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Contact: Karry Rathje
Public Information Manager
435.668.5622
krathje@wcwcd.utah.gov

**RED HILLS DESERT GARDEN CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC
AUGUST 22 – 25, 2016 TO REMOVE ILLEGALLY-INTRODUCED SPECIES IN STREAM**

Red Hills Desert Garden will be closed to the public August 22 through August 25, 2016 to remove illegally-introduced, invasive species in the garden's 1,150-foot stream. The treatment, which will cost more than \$5,000, is necessary to protect the native and endangered fish legally stocked in the stream by the Virgin River Program and Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR).

Biologists believe the illegally-introduced fish, which include goldfish, green sunfish and mosquitofish, were introduced into the stream by humans. The most prolific of the invasive species is the goldfish, which was discovered shortly after the garden opened to the public in 2015. More than 1,000 goldfish have been removed during the year, but biologists believe at least 1,000 more remain in the stream and are reproducing at a rate that is threatening the native and endangered fish.

"The illegally-introduced fish outnumber and outcompete our native and endangered fish," said Steve Meismer, local coordinator for the Virgin River Program. "We're at a point where the only option is to salvage the desired fish and eliminate the others. It's an unfortunate situation."

The treatment process will include the following steps:

- **Monday, August 22:** biologists will capture and safely transplant the stream's legally stocked fish
- **Tuesday, August 22:** stream will be drained as much as possible; some maintenance to the streambed and fish viewing area will be performed
- **Wednesday, August 23:** undrained water will be treated with rotenone, a natural and self-decomposing chemical toxic only to fish in the concentrations used
- **Friday, August 26:** fish will be reintroduced into the stream

"We're confident this treatment will remove the invasive species and restore a healthy habitat for our native and endangered fish," said Ron Thompson, general manager of Washington County Water Conservancy District. "The garden is one of the few places in the world where the public can see the rare species native to the Virgin River."

(more)

Following the treatment, the district will install signs with the slogan ‘Don’t Ditch a Fish’ around the garden’s stream in an effort to educate the public and hopefully prevent this situation from reoccurring. The signs will provide tips on the proper disposal of live fish as well as information on how to report sightings of illegal fish releases.

“Introducing fish, including aquarium species, into ponds, lakes and streams is illegal,” said Rick Fridell, aquatic manager for the UDWR. “It harms our fisheries, native species and ecosystems. We have a shared responsibility to protect these resources.”

Participants in the treatment include the Virgin River Program, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Washington County Water Conservancy District and City of St. George.

About Red Hills Desert Garden

Red Hills Desert Garden, Utah’s first desert conservation garden, is located on 4.5-acres along the northern rim of St. George. The garden features more than 5,000 water-efficient plants, a 1,150-foot meandering stream and fish viewing area stocked with native and endangered species from the Virgin River, prehistoric dinosaur tracks, and a replica slot canyon that pays tribute to Southern Utah’s natural landscape. The garden, which opened to the public in 2015, is a collaborative project of the Washington County Water Conservancy District, City of St. George and Virgin River Program.

About Washington County Water Conservancy District

Washington County Water Conservancy District is a not-for-profit public agency established in 1962 to manage Southern Utah’s regional water needs. The district oversees the development, stabilization, management, acquisition and conservation of water resources in Washington County in an ongoing effort to provide a safe, reliable water supply for current and future generations. Visit www.wcwcd.org for more information.