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Fish & Wildlife Service

**Northern Corridor Supplemental
Environmental Impact Statement**

WELCOME

PUBLIC SCOPING OPEN HOUSE

for the

Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to Reconsider a Highway Right-of-Way Application and Associated Amendment of an Incidental Take Permit, Washington County, Utah

The purpose of this meeting is to provide information and gather public input and identify issues related to the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) intent, as co-lead agencies, to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to further consider the effects of granting a right-of-way (ROW) to the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) for the Northern Corridor (a proposed highway) as well as a potential amendment to the Incidental Take Permit (ITP) issued to Washington County, Utah, under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA.

Please sign-in and pick up a Tour Guide which will provide an outline of the information being presented.



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Background

A SEIS is being prepared in response to a settlement agreement signed between the U.S. Government and the plaintiffs to a lawsuit filed in 2021 (see Litigation Summary). Consistent with the settlement agreement, the BLM and FWS, as co-lead agencies, are preparing the SEIS to supplement the analysis contained in the 2020 Final EIS (FEIS) and associated 2021 Records of Decision (ROD) and to further consider the effects of granting the ROW to UDOT for the Northern Corridor highway as well as a possible amendment to the ITP issued to Washington County, Utah. Amendments to the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA) and St. George Field Office Resource Management Plans (RMPs) will not be reconsidered in the SEIS. Changes to the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will not be reconsidered in the SEIS.

LITIGATION SUMMARY

June 3, 2021: Seven conservation organizations (collectively, Plaintiffs) filed an initial complaint in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Case No. 1:21-cv-01506. Among other claims, Plaintiffs alleged the BLM's ROW decision violated both NEPA and consultation required by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

July 27, 2021: Plaintiffs amended their complaint to include the FWS and additional claims related to NEPA and the ESA.

The United States and Plaintiffs have entered into a settlement agreement. The settlement agreement includes, in part, a commitment to prepare a SEIS.

November 16, 2023: United States District Court remands the 2021 decisions to the BLM and FWS for reconsideration.

AGENCY ACTION

The BLM will further consider the effects of granting UDOT's 2018 ROW application.

The FWS will consider a possible amendment of Washington County's ITP, consistent with the decision that results from the BLM's reconsideration of UDOT's application.



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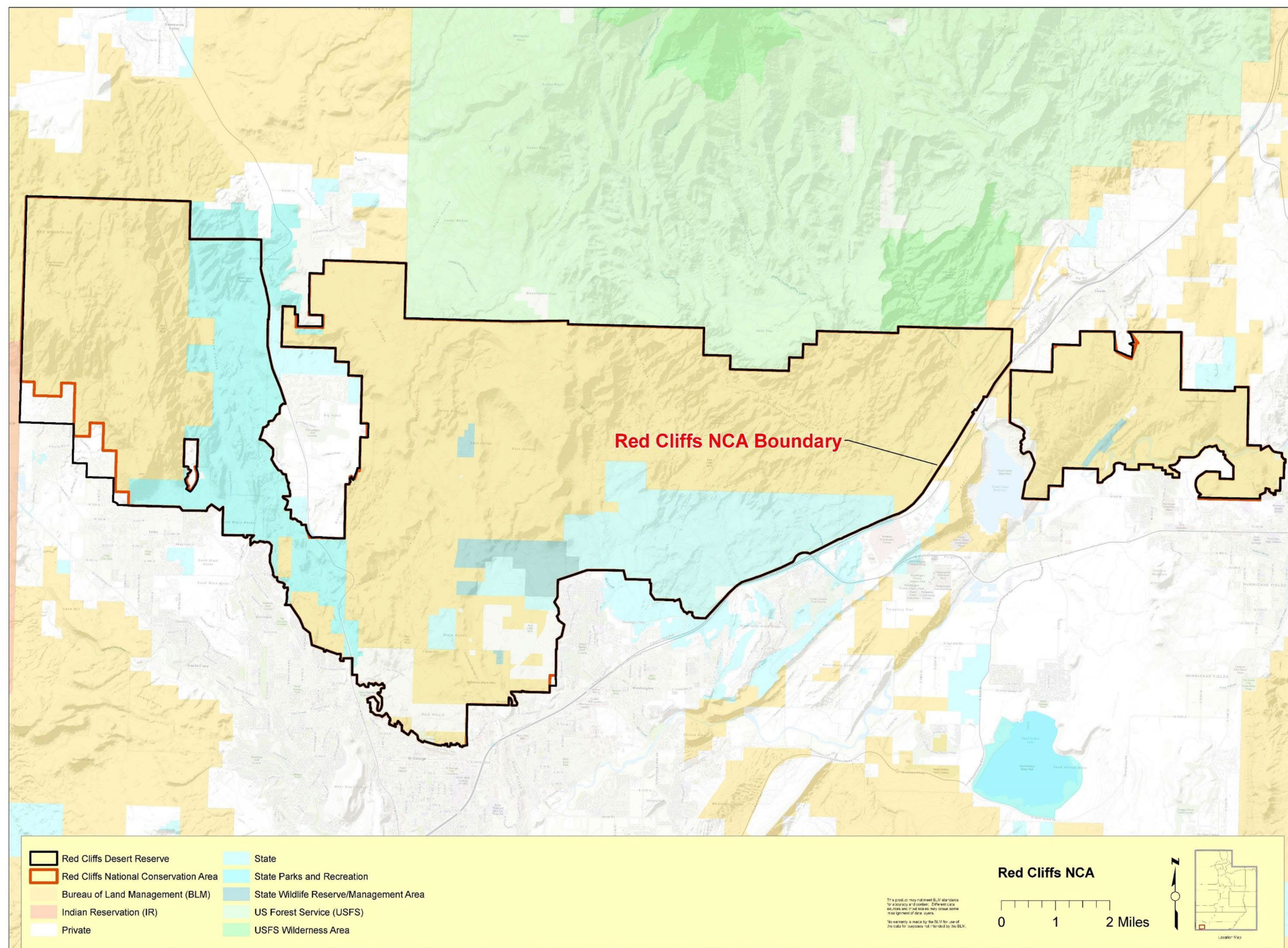
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Red Cliffs NCA

The Red Cliffs National Conservation Area (NCA) was established by Congress with the passage of Subtitle O of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (16 U.S.C. 7202, Public Law (PL) 111-11). PL 111-11 designated approximately 45,000 acres of the original 62,000-acre Red Cliffs Desert Reserve as an NCA, to be administered by the BLM's St. George Field Office (SGFO) for the following purposes:

- (1) to conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations the ecological, scenic, wildlife, recreational, cultural, historical, natural, educational, and scientific resources of the National Conservation Area; and
- (2) to protect each species that is— (A) located in the National Conservation Area; and (B) listed as a threatened or endangered species on the list of threatened species or the list of endangered species published under section 4(c)(1) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1533(c)(1)).





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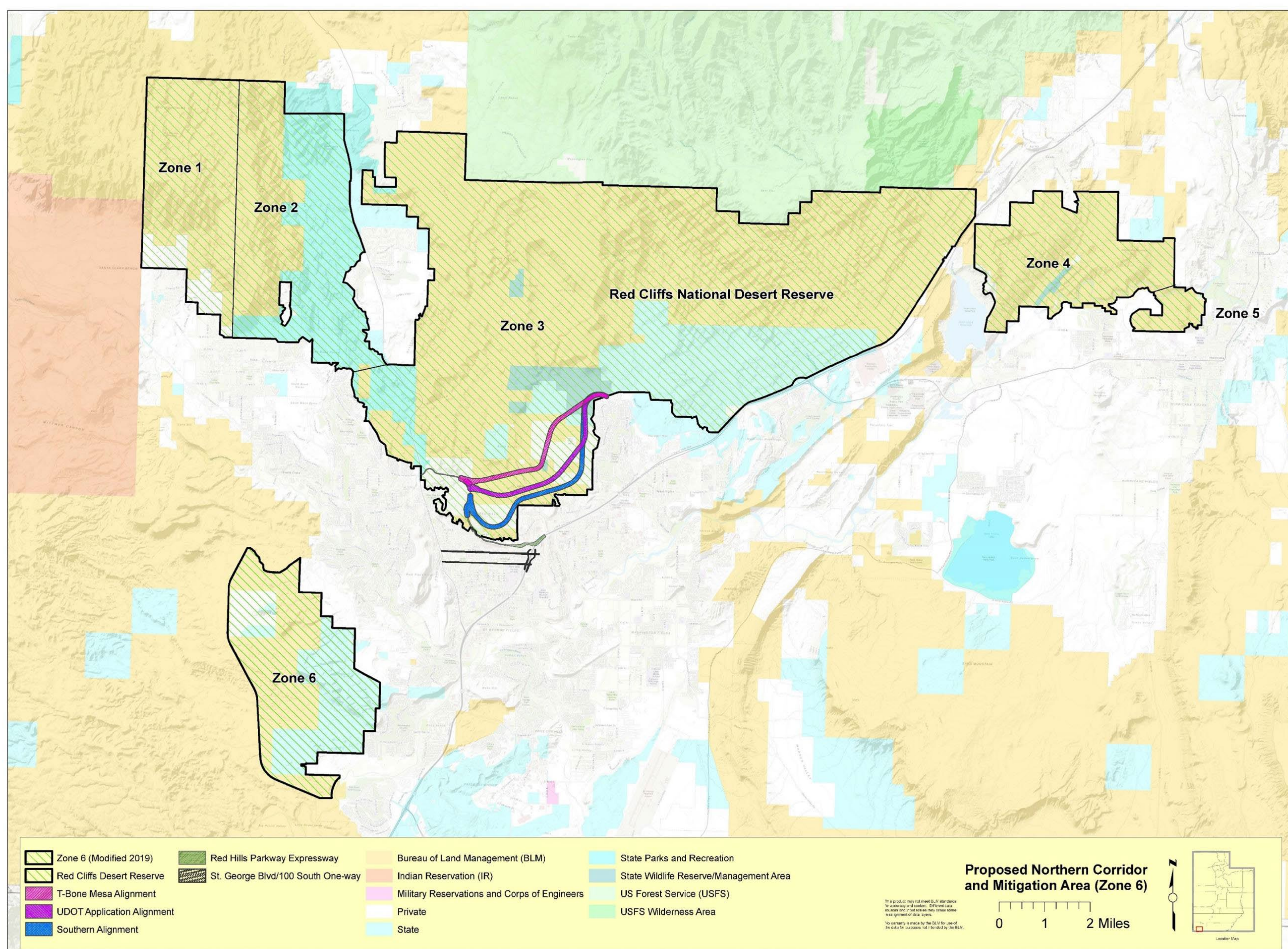
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In September 2018, UDOT applied for a ROW to construct a multi-lane, divided highway (the Northern Corridor) on BLM-administered lands within the Red Cliffs NCA and the overlapping Red Cliffs Desert Reserve.

In January 2021, after the FEIS was completed, the Secretary of the Interior prepared a ROD and the BLM issued a FLPMA Title V ROW grant to UDOT. The FWS prepared a ROD and issued an ITP to Washington County for the Mojave desert tortoise under Section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA.

As part of its decisions, BLM amended the Red Cliffs NCA RMP to allow a one-time exception for a transportation ROW and/or corridor within the NCA. BLM also amended the St. George Field Office RMP to modify management on a portion of the 6,800-acre mitigation area (Zone 6) that was added to the Reserve to offset the ROW impacts.





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Alternative Alignments

The following six alternative alignments were analyzed in detail in the 2020 Northern Corridor Highway Final EIS and are anticipated to be carried forward in the SEIS

No Action Alternative

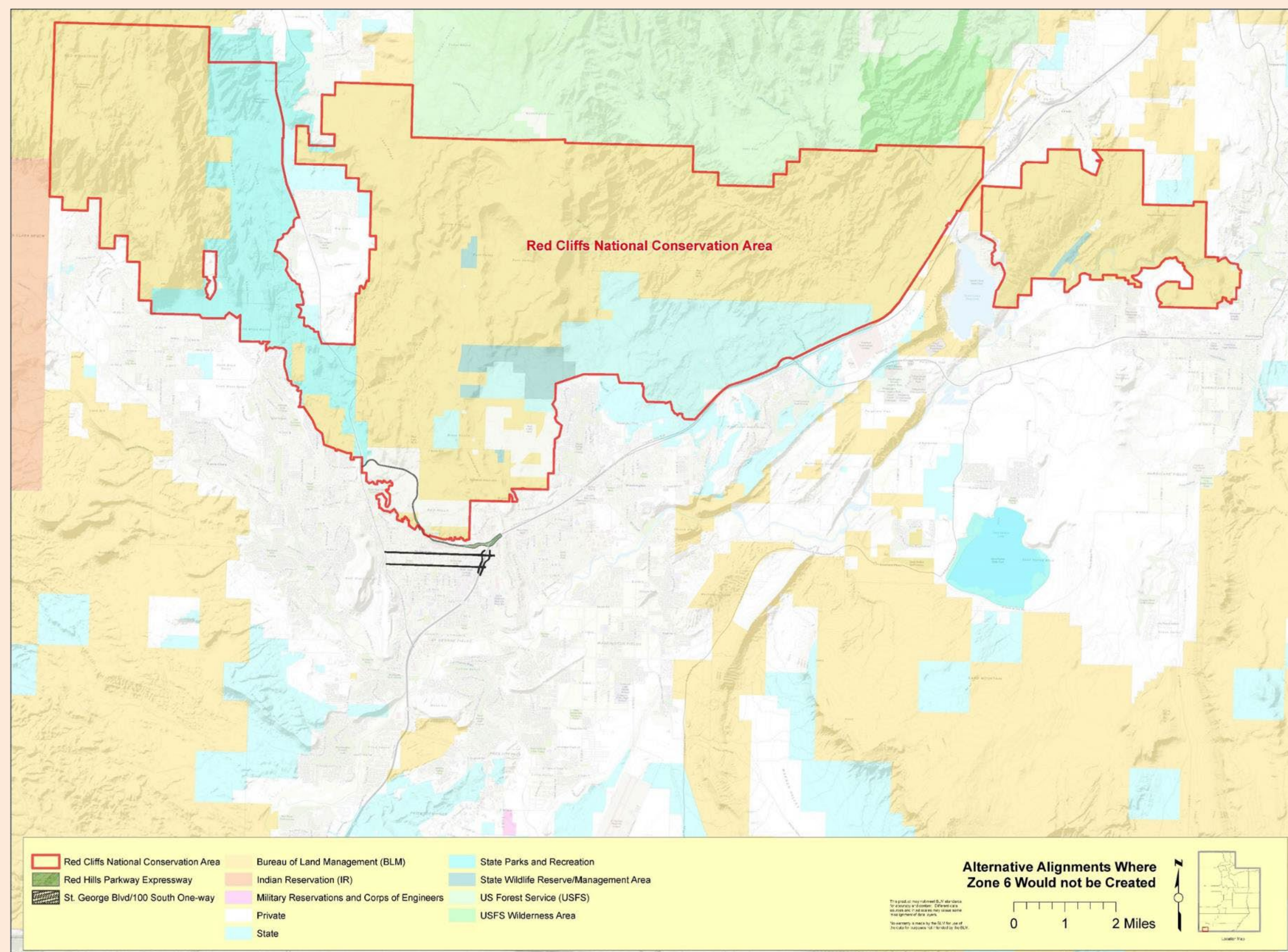
The BLM would deny UDOT's application for a ROW grant across the Red Cliffs NCA. The Northern Corridor would not be constructed, and Zone 6 of the Reserve would not be created.

Red Hills Parkway Expressway

The BLM would grant necessary ROW amendments to the existing FLPMA Title V ROW for the Red Hills Parkway. Zone 6 of the Reserve would not be created.

St. George Boulevard/100 South One-way Couplet

The BLM would not grant a ROW in the Red Cliffs NCA for the Northern Corridor, but improvements to St. George Boulevard and 100 South would be made to respond to future transportation needs in Washington County. Zone 6 of the Reserve would not be created.



T-Bone Mesa Alignment

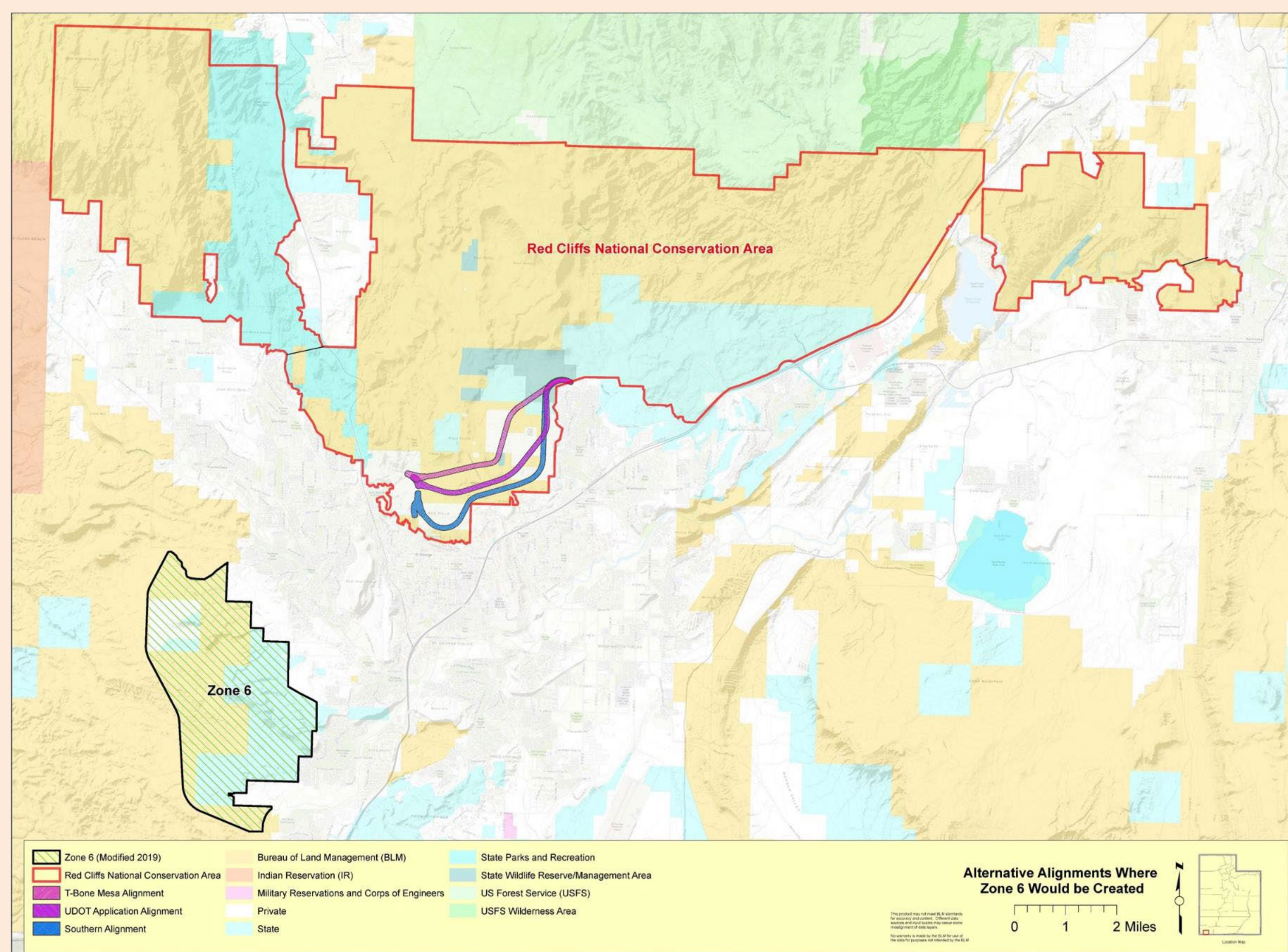
The BLM would grant UDOT a ROW across the public lands in the Red Cliffs NCA for the Northern Corridor on the T-Bone Mesa Alignment and Zone 6 of the Reserve would be created.

UDOT Application Alignment

The BLM would grant a ROW to UDOT across Red Cliffs NCA on the UDOT ROW Application Alignment and Zone 6 of the Reserve would be created.

Southern Alignment

The BLM would grant UDOT a ROW across public lands in the Red Cliffs NCA for the Northern Corridor on the Southern Alignment and Zone 6 of the Reserve would be created.





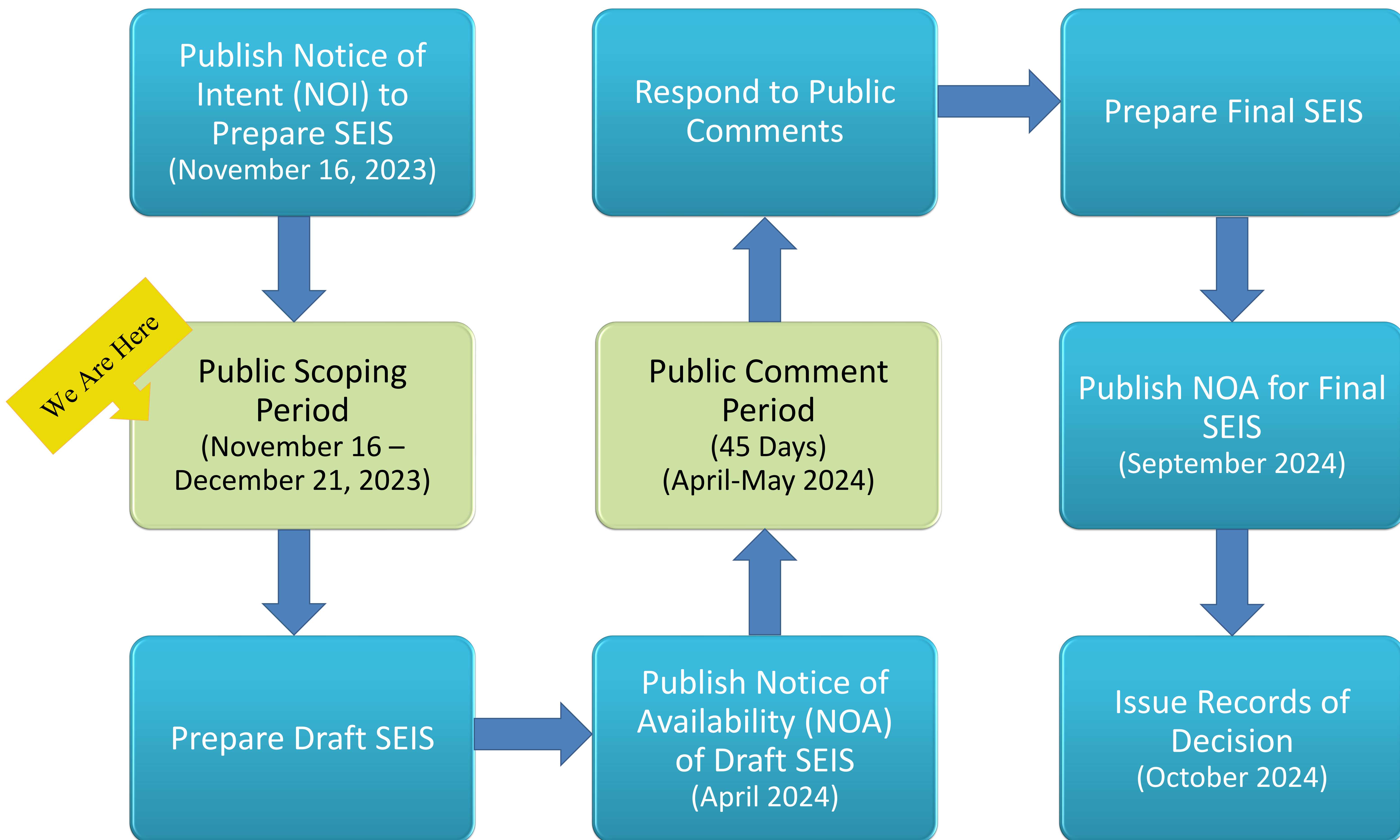
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NEPA Process and Schedule





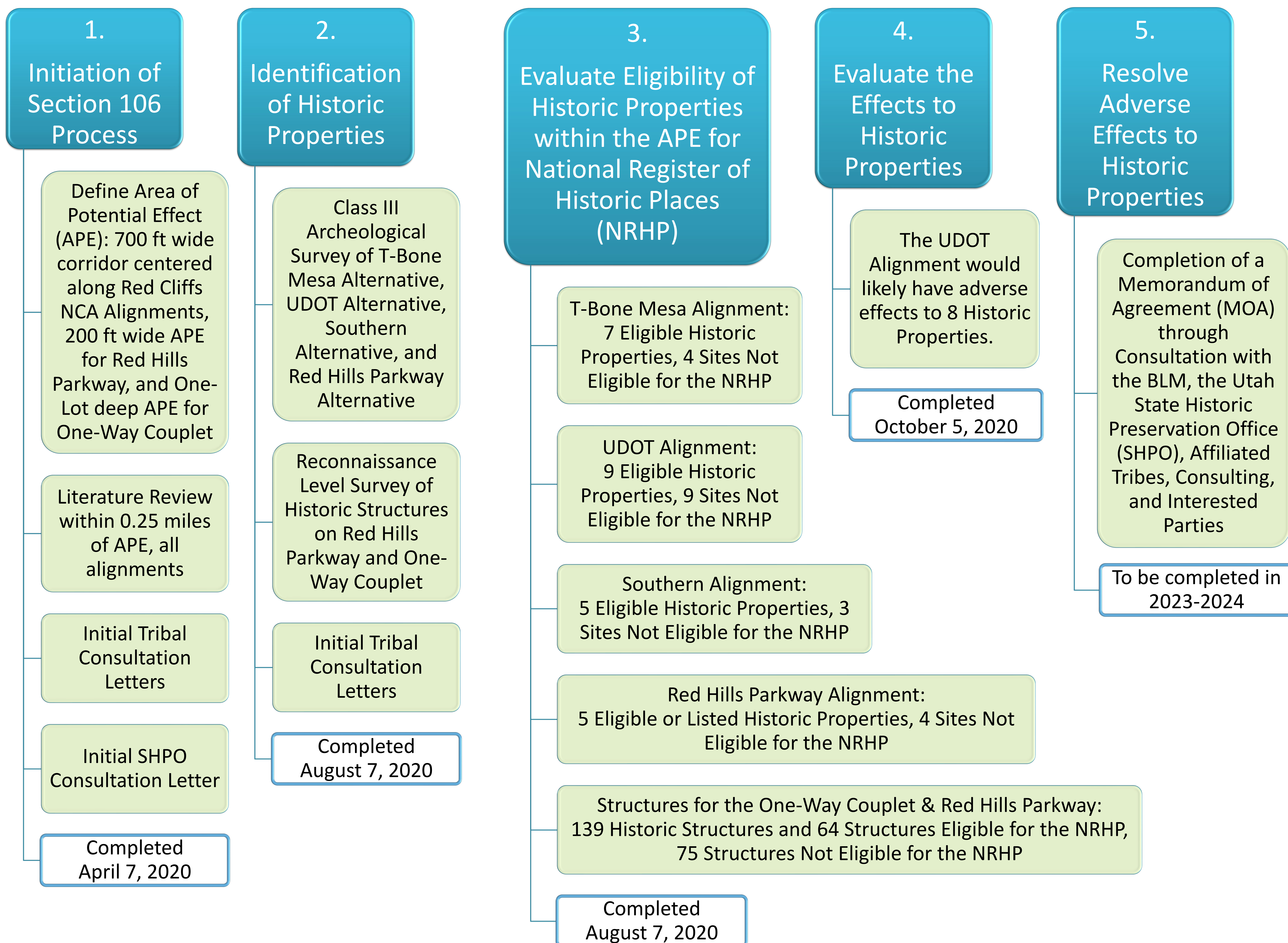
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NHPA Section 106 Compliance





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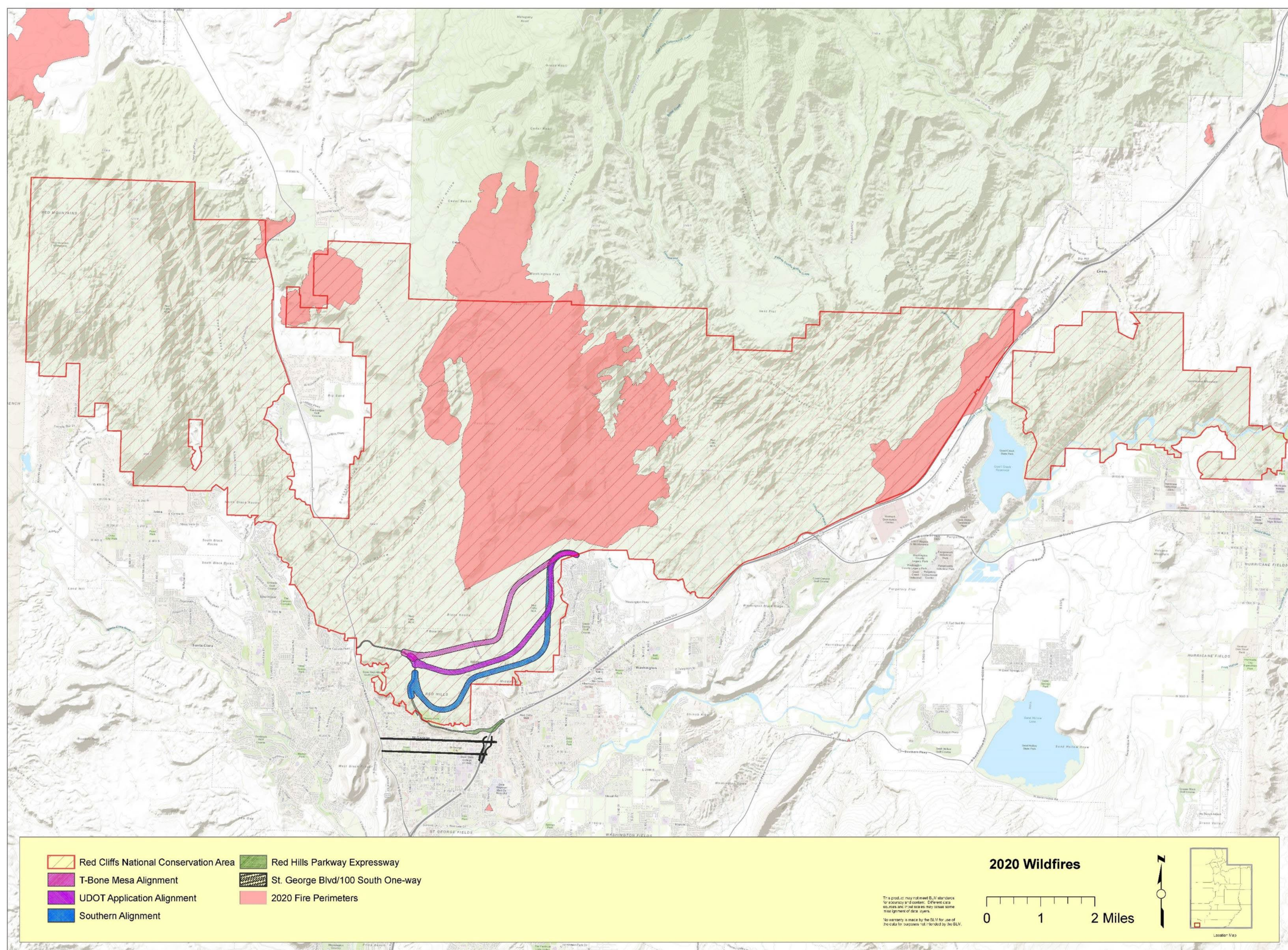
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Key Issues

Wildfire

As the Final EIS was being prepared in 2020, four wildfires occurred within the Red Cliffs NCA and Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. The SEIS will include additional analysis of wildfires and associated potential effects to vegetation, Mojave desert tortoise, and Mojave desert tortoise habitat to ensure all impacts are fully identified and documented.





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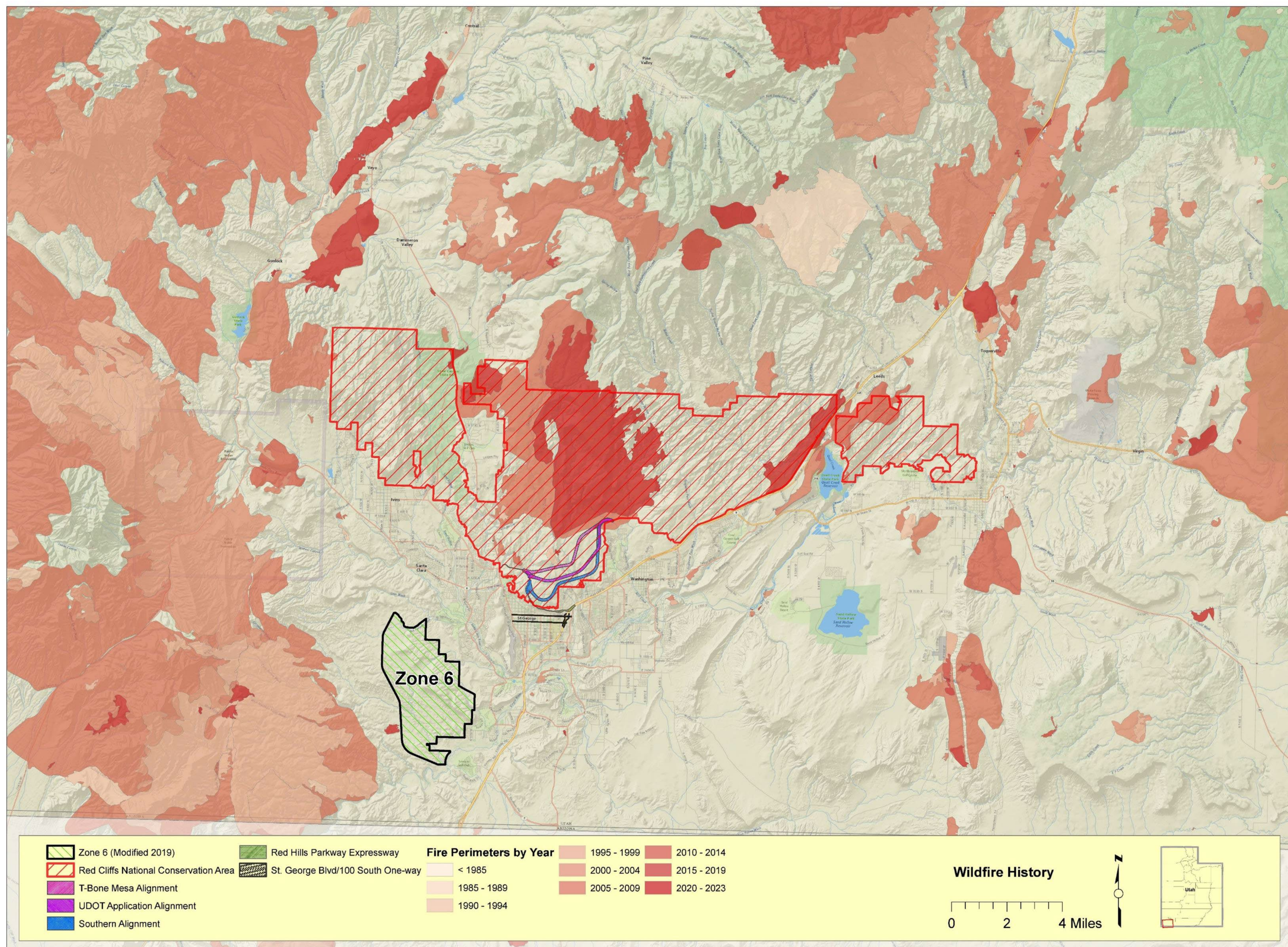
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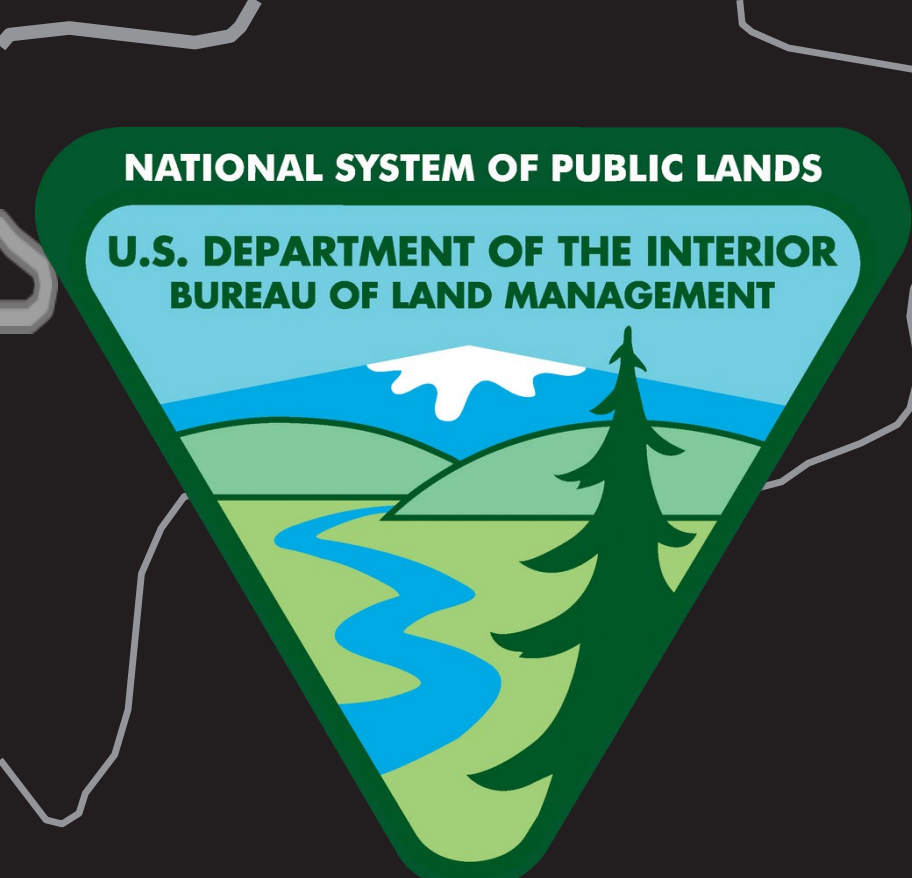
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Key Issues

Wildfire

The Final EIS issued in 2020 disclosed that as wildfires burn and reburn desert tortoise habitat, they remove native shrub cover. The native shrubs are then replaced by exotic annual grasses and noxious weeds, which do not provide adequate shade, cover, or nutritional forage for desert tortoise and other wildlife species. Tortoise mortality has also been directly attributed to wildfires. The SEIS will include additional analysis of wildfires and associated potential effects to Mojave tortoise and Mojave desert tortoise habitat.





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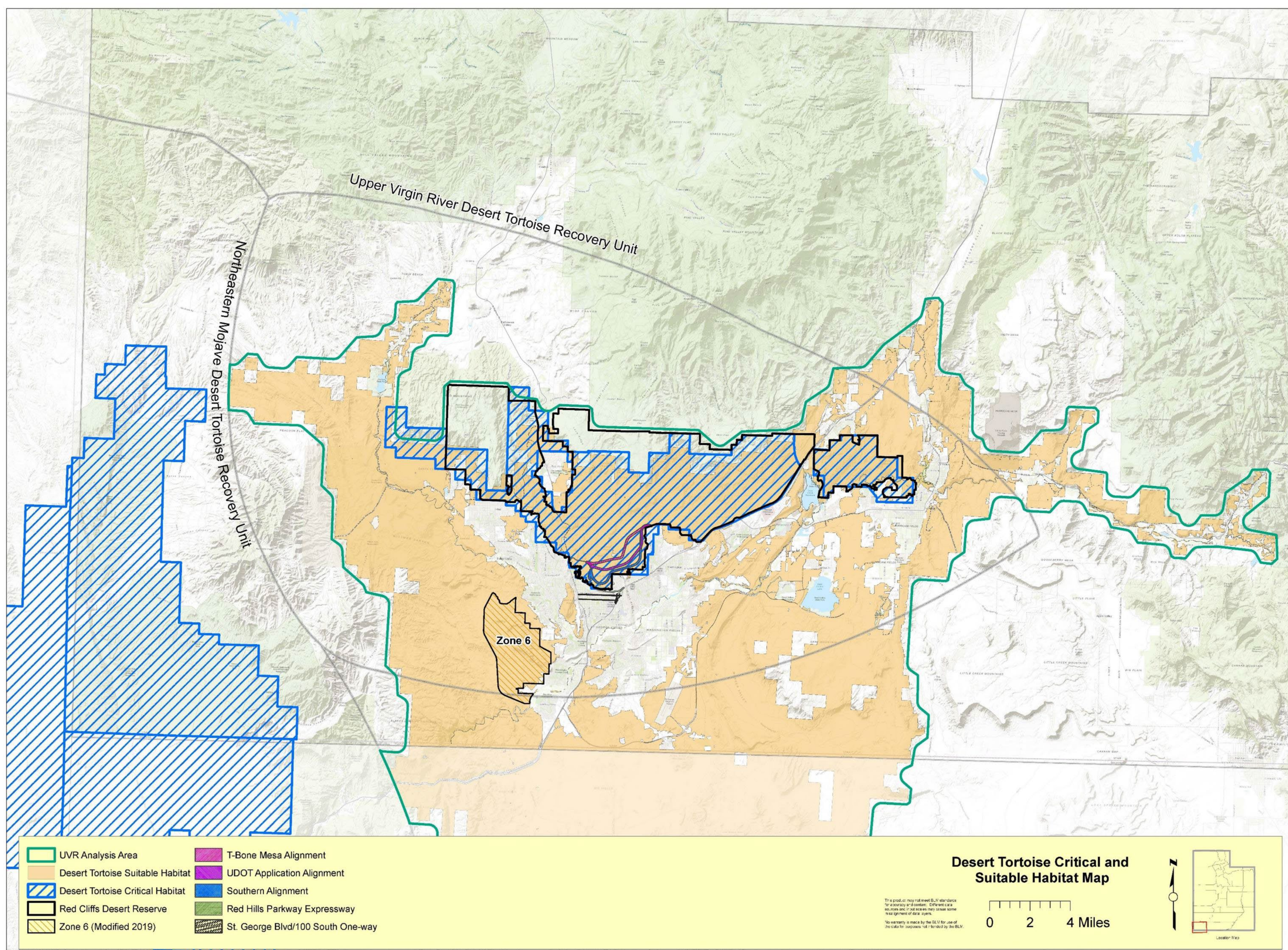
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Key Issues

Mojave Desert Tortoise

The Mojave desert tortoise is listed as a threatened species under the ESA. The Final EIS issued in 2020 disclosed that the Mojave desert tortoise faces threats from habitat loss due to urbanization and large-scale renewable energy projects, as well as habitat fragmentation from roads, off-highway vehicle activity, and invasive plants. Predation, disease, drought, wildfire, and climate change also pose risks to their populations. The SEIS will include additional analysis of wildfires and other disturbances on Mojave desert tortoise and their habitat to ensure all impacts are fully identified and documented.





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Key Issues

Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species

Vegetation surveys were completed in 2020 in portions of the Red Cliffs NCA and additional surveys are planned. The SEIS will include additional analysis of noxious weeds and invasive species and the impact on Mojave desert tortoise and other animal habitat.



Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*)



Native vegetation replaced by grasses after fire



Native shrubland vegetation



Tall tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*)



Native shrubland vegetation



Puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*)



Red brome (*Bromus rubens*)



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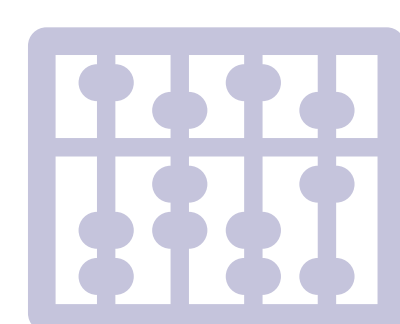
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Other Considerations



Heritage Resources and Native American Concerns

Historic and prehistoric archeological sites and sites of importance to Native Americans occurring within the alternative highway alignments that were analyzed in the 2020 FEIS may be further evaluated and mitigation may be developed through completion of a MOA through consultation with the BLM, SHPO, Affiliated Tribes, Consulting, and Interested Parties.



Socioeconomics

Socioeconomic data, such as demographics, employment and income indicators, land uses and values, and traffic and transportation may need to be updated due to growth in Washington County since the 2020 Final EIS was completed.



Environmental Justice

Demographic data may have changed with the growth occurring in Washington County and an updated analysis may be needed to determine if protected populations may be affected differently than as described in the 2020 Final EIS.



Compatibility Framework Analysis

The settlement agreement commits the BLM to making a compatibility determination to ensure that its decision at the end of the SEIS process is compatible with law, regulation and policy for a National Conservation Area.



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Commenting

Your participation is an important part of the decision-making process. All comments provided will be reviewed and evaluated as part of the SEIS process. The most effective comments are clear, concise, and relevant to the issues and decisions being considered by the agencies.

Substantive comments are those that:

- Are within the scope of the decisions, are specific to the decisions, have a direct relationship to the decisions, and include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider (36 CFR 219.62).
- Identify potentially affected resources, applicable laws, policies and regulations, or relevant reasonably foreseeable actions.
- Highlight information, data, and/or analysis the BLM and FWS might use when developing alternatives and considering the impact of the proposed project or alternatives.
- Identify – based on factual evidence – potential deficiencies in the scope of analysis or methodology or assumptions proposed for use in the environmental analysis.

Here are some additional points to consider when commenting:

- Comments made during scoping are not counted as “votes” towards the BLM and FWS decisions, but instead are used to improve the SEIS and analyses before the agencies make decisions regarding the project.
- Avoid comments that simply state, “I am in favor of this project” or “I am opposed to this project” and instead provide feedback that provides specific examples of concerns.

COMMENTS CAN BE SUBMITTED UNTIL DEC 21, 2023, 11:59 P.M.



WEBSITE: <https://ow.ly/pgkG50Q7AyR>



MAIL:

Bureau of Land Management,
Attn: Northern Corridor SEIS
345 East Riverside Drive,
St. George, UT 84790



TONIGHT'S MEETING:

Leave comment form in secure box on
comment table

Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Relay Service (FRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the individual listed below. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

For further information visit <https://ow.ly/pgkG50Q7AyR>, or contact Dawna Ferris-Rowley, Project Manager at (435) 688-3200 or email BLM_UT_NorthernCorridor@blm.gov.

After scoping is completed, the BLM and FWS will publish a Scoping Report with a summary of the scoping process and comments received.