

Charter

Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group

Purpose and Background: The Mojave population of the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. In 1994, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) designated critical habitat covering 6.4 million acres of the desert tortoises range. Approximately, 4.8 million acres or 75 percent of the critical habitat occurs in California, primarily on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, the Department of Defense, and the State of California. In addition to Federal protection, the desert tortoise is the California State reptile and is listed as a threatened species under the State's Endangered Species Act.

Recovery of the desert tortoise is guided by the 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan which outlines the actions needed to recover the desert tortoise throughout its range. In California, the primary means of achieving the objectives of the Recovery Plan will be through implementation of approved agency land and resource management plans. These plans provide for implementation of a variety of recovery actions identified in the Recovery Plan consistent with each agency's mission and statutory authority. The FWS Desert Tortoise Recovery Office is beginning the process of revising of the 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan.

Because of the many political jurisdictions involved and stakeholders interested in or affected by desert tortoise recovery, effective implementation of recovery actions will require unprecedented cooperation and coordination. A cooperative/coordinated effort among land managers, wildlife agencies, and stakeholder interests will:

1. Accomplish recovery goals that would be unattainable on a local scale;
2. Reduce duplication of effort and increase the efficient use of resources and expertise; and
3. Increase public and federal/state/local agency support of the recovery effort by providing consistent information on the status of the tortoise and recovery implementation throughout the California desert;

The Desert Managers Group established the Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group (Work Group) to promote and facilitate a collaborative recovery effort for the desert tortoise among land and resource managers, scientists, partners, and stakeholders across jurisdictional boundaries. An initial assignment of the Work Group will be to develop Recovery Action Plans (RAP) for inclusion in the revised DT Recovery Plan. The RAPs will identify desert tortoise recovery actions that can/will be carried out in the next 5 years based upon:

1. the best available scientific information,
2. an assessment of threats and population status in each of the recovery units, and
3. a review of the desert tortoise recovery actions included in various agency land management plans.

The RAPs will also address critical information gaps associated with each action, the research needed to fill those gaps, and how the effectiveness of the recovery action will be monitored and evaluated. The work group will utilize the knowledge and expertise of agency resource management specialists and scientists with direct experience in studying and managing the desert tortoise in the California deserts. Over the long term, the Work Group will provide the forum for land and resource management agencies and partners to coordinate implementation of the RAPs, review progress towards recovery, and assess the effectiveness of recovery actions. The Work Group will rely on FWS' DT Science Advisory Committee, data management program, and range-wide monitoring effort to ensure recovery actions are based on sound science and implemented using an adaptive management approach.

Mission

Identify, plan, and coordinate implementation of desert tortoise recovery, monitoring and research actions in the California deserts among managers, scientists, and partners across jurisdictional boundaries.

Duties and Responsibilities

1. Review various agency land management plans and develop Recovery Action Plans for each recovery unit in California for approval by the DMG. The Recovery Action Plans will be included in the revised Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan by FWS.
2. Plan and coordinate implementation of recovery actions, assess progress related to implementation of approved Recovery Action Plans, and evaluate the effectiveness of recovery actions.
3. Report findings, provide updates, and develop recommendations for consideration by the DMG.

Work Group Participants

- Biologists: DMG agency senior level biologists/resource specialists
- DT Scientists: USGS Science Advisory Committee representative
- Managers: One or two managers to provide management guidance to the work group and provide liaison with the DMG
- Stakeholders and partners interested/committed in working cooperatively and constructively to develop and implement recovery action plans for the DT
- Staff Support: DMG Coordinators and University Redland Desert Tortoise Project