



September 20, 2002

Memorandum

To: Desert Managers Group
DMG Interagency Working Group Team Leaders
DMG Coordinators
DMG Interested Parties

From: DOI Executive Coordinator, Desert Managers Group
DOD Coordinator, Desert Managers Group

Subject: September 11-12, 2002, Desert Managers Group Meeting Summary

Attached is the draft summary of the Desert Managers Group meeting conducted on September 11-12, 2002 at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command, Twentynine Palms, CA. Please review the action items and follow through on any assignments for which you are responsible. *Action items have been highlighted for easy review.* All attachments are accessible on the DMG website at www.dmg.gov. Please contact either John Hamill (760-255-8888) or Clarence Everly (760-255-8896) if you have questions.

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Attachments

1. DMG Meeting Attendance Roster
2. CDFG Desert Tortoise Population Status Report
3. Preliminary Desert Tortoise LDS results for FY 2002
4. Petition to list the desert tortoise as an endangered species
5. MOG TAC Meeting Summary
6. Redlands Institute Desert Tortoise Project Program Design
7. Revised DMG Desert Tortoise Recovery Action Proposal
8. USGS Recovery and Vulnerability Project Brief
9. Proposed Outline for the DMG Desert Tortoise Summit
10. Mojave Desert Information Center Support Request
11. FY 2002 Burro Management Accomplishment Report
12. Draft – FY 2003 Burro Management Work Plan
13. San Sebastian Marsh-San Felipe Creed Watershed Restoration FY 03 Work Plan
14. DMG Restoration Conference Brief
15. DMG Water Work Group Brief
16. DMG Research Inventory Work Group Report
17. PACRAT Status Report

Meeting Summary and Action Items
Desert Managers Group Meeting
September 11-12, 2002
Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command
Twentynine Palms, CA

- A. **Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command Mission/Operations.** LTC Mark LeClair provided an overview of MAGTFTC's mission and operations.
- B. **Desert Tortoise Population/Monitoring Update.** Becky Jones summarized the current status of the desert tortoise population in California (attached). The report indicated that tortoise populations have experienced major declines in many areas. Phil Medica (FWS) presented preliminary results of the FY 02 Line Distance Sampling. Encounter rates were low in most areas, perhaps because of the dry conditions during the sampling period.
- C. **Desert Tortoise Political Update.** Bob Williams announced that FWS had been petitioned to list the desert tortoise as endangered based on recent population declines (see attached). Bob was uncertain how FWS would respond to the petition at this time. Bob indicated that the draft of the GAO audit was scheduled for release in the next week or so. Bob also indicated that FWS still had not responded officially to the congressional inquiry from Sen. Bennett and Cong. Hansen. Hamill reported that the Inspector General was auditing the DMG's performance related to the GPRA goal to monitor desert tortoise populations in FY 01.
- D. **MOG/MOG TAC Meeting Summary and Next Steps.** Bob Williams summarized the results of the last MOG and MOGTAC meeting (attached). The MOGTAC concluded that the DT Recovery Plan was still up-to-date. However, the Service has not made a decision on whether to revise or update the Plan. This issue will be discussed at the MOG meeting on October 9, 2002 in Las Vegas.
- E. **Establishment of a DT Science Office/Team.** Bob Williams proposed establishing a Science Office or Team to coordinate research, recovery and monitoring activities and provide DT information and synthesis to Managers in a timely manner and in a useful format. *The DMG supported Bob's proposal in concept. The Managers requested that Bob develop a White Paper that would examine options and alternatives for integrating science with desert tortoise recovery as well as staffing requirements and budget implications of the proposal. Bob agreed to prepare the White Paper for discussion at the next DMG meeting .*
- F. **University of Redlands Desert Tortoise Project.** Dr. Jill Heaton and Dr. Monty Hempel reviewed the project design for the Redland Institutes DT Project (attached). The project will focus on providing better science-based estimates of DT populations, habitats and threats generally within the West Mojave Recovery Unit and for the Fort Irwin Expansion effort in particular. The project will employ various information science technologies to address the management and policy implications of desert tortoise recovery. *The DMG requested that RI*

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provide a more detailed presentation at its next meeting on how a decision support system, proposed by RI for implementation, could support the recovery effort.

G. DMG Tortoise Strategy and Presentation to the MOG. Jim Kenna led the DMG is a discussion of the Ad Hoc Desert Tortoise Work Group proposal related to desert tortoise recovery. *The proposal was modified and approved by the DMG (attached). Specific highlights include:*

1. *place emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of past management actions, population monitoring, completion and coordinated implementation of agency land management plans, and reducing the causes of desert tortoise mortality*
2. *an ad hoc group of managers, biologist and biostatisticians will evaluate the relative priority of funding for Permanent Study Plots and Line Distance Sampling*
3. *Redlands Institute will develop a synthesis of existing plot data to determine the relative value of the data collected and what questions the information is best suited to answer/address. USFWS and CAL F&G will provide sample plot data to RI by 1 Oct. RI will provide the results of their efforts NLT 1 Nov.*
4. *FWS will take the lead on developing and implementing a predator control plan, focusing on actions to be taken, with the initial emphasis on raven management*
5. *the Ad Hoc Desert Tortoise Work Group will evaluate funding options and strategies for discussion at the next DMG meeting.*
6. *Jim Kenna will present the DMG approved proposal to the MOG on October 9.*

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H. USGS Desert Recoverability and Vulnerability Project Update. Russell Scofield reviewed the background and status of the USGS Recoverability and Vulnerability of Desert Ecosystems Project (RVDE). *The DMG agreed with the following recommendations:*

1. *A workgroup be formed to provide land manger feedback to the RVDE project. Members of the workgroup include: Russ Scofield, Jim Kenna, Jim Weigand, Debra Hughson, Shannon Collis, Rhys Evans, and Jane Rodgers.*
2. *Invite RVDE scientists to meet land management resource specialist this Fall to discuss how the RVDE could support agency resource management needs.*
3. *Invite the USGS to provide a brief on the RVDE at the December DMG meeting in Needles.*
4. *Propose to USGS that the DMG's RVDE workgroup serve to provide continuing guidance to the RVDE project. This would ensure that the RVDE project remains focused on agency land management needs while still providing the science necessary to meet RVDE and USGS research goals.*

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I. DMG Chair. Hamill reported that the Regional Executives would like the Managers to exercise more leadership in the DMG. They proposed that the Coordinators continue to chair the meetings. However, they would like the manager that hosts a meeting to be actively involved in planning and chairing at least a portion of the meeting in coordination with the DMG coordinators. They propose trying this arrangement for a year then revisiting how well it worked. *The DMG supported the proposal from the Regional Executives.*

J. Executive Coordination Meeting—Desert Tortoise Summit. The DMG supported the proposal (attached) presented by John Hamill for the DMG executive coordination meeting

to focus on the Desert Tortoise. The group recommended the meeting be held in the Spring to allow adequate time to plan the meeting.

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K. **Senator Boxer's Wilderness Bill.** Steven Evanko summarized of Marine Corps concerns with the proposed wilderness bill. *The Managers requested that the Coordinators invite Senator Boxer's staff to discuss the legislation at the next DMG meeting.*

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L. **DIRT Report.** Joe Zarki reported the DIRT met to develop a FY 03 work plan. Joe was the only member of the Group that came to the meeting. *The Manager's requested that Joe let the Managers know when the next meeting will be and they will encourage their staff to attend.*

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Hamill distributed a briefing from Kathleen Franklin concerning financial support for the Mojave Desert Information Center in Lancaster. State Parks indicated they were developing a business plan for the MDIC. *Managers suggested the issue be discussed with the DIRT and agreed to evaluate and discuss funding options at the next DMG meeting.*

M. **Burro Update.** Dave Sjaastad reported on the FY 02 accomplishments of the burro management efforts in the Cal deserts (attached) and presented a draft FY 03 work plan for consideration by the DMG (attached). Dave reported the goals for burro removal established in the Burro Strategic Plan were not being met due to funding shortfalls in BLM and NPS. Dave indicated that BLM will continue to accept and place into adoption programs all burros captured by NPS that are protected under the Wild Horse and Burro Act. *Mary Martin, John Hamill, and John O'Gara will develop a strategy for re-invigorating and elevating the emphasis on burro management in the Cal desert.*

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N. **Hazmat Work Group Report.** John Key introduced Garry Brown (Cal EPA) as the new Vice Chair of the Hazmat Work Group. Russ Scofield reported on the status of dump clean-up and prevention efforts and upcoming Hazmat training. *John Key will present the FY 03 work plan for approval at the next DMG meeting.*

O. **Habitat Restoration Report (Scofield)**

- **San Sebastian Marsh-San Felipe Watershed Partnership.** Russell was encouraged to proceed with implementation of the work plan (attached). *Formal approval of the work plan was deferred until the next meeting when Dave Van Cleve and Greg Thompson are in attendance.*
- **Mojave River Partnership.** Russell indicated that he and several members of the Weed Management group are assessing the political interest in a Mojave River restoration project. Diane indicated that Ray Bransfield was interested in participating. *The DMG approved Russell's continued efforts to assess interest in this project.*
- **Restoration conference/workshop** (attached). *The DMG expressed continued support for the Workshop which is planned for March 3-7, 2002 at the Doral Palm Springs Resort.* Edwards AFB, NPS, BLM, MDEP, and GS are contributing resources to sponsor the conference/workshop.
- **Weed Management Area MOU and activities.** Most parties have signed the MOU to establish the Mojave Weed Management Area with the following exceptions:

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- Fort Irwin
- BLM
- FWS

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- MAGTFTC
- Edwards AFB

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The Marine Base—Barstow indicated they would not sign the MOU at this time. *All other parties indicated they would follow-up to ensure the MOU is signed in the near future.*

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Russell reported the weed management group was focusing on control and research related to Saharan Mustard which is spreading throughout the desert. The initial focus would be in Joshua Tree NP and Johnson Valley. In addition, the Weed Management Group will begin drafting a long-range plan for the Mojave Weed Management Area.

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P. Coordinated Natural Resource Monitoring Update. Debra Hughson reported the natural resource monitoring workshop originally planned for January 2003 has been postponed until completion of the natural resource inventories of the National Park units in 2005. The DMG discussed, but did not reach resolution on how to address the need for additional weather monitoring stations in the desert. This topic will be discussed further at the next meeting.

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Q. Water Work Group Report. (Attached) Debra Hughson reported the NPS will issue a contract to the Desert Research Institute to revise and field test the spring survey protocol. BLM is seeking two grants totaling \$50K for spring surveys on public lands.

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R. Research Work Group Update (Attached) Hughson reported the ad hoc research group is developing a database of ongoing research projects in the Cal deserts. The database will be accessible through the DMG website in the next few weeks. The Managers discussed the best way to require that all the ongoing projects get entered into the database. *It was decided that each agency/office will develop its own protocols for making sure that projects are entered into the database.*

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S. Roundtable Report: The managers reported on activities of regional or interagency interest. Highlights included:

- Dietrich (FS) – The Regional Forester FS will sign the MOU to become a member of the DMG. Gene Zimmerman will represent Cleveland, Angeles, Inyo and San Bernardino National Forests on the DMG.
- Kenna (BLM, Palm Springs) – indicated there was increased interest by the Mexican government in working cooperatively; Salton Sea issues are heating up.
- O’Gara (China Lakes NWS) - the Range-wide EIS will be completed soon; several tribes are interested in joining the DMG
- Medica (FWS) – MOG meeting Oct 9, LV; MOG TAC meeting Oct 24, LV
- Everly (DOD) – Overflight Group Meeting, Oct 25th, Anza Borrego
- Hamill (DOI) – DOI Coordinator now reports to Regional Executives from BLM, NPS, GS, and FWS; has meeting with Timbisha Tribe to discuss their participation in the DMG (Oct 3, in DEVA).
- PACRAT work group Status Report was distributed (attached)

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- Noda (FWS) – Judy Holman (Ventura) is new desert supervisor; FWS is considering closing the Barstow office due to recruiting difficulties—several managers expressed concern about closing the Barstow Office.
- Hayes (NPS, DEVA) – pup fish population at Devils Hole is declining—workshop to discuss problems/solutions is schedule for Sept 24-25 in Vegas.
- Sharpe (BLM, Needles) – BLM approved Cadiz EIS; new day use site open at the Amboy Crater; initiating a tamarisk removal project.
- Martin (NPS, MOJA) – DEVA and MOJA General Management Plans are done; Dennis Schramm going to DC; construction started on Kelso Depot; new interagency fire center open at Hole in the Wall
- Joia (MCLB) – surplus houses at MCLB available for the taking
- Jones (CDFG) – good success capturing Mojave Ground Squirrels this year
- Viallobos (BLM, Ridgecrest) - Monitoring Team working at Jawbone/Dove Spring; Restoration Team working at JOTR
- Quillman (NTC) - The Ft Irwin Expansion BA should be out in November; needs Section 7 BO on fiber optic line to China Lakes ASAP.

T. Next DMG Meetings

- December 3-4, 2002, Needles, CA Host: Molly Brady. Preliminary agenda topics:
 - desert tortoise recovery plans and implementation strategy
 - GAO desert tortoise audit results/implications
 - executive coordination meeting/desert tortoise summit
 - review and update the DMG 5 year plan (DMG and Work Groups)
 - USGS Recoverability and Vulnerability Project Briefing
 - Sen Boxers Wilderness Bill
 - Burro Management Strategy
 - Weather Monitoring
 - Desert tortoise monitoring
 - DSS presentation by Redlands Institute
 - State of California Legacy Project Workshop
 - California Desert Fund
 - Funding Support for the Mojave Desert Info Center
- March 12-13, 2002, Palm Springs, CA Host: Jim Kenna

