DESERT
MANAGERS GROUP

DRAFT
Meeting Summary

Meeting: DMG Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group
Date/Location: May 12, 2005, NPS Office, Barstow, California
Purpose:

1. Finalize charter of the work group
2. Review/approve proposal for a DT Threats Workshop for the Eastern Mojave Desert Region
3. Review/agree upon how stakeholder input will be addressed.
4. Review/agree upon the role of the DT Science Advisory Committee
5. Discuss process, steps and schedule for developing Recovery Action Plans

Participants:

Larry LaPre (BLM)
Becky Jones (CDFG)
Ray Bransfield (FWS)
Shannon Collis (EAFB)
Neil Lynn (NTC)
Mary Martin (NPS)
Glenn Black (CDFG)
Don Maben (Kern County)
Bob Wood (EAFB)
Roy Averill-Murray (FWS DTRO)
Sandy Marquez (FWS DTRO)
Amy Salveter (FWS DTRO)
John Hamill (DOI)
Clarence Everly (DOD)
Thomas Lueteritz (UR)
Larry Whalon (NPS)
Debra Hughson (NPS)
Karen Phillips (USGS)
Kristin Berry (USGS)

Results/conclusions:

1. Bob Williams (by phone) indicated that FWS wants full and balanced stakeholder involvement in the process.
2. The Work Group discussed a number of options for involving stakeholders in the process. Concerns/points raised during the discussion included:
   - Threats workshops should be technical exercises that rely primarily on the best available scientific information; participants should have some minimum technical credentials in order to participate. Stakeholder are more likely to accept the results if they are involved. The number of participants should be limited and may require stakeholders to consolidate representation. Quadstate and Defenders of Wildlife should be invited.
   - Should involve stakeholders in development of the Recovery Action Plans who are willing to bring something to the table in terms of recovery implementation
   - Need to keep the group to a manageable size in order to get something done (large groups are not effective).
   - Stakeholder representatives needs to be capable of making commitments for their group(s)
   - Land management agencies can not abrogate their responsibilities or commitments made in their land management plans, but they need to be flexible so that stakeholders feel like their voice counts
   - Everyone needs to recognize that full consensus may not be achieved, but the process (recovery planning/implementation) still needs to move forward
   - The groups should study the "Keystone report" which discusses public involvement using a citizen advisory boards
   - Involving stakeholders will reduce the likelihood of law suits
   - Plans should identify separate priorities for federal, state, and local agencies
   - Stakeholder involvement plan should distinguish between stakeholders and local governments (cities)
   - Not all stakeholders can afford to actively participate; financial assistance would increase the likelihood of balanced stakeholder participation.

3. A subgroup met after the meeting and developed draft Stakeholder Involvement Guidelines that reflect the issues and points articulated above. (Note: The Draft Guidelines were circulated to the full Work Group for review and comment—the attached version reflects the results of that review). The Groups agreed that the Draft Guidelines would be presented at the DMG Executive Meeting on May 24 for review/approval.

4. The Work Group reviewed and approved the revised Work Group Charter (attached) with the understanding that it will be amended later to address stakeholder involvement.

5. Roy Averill-Murray presented the proposal for the Eastern Mojave Desert Region Threats Workshop (attached). He noted that the threats workshops would not rely or focus on existing recovery units or DWMAs. Concerns and recommendations included

- It may be best to do just one workshop for California, not 3 regions as proposed. If separate workshops are held, they should occur in quick sequence (e.g., within a month). The Work Group agreed to 3 workshops that would occur over a several week period.
- FWS may want to consider doing pre-workshop scoping meetings to determine the issues and concerns (little support for this idea).
- *The University of Redlands agreed to complete its review of agency activities and land management plans for the Eastern Mojave Region before the workshop and have it available for use at the workshop.*
- BLM planning unit boundaries will be used as the basis for delineating the DT planning units. *The University of Redlands will generate the planning area maps.*
- Threats should be combined as appropriate across range. How this gets done needs further discussion. There was concern that threats that may have significant local impacts may get watered down if looked at on a regional scale.
- Need to guard against being pre decisional about the priorities of various threats
- *Redlands will develop maps of threats in each planning area.*
- *Roy Averill-Murray agreed to revise the attached proposal to reflect comments above*

6. Role of DT Science Advisory Committee. Roy Averill-Murray indicated that the SAC will be asked to critically review threat assessment and Recovery Action Plans for missing elements, consistency among threat assessments, etc. The SAC will also be asked to review, evaluate, and endorse the TNC threat assessment process at their meeting on May 16. Roy will provide the SAC with background information on the process and how it has been applied in the past. The work group recommended that future SAC meetings be held in California or Las Vegas to allow for participation by interested parties from California.

7. Next meeting: August 2, 2005, CDFG office in Ontario

Attachment 1

Draft

Proposed Stakeholder Involvement Guidelines
in the
Development and Implementation of Desert Tortoise Recovery Action Plans
for the California Deserts
May 23, 2005

Background: The Fish and Wildlife Service Desert Tortoise Recovery Office (DTRO) is beginning the process of revising the 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. Revision of the 1994 recovery plan will be based on regional recovery action plans developed by the Desert Managers Group (DMG) Desert Tortoise (DT) Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group (DTRPIWG). Each recovery action plan will list and prioritize desert tortoise recovery actions, including research and monitoring needed to directly link recovery with management actions, within a specific portion of the tortoise's range. To insure success of recovery actions developed through this process, it is essential to solicit input from local stakeholders and encourage their assistance in implementation of high priority recovery actions. The following guidance was developed by the DTRPIWG on May 12, 2005.

Goal: Provide for constructive and active stakeholders involvement in the identification, development and implementation of high priority DT recovery actions in California

1. **Threats Workshops**: In coordination with the DMG, FWS will sponsor a series of 2-day technical (science based) workshops this summer to update and prioritize threats to desert tortoise in the East Mojave, West Mojave, and Colorado Desert Planning Units. Technical experts from DMG agencies will participate in the workshop.
   - **Stakeholder Involvement**:
     - Stakeholders will be invited to submit scientific data and scientific reports on the severity and scope of threats in each area prior to the workshops.
     - Stakeholders will be invited to nominate an expert or scientist to participate in the workshops.
     - Workshop results will be documented and distributed widely for review, including to the FWS DT Science Advisory Committee (SAC).
     - Disagreements over the priority of threats (if any) will be documented and reported to the DTRPIWG and the SAC.
     - FWS will work with stakeholders to develop a process to ensure representation while keeping numbers at manageable levels for workshop effectiveness. Interested parties are encouraged to coordinate/consolidate their nominations as feasible.

2. **Recovery Action Plan (RAP) Development**. The DMG DTRPIWG will develop Recovery Action Plans for the Desert Tortoise in California. The goal is to identify high priority recovery actions that can/will be implemented in the next 5-10 years. The components/elements of the RAP shall include:

- Discussion and priority ranking of threats (from the threats workshops).
- Recommended recovery actions needed to address the threats.
- An evaluation of the various agency land management plans and activities as related to the recommended recovery actions.
- Identification of where collaboration and cooperation among various land managers and partners is necessary and/or possible.
- An implementation schedule, budget, and lead entity to coordinate implementation of each of the recommended actions.
- Information needs/gaps that are relevant to the recommended action.
- Recommended research to address identified information needs/gaps.
- Recommended monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the recovery action contributing to the recovery of the DT.

Stakeholder involvement:

- Stakeholders will be invited to submit scientific data, reports, and recommendations on high priority recovery actions
- Stakeholders will be invited to nominate a representative to participate in the Work Group. Each group or person will be required to submit a letter or resolution that they or their group agrees to work cooperatively and in good faith to develop and implement recovery action plans for the DT.
- FWS will work with stakeholders to develop a process to ensure representation while keeping numbers at manageable levels for work group effectiveness. Interested parties are encouraged to coordinate/consolidate there nominations as feasible.
- The draft RAP(s) will be distributed widely for review, including to the FWS DT SAC.
- Disagreements over priority recovery actions will be documented and reported to the DMG and FWS for discussion and resolution
- Recovery action plans will be used by FWS to amend the DT Recovery Plan. Public review will be provided for as part of the Recovery Plan revision process.
- All recovery actions will be subject to appropriate NEPA/CEQA compliance and associated public review requirements

Next Steps

1. FWS will send a letter to all interested parties outlining the process for developing and implementing DT Recovery Action Plans, including how stakeholders will be invited to participate in the process.

2. To ensure balanced stakeholder representation, the DTRPIWG recommends that FWS considers providing financial assistance (travel and per diem) to stakeholders to participate in the process.

3. Similar processes will be developed and implemented to address desert tortoise recovery in Arizona, Nevada, and Utah.

Attachment 2

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 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan (FWS, 1994), 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 agencies mission and statutory authority. In 2004, the FWS completed a comprehensive scientific review of the Recovery Plan and expects to complete a revision of the 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan in 2006.

Because of the many political jurisdictions involved with desert tortoise recovery, effective implementation of recovery actions will require unprecedented cooperation and coordination. A cooperative/coordinated effort among land managers 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 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 Action Planning Work Group (Work Group) to promote and facilitate a collaborative recovery effort for the desert tortoise among land and resource managers, scientists and partners across jurisdictional boundaries. An initial assignment of the Work Group will be to develop Recovery Action Plans for each recovery unit in California for inclusion in the revised DT Recovery Plan. The Recovery Action Plans (RAP) 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 to coordinate implementation of the Recovery Action Plans and to 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 and scientists across jurisdictional boundaries.

Duties and Responsibilities

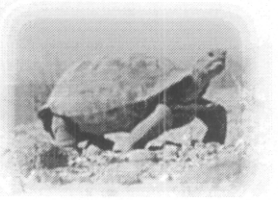
1. Review various agency land management plans and develop Recovery Action Plans for each recovery unit in California for approval by the DMG. The Recovery Action Plans will be included in the revised Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan by FWS.
2. Plan and coordinate implementation of recovery actions, assess 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

Attachment 3

Desert Tortoise Recovery Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234
Reno, Nevada 89502
Ph: 775-861-6300 ~ Fax: 775-861-6301



DESERT TORTOISE THREAT ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP
EASTERN MOJAVE DESERT REGION, CALIFORNIA
June 20-21, 2005

The revision of the 1994 Recovery Plan for the desert tortoise will be based on regional recovery action plans. Each recovery action plan will list and prioritize desert tortoise recovery actions, including research and monitoring needed to directly link recovery with management actions, within a specific portion of the tortoise's range. The recovery action planning process will begin with an updated assessment of threats. This threat assessment will be used to help define the threat-based geographic coverage for each recovery action plan, as well as the prioritized actions.

The Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment Committee noted that of 43 pages of the 1994 Recovery Plan describing threats to the tortoise, only 1.5 pages were devoted to cumulative, interacting, and synergistic effects of multiple threats. In an effort to better emphasize the interactive nature of threats, each workshop will use The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Management Project Workbook. This workbook allows participants to rank threats in a transparent, repeatable system that 1) identifies the severity and scope of altered key ecological attributes (critical components of the tortoise's life history or habitat) believed to contribute to reduced tortoise population viability, as well as 2) documenting the relative contribution and reversibility of specific threats to these key attributes. This tool has been used in recovery planning for the Chiricahua Leopard Frog, conservation planning for the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise, as well as for other species. The transparent nature of the threats assessment will provide opportunity for comment on individual elements in the assessment, as well as the ability to revise the assessment and recovery priorities as new information on threats and threat mitigation is obtained in the future.

Key Points for the Workshop:

- This workshop will focus on the Eastern Mojave Desert region of California (Map 1). Separate workshops will address the Western Mojave Desert, Colorado Desert, Northeastern Mojave Desert, and Upper Virgin River regions.

- Participants will use the best available information to describe the nature of each threat and its spatial extent. The reliability and certainty (e.g., published scientific literature, unpublished data, professional opinion, etc.) of the information used in the assessments will be documented, and recommendations for research and effectiveness monitoring will be noted where needed.

- Synthesis of all the assessments will identify whether the regions identified above need to be split, combined, or some combination so that each recovery action plan addresses a region with relatively uniform threats relative to other regions.

(Insert Map of Eastern Mojave Desert Region)

Workshop Participants:
Each workshop will be limited to approximately 10 participants, including local, state, and federal representation, to maximize meeting efficiency. Results of the assessment will be circulated among the Desert Managers Group membership, stakeholders, scientists, and the Science Advisory Committee for review and comment. Participants in the Eastern Mojave Desert workshop will include:

???, San Bernardino County
Becky Jones, California Department of Fish and Game
Edy Seehafer, Bureau of Land Management, Barstow
???, Bureau of Land Management, Needles
Larry LePre?, Bureau of Land Management, Moreno Valley
Debra Hughson, Mojave National Preserve
Ray Bransfield, Fish and Wildlife Service
Bill Boarman, US Geological Survey
Kristin Berry, US Geological Survey

Workshop support will be provided by the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office, the Redlands Institute, and the DMG coordinators.

Conservation Planning Workbook Instructions:
The Excel-based Conservation Project Management Workbook is available at http://www.conserveonline.org/2003/07/s/ConPrjMgmt_v4. The main source of detailed instructions can be found in "THE FIVE-S FRAMEWORK FOR SITE CONSERVATION: A Practitioner's Handbook for Site Conservation Planning and Measuring Conservation Success," 3rd edition, released July 2003. The handbook is available for download at:

http://www.conserveonline.org/2000/11/b/5-SVOL1 (main handbook)

http://www.conserveonline.org/2000/11/b/5-SVOL2 (appendices)

Participants will consider threats in two narrowly defined steps, asking first what the ecological stresses to a system are—independent of the source of those stresses—before separately tracing those stresses to their sources. **Stresses** represent altered or impaired key ecological attributes that reduce the viability of tortoise populations. We will specifically consider the ecological stresses within the context of the broad factors considered when listing species under the Endangered Species Act. **Threats (sources of stress)** represent the proximate cause of the stress (e.g., urbanization, collection, fire).

Stress Ranking Guidelines

Severity of Damage — What level of damage over at least some portion of the tortoise's range *within the Eastern Mojave Desert* can reasonably be expected within 10 years under current circumstances (given the continuation of the existing management/conservation situation)	
Very High	The stress is likely to *destroy or eliminate* tortoise populations over some portion of their range within the area.
High	The stress is likely to *seriously impact* tortoise populations.
Medium	The stress is likely to *moderately impact* tortoise populations.
Low	The stress is likely to only *slightly impact* tortoise populations.
Scope of Damage — What is the geographic scope of impact to the desert tortoise *within the Eastern Mojave Desert* that can reasonably be expected within 10 years under current circumstances (given the continuation of the existing management/conservation situation)	
Very High	The stress is likely to be very widespread or *pervasive* and affect tortoises *throughout* the area.
High	The stress is likely to be *widespread* and affect tortoises at *many locations*.
Medium	The stress is likely to be *localized* and affect tortoises at *some locations*.
Low	The stress is likely to be *very localized* and affect tortoises at a *limited portion* of locations.

Source-of-Stress Ranking Guidelines

Contribution — Expected contribution of the source, acting alone, to the full expression of a stress (as determined in the stress assessment) under current circumstances (i.e., given the continuation of the existing management/conservation situation)	
Very High	The source is a very large contributor of the particular stress.
High	The source is a large contributor of the particular stress.
Medium	The source is a moderate contributor of the particular stress.
Low	The source is a low contributor of the particular stress.
Irreversibility — Reversibility of the stress caused by the source of stress	
Very High	The source produces a stress that is not reversible, for all intents and purposes (e.g., urban development of habitat).
High	The source produces a stress that is reversible, but not practically affordable (e.g., habitat converted to agriculture).
Medium	The source produces a stress that is reversible with a reasonable commitment of additional resources (e.g., fencing highways).
Low	The source produces a stress that is easily reversible at relatively low cost (e.g., installing garbage container covers at highway rest areas to exclude ravens).

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