Desert Tortoise Information and Education Project
September 2005

Background: Declines in desert tortoise populations are attributed to a number of factors, many of which are directly related to the growth of human population in the desert. For example, predation by common ravens and free roaming/feral dogs on desert tortoise has increased in the desert with increased human populations. In addition, illegal or unauthorized off road vehicle use in the desert, often associated with residential development, is widely regarded as a serious impact to tortoises and tortoise habitat in many areas. People also commonly collect tortoises as pets, which directly reduces the number of tortoises in the wild. Pet tortoises may serve as vectors for diseases when they are released back into the wild.

An educated public that appreciates the value of the desert tortoise and understands how human activities and other factors are contributing to its decline is fundamental to a successful recovery effort. However, there is presently no coordinated or comprehensive effort to communicate information about the desert tortoise to the public or to provide objective, consistent information to stakeholders, decision makers, and local communities about the factors responsible for tortoise declines and current activities to recover the desert tortoise.

Goal: Develop and implement an information and education program about the desert tortoise to build public support for, and involvement in, its recovery.

Priority Messages

1. Desert tortoises are an important and valuable part of the Mojave Desert ecosystem and are worth saving.
2. Individuals can help conserve and protect desert tortoise by:
   a. Disposing of trash properly
   b. Staying on open roads and trails
   c. Keeping hands off –i.e., not picking tortoises up unless they are in harms way
   d. Not releasing pet tortoises into the wild
3. Agencies are working collaboratively to recovery the desert tortoise. Recovery efforts are based on sound science while accommodating human uses in the desert.

Priority Audiences

1. Residents
2. Desert recreation users
3. School children
4. Decision makers, stakeholders
5. Tortoise pet owners
6. General public

Proposed Course of Action: The following course of action will be implemented over a three-year period.

1. **Mojave Max Campaign and Education Program**: The desert tortoise outreach and education program will be built around Mojave Max, a popular cartoon desert tortoise that is the spokes tortoise for the Clark County (Nevada) Desert Conservation Program (the CCDCP). Mojave Max is also a real desert tortoise that lives in a special habitat at the Red Rock National Conservation Area in Clark County, Nevada. The DMG will enter into an agreement with the CCDCP for use of the Mojave Max image and trademark in California. A Mojave Max-based desert tortoise curriculum will be developed and implemented in desert schools (target 50,000 K-8 students over a three-year period).

2. **Desert Tortoise Media Campaign:** A multi-faceted campaign will be implemented to get key messages related to desert tortoise in the media. Elements of the media campaign will include:
   a. **Radio Public Service Announcements (PSA)—The Mojave Minute**: The DMG will produce a minimum of 12 PSAs per year for broad distribution to radio stations throughout the desert.
   b. **Desert Tortoise Media Kit.** A desert tortoise media kit will be designed, developed, and disseminated.
   c. **Desert Tortoise News Releases.** The DMG will be produce and disseminate a minimum of six news releases per year on newsworthy events and information.
   d. **Desert Tortoise Television PSA/Programs.** The DMG will explore and implement the production of television PSAs and programs related to the desert tortoise. A series of 30- to 60- second television spots will be produced for broadcast on regional television stations in the Palm Springs and Los Angeles/San Diego markets.
   e. **Media Field Day.** The DMG will host an annual media field day in conjunction with appropriate desert tortoise field activities (e.g., annual population monitoring) at several locations/media markets in the desert. The purpose will be to establish a working relationship with the media and promote positive stories about the desert tortoise and desert tortoise recovery efforts.

3. **Desert Tortoise Newsletter.** Produce one-two desert tortoise Newsletters annually to provide objective and timely information on desert tortoise recovery activities and progress. The newsletter will be targeted at decision makers, stakeholders, opinion makers, and community groups.

4. **Desert Tortoise Summit**: In concert with the release of the new desert tortoise Recovery Plan, the DMG, MOG and partners will host a desert tortoise summit to:
   a. Create awareness of the status of the desert tortoise population, factors that are contributing to its decline, and efforts and accomplishments related to recovery of the desert tortoise.
   b. Promote a dialogue and collaborative approach to resolving ESA (especially desert tortoise) issues among government, stakeholders, and business
   c. Build support for implementation of an effective and timely desert tortoise recovery effort

5. **DT Color Brochure.** A color DT brochure will be developed to promote tortoise awareness and appreciation among desert recreation users and the public.

6. **Desert Tortoise Pet Owner Brochure**. A brochure about tortoise diseases and about responsible tortoise ownership will be developed for distribution through veterinarian offices,

pet stores, animal shelters, and tortoise clubs/rescue groups. The brochure will identify sites where the public can take sick, unwanted, or rescued tortoises.

7. **Desert Tortoise Webpage**: An expanded or new desert tortoise web page will be developed that will be a repository and clearinghouse for all information developed through the Information and Education Project.

8. **Raven Management:** The Defenders of Wildlife will have primary lead for providing education and outreach aimed at reducing raven populations in the desert using non-lethal means. This will include
   - Writing/producing raven stories, PSAs, brochure, etc. to educate the public about the impact of ravens on desert tortoise and other wildlife
   - Working with trash companies to use raven proof trash containers
   - Promoting local anti raven feeding and lawn watering ordinances

9. **Desert Tortoise Sale Items**. In cooperation with non-profit cooperating associations, a merchandise plan will be developed for low-cost, high impact sales items related to the desert tortoise, i.e. bumper stickers, hats, decals, patches, t-shirts.

10. **Desert Tortoise Public Attitude and Outreach Effectiveness Study.** A sociological study will be conducted to gather baseline data on public attitudes, perceptions, and values about the desert tortoise, about tortoise recovery efforts, and about broader California desert conservation and appreciation. The survey will be used to help design effective public outreach messages and strategies. A follow-up survey will be conducted at the end of the 3-year project to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach and education efforts.

11. **Desert Tortoise Outreach Coordinator.** A full time Desert Tortoise Information and Education Coordinator will be hired by the National park Service to coordinate and facilitate implementation of the project. Project oversight and assistance will be provided by the DMG and the DMG Information and Education Work Group. Major responsibilities of the Coordinator will include:
    - reviewing and providing quality control for Radio and TV PSAs, press releases, information and education products, etc
    - writing and assembling the media kit
    - organizing a desert tortoise summit
    - distribution of PSAs and news releases to the media
    - administering contracts for the development of various products (brochures, education materials, effectiveness survey, etc)
    - organizing media field days
    - working with the non-profit cooperating associations to develop and implement an appropriate DT merchandising program.
    - assisting with the design and implementation of a desert tortoise web page.
    - organizing and providing staff support to the DMG DT Information and Education Work Group that provides general technical oversight over the Program
    - assisting with the design of the DT effectiveness survey and evaluation
    - monitoring progress and providing quarterly reports to the DMG
    - seeking grants to implement various aspect of the Program
    - tracking expenditures and accounting for contributions for various agency and partner

Estimated Budget and Schedule
DMG Desert Tortoise Information and Education Project

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant	Phase 1 6/05-6/06	Phase 2 6/06-6/07	Phase 3 6/07-12/08	Phase 4 10/08-1/09	Total
1. Media campaign					
a. Radio PSAs	$1,000	$1,440	$1,440	$1,440	$5,320
b. Media Kit		$8,200	$2,000		$10,200
c. News releases		$1,440	$1,440	$1,440	$4,320
d. Television PSAs/Programming		$10,000	$2,500		$12,500
e. Media Field Days	$1,000	$2,000	$2,000		$5,000
f. News Stories	$2,000				$2,000
2. Desert Tortoise Education Component	$14,000	$24,750	$13,300		$52,050
3. Desert Tortoise Newsletter	$4,000	$2,500	$2,500	$3,000	$12,000
4. Desert Tortoise Summit		$15,000			$15,000
5. Desert Tortoise Color Brochure	$6,500		$5,000		$11,500
6. Desert Tortoise Pet Owners Brochure		$3,500	$3,000	$3,000	$9,500
7. Public Attitude and effectiveness study	$40,000			$20,000	$60,000
Total NFWF Grant	**$68,500**	**$68,830**	**$33,180**	**$28,880**	**$199,390**
Other Partners					
8. Raven Management (Defenders of Wildlife)	$33,000	$33,000			$66,000
9. NPS 2005 Challenge Cost Share Grant	$10,938				$10,938
10. Desert Tortoise Web Site (Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (Department of Defense))	$5,000	$3,000	$3,000	$1,000	$12,000
11. Desert Tortoise Merchandise (Joshua Tree National Park Association)		$6,290	$2,200	$2,200	$10,690
12. Tortoise Outreach Coordinator (Salary/Benefits/Support)					
a. California Off Highway Vehicle Commission grant	$40,000	$46,750	$50,000	$45,000	$181,750
b. California Department of Fish and Game grant	$40,000	$40,000	$40,000		$120,000
Total Other Partners	**$128,938**	**$129,040**	**$95,200**	**$48,200**	**$401,378**
PROJECT GRAND TOTAL	**$197,438**	**$197,870**	**$128,380**	**$77,080**	**$600,768**