

DRAFT

Desert Managers Group  
FY 2003 Accomplishment Report

And

5 Year Work Plan  
(FY 04 – FY 08)

February 2004



DESERT  
MANAGERS GROUP

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## **1.0 Background and Purpose**

The California deserts (Figure 1) include some 100 communities, 2 national parks, 1 national preserve, 6 military bases, 8 counties, 10 state parks, 37 federally recognized Native American Indian tribes, and more than 11 million acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The 25 million-acre desert region is situated within a day's drive of 40 million people and is a well-known destination for hundreds of thousands of out-of-state visitors each year. It is also the home of many unique wildlife and plant species and contains many outstanding cultural and paleontological resources. In addition, the California deserts are critically important training and testing grounds for the U.S. military.

By 2020 the deserts' permanent population is expected to increase by over 1 million and the population of the surrounding area is expected to increase by about 10 million. The demands of increasing use by millions of visitor and permanent residents will create mounting pressure and new challenges for land management agencies in the deserts. A mechanism for addressing desert-wide issues was established in 1994 in the form of the Desert Managers Group (DMG), an interagency group that is coordinating and integrating desert conservation, visitor services, and public safety efforts in the California deserts.

Partners involved with the DMG include the State of California (Fish and Game, Parks and Recreation, and Caltrans), the Department of Defense (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps), the Department of the Interior (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Geological Survey), and the U.S. Forest Service. More information on the DMG, including the Group's charter, organization, and current events is available at [www.dmg.gov](http://www.dmg.gov).

The purpose of this document is to 1) summarize the accomplishments of the DMG in fiscal year 2003, and 2) describe the goals and objectives established by the DMG for fiscal years 2004-2008. This document was approved by the DMG at its regular meeting on January 15, 2004. As with all crosscutting, multi-agency efforts, performance is dependent on the availability of adequate funds and staff for each agency to carry out these efforts.

## **2.0 FY 03 Accomplishments**

DMG accomplishments for FY 03 are summarized below:

1. A total of 473 burros and 39 horses were removed from the California deserts and placed into adoption programs. NPS and BLM also entered into Memorandums of Agreement (MOA) with several volunteer groups to provide for no cost adoption of burros captured in Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley National Park.
2. Two illegal dump sites on public lands were cleaned up under a cost share program with the California Integrated Waste Management Board. Several other clean-ups were accomplished using volunteers and local partnership efforts.

3. The DMG developed and funded a scientific study of the effectiveness and validity of desert tortoise recovery measures taken in California thus far. The focus of the study will be on the effectiveness of actions taken to manage/eliminate cattle/sheep grazing, manage off road vehicles and construct tortoise barriers/fences. The study, which is being lead by the U.S. Geological Survey, will be completed in FY 04.
4. The DMG undertook development of a Desert Tortoise Recovery Action Program (DTRAP) for the California deserts. The DTRAP included the following basic support elements necessary to recover the desert tortoise in California:
  - **Coordinated Interagency Annual Work Planning.** A process for DOI, DOD and the State of California agencies to jointly review progress towards recovery and develop coordinated interagency work plans addressing high priority recovery actions.
  - **Science and Data Management.** Science and data management support capability to ensure that the Program is based on sound science and implemented using an adaptive management approach.
  - **Desert Tortoise Monitoring.** Monitoring to assess the status of the desert tortoise population and habitat and to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken to recover the desert tortoise.
  - **Public Outreach and Education.** An outreach and education effort to foster a better understanding of and support for desert tortoise recovery efforts by the public and decision makers.

The DTRAP will also provide for coordinated implementation of several high priority recovery actions. The initial focus will be on addressing the impacts of ravens, feral dogs, and disease on desert tortoise populations and developing and implementing a coordinated plan for using head starting and translocation to re-populate areas where desert tortoise have been extirpated or significantly reduced.

Mechanisms are provided to ensure that the Program is carried out in consultation and cooperation with affected stakeholders, local communities, and the public.

In FY 04, the Managers will consider entering into a Memorandum of Agreement to formally establish and participate in the DTRAP.

5. The DMG developed and approved a Plan for Preparation of a Raven Management Environmental Assessment.
6. A comprehensive desert tortoise outreach and education proposal was also developed and approved by the DMG. This effort will become part of the DTRAP if it is approved.
7. DMG agencies supported implementation of rangewide desert tortoise monitoring to establish a population baseline and evaluate whether tortoise populations are increasing, remaining stable, or declining. In FY 03, over 4100 kms of transects were sampled; overall, desert tortoise encounter rates were slightly higher than in FY 02.

8. The DMG sponsored the Arid Southwest Lands Habitat Restoration Conference on March 3 – 7, 2003 in Palm Springs, California. Over 250 people from government, academia and private groups attended the event which included several field trips, a session sponsored by U.S. Geological Survey on science for Mojave Desert restoration, and 48 presentations on arid land restoration.
9. A new version of the California Deserts website, [www.californiadesert.gov](http://www.californiadesert.gov), was launched in FY 03. It provides easier access to information about recreation opportunities in the desert. Information on over 75 places of interest was added to the site. The website is currently receiving an average of 6,000 visitors each month.
10. Protocols for characterizing the biological and hydrological characteristics of springs were developed by the Desert Research Institute in coordination with the DMG's water ad hoc work group. Training and field testing occurred in the Mojave Desert Parks (e.g., DEVA, JOTR, MOJA, LAME).
11. The US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service became a formal member of the DMG.
12. The DMG implemented protocols to provide public and stakeholder input at DMG meetings. As a result, representatives of local governments, recreation, environmental and other interests have attended DMG meetings and offered input on a variety of topics. Public involvement protocols will be reviewed in FY 04.
13. Work continued or was initiated on several projects, including:
  - Planning for the Mojave Desert Science Symposium, which will be held at the University of Redlands in November 2004.
  - Establishment of a web accessible research inventory database.
  - Development of an MOU among BLM, State Parks, GS, and CDFG concerning restoration and conservation of the San Sebastian-San Felipe Watershed.
  - Establishment of a prototype illegal dump prevention program in cooperation with Coachella Valley Area Governments and Keep California Beautiful, Inc.
  - Establishment of a southern desert weed management area in cooperation with federal, state and local governments.

### 3.0 The 5 Year Work Plan

The 5 Year Work Plan is intended to facilitate internal and external communication about the goals and activities of the DMG and serve as a tool to allow the DMG and its Work Groups to track activities and projects. The 5 Year Work Plan is updated and approved annually by the DMG.

The 5 Year Work Plan includes 12 goals in 4 general categories:

1. Resource Conservation and Management
2. Visitor Services
3. Science and Data Management
4. DMG Program Management

A brief description of the goals and activities for FY 04 – FY 08 are provided below. (**Lead agencies, fiscal year of completion, and status are noted in parentheses.**)

### 3.1 Resource Conservation and Management Goals

*Goal 1. Restore selected upland and riparian habitats identified for restoration.*

1. The DMG will work with the Mojave Desert Weed Management Area to coordinate weed management activities in the Mojave Desert and implement the WMA long-range plan (**FY 04, BLM, ongoing**).
2. The DMG will host a meeting to review new/current restoration techniques; sources of labor and material; partnership opportunities; ongoing restoration projects; and monitoring (**FY 04, BLM, on track**).
3. A list and status report of ongoing restoration activities in the desert will be compiled and made available through the DMG website (**FY 04, BLM, on track**).
4. The DMG will provide guidance and recommendations to the USGS Recoverability and Vulnerability of Desert Ecosystems project, aimed at improving the management applicability of the research effort (**FY 04, BLM/NPS, ongoing**).
5. In cooperation with various federal, state and local agencies establish the Coachella Valley/Southern Desert Weed Management Area (WMA). Work on this activity is on hold until funding for a coordinator of the WMA is identified (**BLM, funding dependent**).
6. BLM, GS, State Parks and CDFG will enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the conservation and restoration of the San Felipe Creek-San Sebastian Marsh Watershed (**State Parks, on hold**).

***Goal 2. Cleanup and restore illegal dumps that pose a public health or environmental threat, and reduce the incidence of illegal dumping in the future.***

1. The illegal dump database will be maintained and high priority sites will be identified for cleanup based on threats to public health, safety or environmental threats. A report of priority dump sites will be provided to the managers **(FY 04, BLM, dependent on staff support)**.
2. Clean up and restore illegal dumps by leveraging budgets with grants and partnerships, and sponsoring community/volunteer illegal dump cleanups on public lands **(FY 04, BLM, ongoing)**.
3. Coordinate and implement actions to prevent illegal dumping in the California deserts. The focus will be on a) sponsoring an illegal dumping enforcement workshop (IDEW) in Coachella Valley, b) implementing a 1-800 number to report incidences of littering, and c) cooperating with state and local government to increase the awareness of illegal dumping and its environmental consequences, create prevention solutions, and improve illegal dumping laws **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.
4. DMG agencies will sponsor or provide regional technical training for participating agencies, to include:
  - The 8-hour annual Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) refresher training **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**;
  - An unexploded ordnance recognition training course **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.
5. The Hazmat Work Group will provide information to the Raven Work Group/EA team concerning solid waste disposal as needed/requested **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.

***Goal 3. Recover the desert tortoise in the California recovery units.***

1. The DMG will monitor and review the results of the USGS study to evaluate the effectiveness of past recovery actions related to vehicle management, cattle and sheep grazing, and construction of tortoise fences **(FY 04, GS, on track)**.
2. DMG agencies will participate in a cooperative work planning process to identify and cost share high priority desert tortoise recovery actions **(FY 04, DOI, ongoing)**.
3. The DMG will establish a Desert Tortoise Science Work Group to provide scientific guidance for DT recovery and monitoring activities in California. Action on this item is dependent on funding to hire needed staff support and a determination by FWS that the Science work group is needed/appropriate **(FWS, funding dependent)**.
4. FWS will establish an in house repository for all desert tortoise data via a "no cost" MOU with a sister federal agency (e.g., DOD, USGS), an appropriate educational institution, non-profit organization, and/or business firm. Protocols will be developed for the structure and

5. As a condition of any new or renewed Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or California Endangered Species Act (CESA) research permit, FWS and CDFG will require all agencies/institutions/researchers to abide by established data management protocols and submit to the desert tortoise data repository a copy of their field data annually (**FY 04, FWS/DFG, on track**).
6. Seek funding, staff and partnerships to implement a multi-faceted education and outreach campaign aimed at increased public support of and involvement in desert tortoise recovery in California. Major components of this campaign include:
  - a. An agreement with Clark County to use the Mojave Max image in outreach/education efforts in California.
  - b. A multi-faceted media campaign.
  - c. Development of a desert tortoise web page.
  - d. Development and implementation of a desert tortoise curriculum in desert schools.
  - e. A desert tortoise newsletter.
  - f. A desert tortoise disease brochure.
  - g. Development of low cost, high impact sales items related to the desert tortoise.
  - h. Assisting local museums to acquire quality desert tortoise exhibits.
  - i. A sociological study to provide baseline information on public attitudes and beliefs about desert tortoise and desert tortoise recovery efforts.

Until full funding and staff are available DMG agencies will cooperate to implement elements of the campaign as feasible. (**FY 04/05, NPS, funding/staff dependent**).

7. Raven Management:
  - a. Complete appropriate NEPA compliance and secure the necessary permits required by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to implement a raven management program in the California deserts (**FY 04, FWS, on track**);
  - b. Implement raven management actions in selected Desert Wildlife Management Areas (DWMAs), critical habitat, and/or NPS units (**FY 05, FWS, funding dependent**).
8. In conjunction with land use management plans, the CDFG will work with FWS, BLM, DOD, county animal control agencies, and other applicable local entities, to develop a Feral Dog Management Plan. The plan will articulate control/management measures, a method for assessing the effectiveness of control/management measures, and provide an agreed upon implementation time line (**CDFG, funding dependent**).
9. Develop a Desert Tortoise Headstarting and Translocation Plan (**funding dependent**).

10. Implement actions to help control the spread of disease and allow for collection of information that will lead to a better understanding of diseases that affect desert tortoise **(funding dependent)**.

***Goal 4. Reduce and maintain burro populations to appropriate management levels and in appropriate locations.***

1. BLM, FWS, DOD and the State will continue work to reduce burro populations to appropriate management levels (AML); NPS will work to eliminate burros entirely from Death Valley National Park and the Mojave National Preserve **(FY 04, BLM/NPS, on track)**. The targets for FY 04 are:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Number of Animals (Cooperating Agencies)</u>
Clark Mountain	200 burros (BLM, NPS)
Centennial	100 burros/35 horses (BLM, NAWS, NPS)
Slate Range	30 burros (BLM, NAWS)
Picacho	50 burros (BLM, State Parks)
Saline Valley	30 burros (BLM, NPS)
Panamints	30 burros (BLM, NPS)
Mojave NPS	200 burros (BLM, NPS)
Outside HMAs	60 burros (BLM, NPS, other agencies/land owners)
<b>Total</b>	<b>700 burros and 35 horses</b>

2. BLM and California Fish & Game will continue the third year of a four-year study to track burros and deer in the Picacho and Chocolate-Mule Mountain herd management areas (HMA) to better understand the movement and migratory patterns of these two animals **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.
3. BLM will work with Picacho State Park and other volunteers to install alternative drinkers for burros to encourage more activity away from the Colorado River **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.
4. BLM will continue to assess and monitor riparian and rangeland health in the remaining HMAs, and along common administrative boundaries where burro management occurs. BLM will monitor Chemehuevi, Picacho and Chicago Valley HMAs **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.
5. BLM will initiate NEPA review in the Waucoba-Hunter, Lee Flat, and Piper Mountain HMAs to determine future management directions **(FY 04, BLM, on track)**.

***Goal 5. Protect cultural resources and enhance public awareness of the sensitivity and value of paleontological and cultural resources in the California deserts.***

1. Proceedings of the Millennium Conference will be published and distributed **(FY 04, Cal Poly/BLM, on track)**.

2. The Paleontological and Cultural Resources Action Team (PACRAT) will evaluate the integrity and utility of the CHRIS-GIS dataset for the Mojave, review State's business plan for the CHRIS-GIS, and report findings and recommendations to the DMG in the fall of 2004 **(FY 05, NPS, on track)**.
3. The DMG will co-sponsor the Native American Land Conservancy conference: "Sacred Lands – history, archaeology and land management issues in the California deserts." The conference will be in Twentynine Palms on May 21-22, 2004 **(FY 04, NPS, on track)**.
4. Sponsor a basic Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) training class for cultural resources and law enforcement staff **(FY 04, NPS, on track)**.
5. Sponsor an advanced ARPA training class for cultural resource specialists **(FY 04, NAWS, complete)**.

***Goal 6. DMG agencies will strive to understand and work collaboratively to resolve conflicts in each agency's mission.***

1. Each agency will actively consider DMG partner agency mission requirements in their land and resource management and planning activities and analyze/consider potential impacts of their proposed land management decisions/actions on other agencies **(ongoing)**.

### **3.2 Visitor Services and Public Safety Goals**

***Goal 7. Develop a coordinated interagency system for delivering useful, comprehensive, and consistent information about desert resources and recreation opportunities.***

1. Agency webmasters will input information on recreation opportunities and sites in the California deserts on **www.caldesert.gov** and update their information as needed. In addition, the desert news section will be used by agencies to disseminate news to desert visitors **(ongoing, agency webmasters, on track)**.
2. DMG agencies (Caltrans, State Parks, NPS, BLM, MDEP) and San Bernardino County will design and install interpretive exhibits at Caltrans roadside rest areas in the California deserts **(FY 05, NPS/BLM, funding dependent)**.
3. The California deserts website, **www.californiadesert.gov**, will be maintained by the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP). New information will be added to the site as provided by land/resource management agencies **(ongoing, MDEP, on track)**.
4. The interagency "gateway" visitor center at Lancaster, California will continue to be maintained **(ongoing, State Parks, on track)**.

### 3.3 Science and Data Management Goals

***Goal 8. Coordinate scientific studies and monitoring programs needed for effective resource management.***

1. Planning for the Mojave Desert Science Symposium will continue. The Symposium is scheduled for November 16 – 18, 2004 at the University of Redlands **(FY 05, NPS, on track)**.
2. DMG members will participate in the NPS workshop in the spring of 2004 to develop a conceptual framework for monitoring in the California deserts. This workshop will provide the basis for the design of compatible monitoring programs by land and resource management agencies in the California deserts. The action is subject to direction from NPS **(FY 04, NPS, on hold)**.
3. The Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) will finalize the web accessible Research Inventory Database. An inventory of existing resource, research and monitoring studies will be initiated to populate the database. Managers will implement protocols to encourage scientists to input data and/or update the database **(FY 04, NPS, on track)**.

***Goal 9. Monitor desert tortoise population status in relation to recovery goals for the California deserts' recovery units.***

1. Line Distance Sampling (LDS) will be implemented to assess the density of desert tortoise **(FY 04-08, FWS, on track)**.
2. Sample the 15 desert tortoise Permanent Study Plots (PSP) in Californian once every 4 years (not all plots would be sampled in the same year). This action is on hold pending results of the Recovery Plan Assessment and/or direction from FWS **(FWS, funding dependent)**.
3. FWS will identify opportunities to integrate LDS and PSP efforts to a) produce the best data in the most cost effective manner possible, and b) provide a method by which managers can prioritize funding for PSPs and LDS. This action is on hold pending results of the Recovery Plan Assessment/direction from FWS **(FWS, on hold)**.
4. USFWS will annually review monitoring protocols to assess whether they need to be modified to reduce variance in the data and provide more reliable results **(FY 04-08, FWS on track)**.
5. An annual report of desert tortoise monitoring efforts and results will be produced by December of each year **(FY 04-08, FWS, on track)**.

6. The DOD Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) will maintain the interagency desert tortoise data management system. Data will be collected and managed in a manner that facilitates a regional multi-state assessment of the status of desert tortoise populations (**FY 04-08, MDEP, on track**).

***Goal 10. Inventory, monitor and protect desert water resources.***

1. Level 1 spring survey protocols will be finalized and used by management agencies to inventory/characterize spring/wetlands in the desert (**FY 04-05, NPS, funding dependent**).
2. Level 2 spring survey protocols will be developed by DRI and submitted to the DMG Water Group for review and comment (**FY 04-05, NPS, on track**).
3. A web accessible database will be developed for spring and wetland data (**FY 04-05, MDEP, on hold**).

***Goal 11. Integrate and share data and database management systems needed for effective resource management and planning.***

1. The Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) will maintain its GIS database (**www.mojavedata.gov**) of natural and cultural resources in the California deserts (**ongoing, MDEP, on track**).

## **DMG Program Management Goals**

***Goal 12. Ensure the orderly and efficient operation of the DMG and its work groups.***

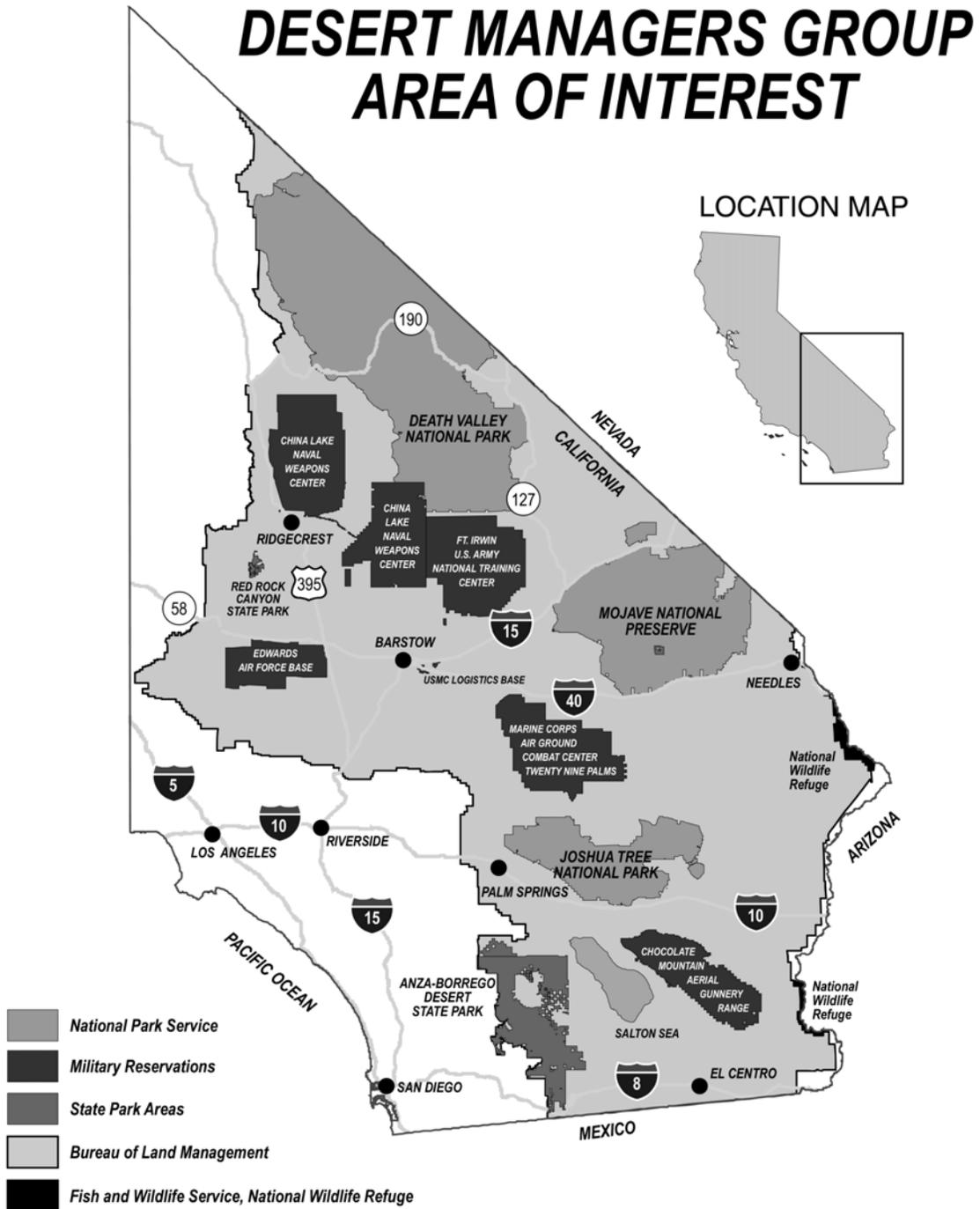
1. The DMG's FY 04 Work Plan and accomplishment report will be updated. Annual work plans will be developed for specific initiatives as needed (**ongoing, DOI/DOD, on track**).
2. The BLM Natural Resources Restoration Coordinator will coordinate implementation of dump clean up and habitat restoration efforts on behalf of the DMG (**ongoing, BLM, on track**).
3. The FWS Desert Tortoise Coordinator will coordinate tortoise monitoring activities on behalf of the DMG (**ongoing, FWS, on track**).
4. MDEP will redesign and maintain the DMG website (**www.dmg.gov**) to allow for the efficient dissemination of information about DMG and work group activities (**ongoing, MDEP, on track**).

5. The DMG will coordinate its activities with the Clark County HCP and the SNPLMA Conservation Initiative where there is program overlap (**ongoing, DOI, on track**).

***Goal 13. Garner support for the DMG, its mission, activities, and funding initiatives.***

1. Federal and state agencies, Congressional representatives, and interested parties will be briefed about DMG activities and initiatives, as requested (**ongoing, DOI, on track**).
2. The DMG will cooperate with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to secure funding for DMG initiatives and establish a California Desert Fund (**DOI, on track**).

**Figure 1.** DMG Area of Interest



FEBRUARY 2000