U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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MEMORANDUM November 23, 2005

To: Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group
California Desert Managers Group

From: Desert Tortoise Recovery Coordinator, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, Reno, Nevada

Subject: 2006 Plan for Range-wide Monitoring

Range-wide monitoring efforts for the desert tortoise have been conducted from 2001 through 2005. These efforts have concentrated on field surveys, with less attention given to data quality control, analysis, and reporting. The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) understands that state and federal managers need results from these surveys to better implement their respective land and wildlife management plans, as well as to contribute to the revision of the 1994 recovery plan. Several modifications have been made to survey strategy and the data collected during the last five years. Recently, the Service had planned on implementing surveys in 2006 according to the same protocol used in 2005. However, we have decided to redirect monitoring efforts in 2006 in order to conduct a five-year review of the program. This five-year review and future implementation of range-wide monitoring will include several components, as described below.

- The Service is developing a full-time Monitoring Coordinator position within the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office to oversee and be accountable for all aspects of the monitoring program, including coordination of funding, contracting, training, field surveys, data quality control, analysis, and reporting. We hope to fill this position as early as possible in 2006, so the new Coordinator can participate in the five-year review and prepare for the 2007 field season.

- The Service invites agency participation on the Desert Tortoise Monitoring Implementation Committee (DTMIC). We believe that interaction between a managers' group with the technical group on the committee will facilitate communication of agency monitoring needs, as well as progress of the program. Interested individuals should coordinate within their respective agencies to identify a representative in order to keep the committee to a manageable number. Please contact me at the address above. Note that this expanded committee will not replace regular updates to and feedback from the MOG and DMG.

- The DTMIC plans to have a draft summary report of the 2001-05 results by early February. This report will focus on advances in the methodology and on density estimate results. During 2006, the DTMIC will conduct additional spatial analyses, as well as analyses of various components of the program, and will formalize plans for the 2007 field season.

Range-wide monitoring of the desert tortoise requires extensive coordination among many partners. I hope that our plan for 2006 will facilitate this coordination, improve the monitoring program, and make it more responsive to managers' and scientists' needs, including more timely data handling as well as annual reporting. While funding for a 2006 field season will not be necessary, I urge you to continue to identify funding to resume sampling in 2007.

I look forward to sharing the results of monitoring results to date and working with you to implement a new and improved monitoring program. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please let me know.