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Mr. John Hamill
Department of the Interior
222 E. Main Street, Suite 202
Barstow, CA 92331

Dear John,

It was nice to meet you in person and I would like to express my thanks to you for allowing me to attend and participate in this meeting.

I would like to take this opportunity to express some of my concerns as a result of that meeting and listening to some of the comments made by the other government agencies. I personally feel that there were some topics that should have been brought up at this meeting. One would be the fact that no agency mentioned that millions of acres have been closed off to the general public because of the desert tortoise. And maybe these government employees should be thinking about expediting their research so as not to keep the public from these lands any longer than necessary. It was fairly obvious to me that none of the meeting attendees were the least bit concerned that John Q. Public has been shut out of these millions of acres of public land. We all are concerned about the desert tortoise and do not want to see this reptile become extinct. But by the same token I was truly appalled that not one person felt they needed to expedite this research into the supposed demise of the desert tortoise.

I want you to remember John, that I am the public, and while I do not have a PhD. in desert tortoise recovery it is very obvious to me that the demise of the tortoise has very little to do with grazing, mining, hunting, or traveling on dirt roads. It was stated at a Desert Council Advisory Board meeting on December 8, 2001, in El Centro, CA by three BLM scientists that their studies of the desert tortoise "showed that 3% or less of the demise of the desert tortoise is due to human intervention". Roy Denner President of ORBA who is a member of the Desert Council Advisory Board was in attendance at this meeting as well as Jere Allen, President of RSBA and a local businessman in Blythe. They can verify this statement was made as well as the minutes of that meeting should contain that statement. Additionally these scientists also said they would need to make a 20 year study of the desert tortoise in order to come to any credible scientific conclusion about it's endangerment. Now going back to this current meeting, it would seem that human intervention was the major topic being discussed. Additionally, it seemed to me that the

majority of the attendees seemed to feel that human intervention was the sole reason the desert tortoise is in decline. Most of the discussion centered around grazing, off-road vehicle use, mining, feral dogs and hunting was mentioned. In conjunction with feral dogs, the remarks made by the man sitting to your right that "guzzlers are promoting feral dogs" was so far out in left field that I came to the conclusion in a hurry that this person was not very well informed. The statement is ludicrous. As far as mining and grazing goes, I am not a miner or a rancher but you and I both know that these activities have coexisted with the desert tortoise for over 100 years and in fact were around when the desert tortoise was thriving in the 60's and 70's. But yet the only conclusion that seems to be made is to "shut down the desert".

As a person who has used the desert for over 40 years and seen hundreds of tortoises it seems to be obvious to me that the taxpayers money would be better spent in three major categories:

(1) More research must be done on the shell and respiratory disease in order to find the cause and cure. If the shell disease and respiratory disease are not solved then the closing of public land is not going to bring about a recovery.

(2) Ravens - It is a fact that ravens eat baby tortoises and per the enclosed article actually eat them up to 7 years of age. I have talked to many people who have seen raven roosting and nesting areas with over 100 tortoise shells underneath the nest. It would seem the raven population must be curtailed in order for the desert tortoise to prosper.

(3) Breeding Program - When I asked this question about a breeding program it didn't seem to get very far. Money must be spent in a "disease free" area for breeding. Any area that has a fair population would obviously be a good area to start a breeding program (Goff's would be excellent). An example, look at the Mongolian Horse and California Condor.

I feel that if these three items are not accomplished then it doesn't matter what the BLM, DOI, USFWS, USGS and CA Dept of Fish & Game do in order to bring about a desert tortoise recovery because they won't prosper. Therefore, the closure of all this public land, the removal of grazing, the closing of mines and the prevention of public travel on established dirt roads will have been for naught.

I hope this letter and the articles I have sent you make sense. Again, I would like to say I appreciate the opportunity to attend this meeting and am looking forward to hopefully being invited to other desert management meetings.

Sincerely,

Cliff McDonald

cc: Gale Norton, Secretary, DOI
Paul Hoffman, DOI