

Desert Tortoise Bill Open House Comment Summary

August 16, 2018

On March 28, 2018, Washington County held a public open house to provide information to any interested citizens about H.R. 5597, or the *Desert Tortoise Habitat Conservation Plan Expansion Act, Washington County, Utah*. At that meeting, written comments were accepted and will be summarized in this document.

In total, 140 comments were collected. Most were handwritten on provided comment cards. A few were typed comments or flyers. For the purposes of this document, these comments have been classified into eight categories as follows.

The most comments came from people or organizational representatives who want recreational opportunities in the proposed Zone 6 preserved. Of the 140 comments, 54 or about 39% fit in this category. Many of these are mountain bikers who wanted to be able to use the trails in the proposed Zone 6 for personal use and events. These often cited the economic and growth benefits of recreation in the area. A common sentiment in these comments was that the commenter was in support of the bill as long as recreation was preserved.

The next largest group of comments is those who opposed the Northern Corridor. Of the 140 comments, 36 or about 26% fit in this category. Many of these opposed the Northern Corridor for primarily conservation reasons; they expressed concern about the actual effects of the road on the turtle population, they didn't want a road to interfere with views or recreational opportunities, etc. Many others expressed their opinion that the building of the Northern Corridor would open up the Red Cliffs Reserve to future development. Many expressed frustration with building a new road instead of investing in other ways of mitigating traffic like expanding existing roads.

Commented [TB1]: Conserve Southwest Utah was not allowed to see the data or to verify the summary.

Commented [TB2]: This is an incorrect characterization. This subset of the recreational community is in favor of protecting Zone 6, but are not in favor of the highway.

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Another group of comments were those favoring the Northern Corridor. 17 or about 12% of the 140 comments fit in this category. A few of these expressed support for the road and said that it showed consideration for both conservation and development. Several expressed conditional support for the road. Prominent among these comments were those who favored it as long as it did not open the area for future development. A few only expressed concerns about the construction of the road, suggesting specific measures, presumably to protect the tortoise population.

Several comments advocated limiting growth in Washington County. 11 or about 8% of the comments could be classified as such. Many of these expressed a concern for preserving all protected land and advocated alternative development strategies such as encouraging public transportation, “building up,” and spreading out commercial areas. Several expressed their concern that St. George is becoming too much like larger metropolitan areas like Salt Lake and Las Vegas. A couple of these comments could be classified as opposing the Northern Corridor specifically.

There were three remaining categories of comments. Each contained three comments or about 2% of the total. One of these categories was just comments critical of the open house itself. Overall, they expressed their feelings that the information provided was not sufficient and that the meeting was not done well.

Another category was comments from those who were in favor of including Zone 6 in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. Two of these three comments were opposed to the Northern Corridor, however.

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Lastly, there were three comments from people who live close to the proposed Northern Corridor and are opposed to it being built where it is being proposed. They expressed their frustration with the construction or location of the Northern Corridor.

There were also 13 comments, about 9% of the total, that didn't fit into any of our established categories. These comments covered a wide variety of topics, some expressing support for conservation, one advocating for a historical site, and others just asking questions.

There were also four comment cards submitted that did not have names on them. They were not included in this summary.