *The Electric Horseman*, and others).

? **What do I do if I see a tortoise in the road?** Make sure you are not endangering yourself and, if it safe to do so, move the tortoise out of the road in the direction it was going. If there is a mesh fence along the road, put the tortoise on the other side in the direction it was going. **You will not get in trouble for moving a tortoise out of harm's way.** If the tortoise is in a developed area, please call 634-5759 or 467-5766 so county personnel can pick it up and relocate it to an appropriate area. Please do not attempt to relocate animals yourself. The county tests each tortoise to make sure it is healthy before relocation.

ENJOY THE RESERVE.... IT IS ABOUT WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE AND HOW WE CAN LIVE TOGETHER.

For More Information....

Contact Red Cliffs Desert Reserve by calling 435-634-5759 or visit us on the web at redcliffsdessertreserve.com.