



**Draft
Meeting Summary
July 26 - 27, 2006
Big Bear, CA.**

The Desert Managers Group held its summer meeting at the San Bernardino National Forest Discovery Center 26 -27 July 2006. The meeting was hosted by the San Bernardino National Forest. A summary of meeting topics and discussions is found below. For questions or comments contact Clarence Everly (everlyc@mojavedata.gov, 760-256-7033) or Russell Scofield (Russell_Scofield@partner.nps.gov, 760-365-0955).

Wednesday, July 26, 2006

1. The DMG welcomed Major Milton Clausen as the new Manager from MCAGCC.
2. **Introduction to the San Bernardino National Forest.** Jean Wade Smith, the Forest Supervisor, welcomed all to the meeting and to the San Bernardino National Forest. Max Copenhagen, the Deputy Forest Supervisor, provided an excellent overview of the mission, activities/operations, history, and issues within the San Bernardino National Forest.
3. **Desert Tortoise Recovery Office Update.** Roy Averill-Murray introduced Linda Allison, the new DTRO Monitoring Coordinator. Updating the group on DTRO activities, Roy stated the Science Advisory Committee is currently reviewing/ discussing recovery criteria for the desert tortoise. A synopsis of their discussions will be given at the upcoming August 15 MOG meeting. Roy also stated the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution is wrapping up its interviews and will present their preliminary findings at the MOG meeting. Their presentation will consist of sharing the common themes and any major issues observed during the interview process. They will also take comments from the audience or from individuals they did not have an opportunity to interview. Bob Wood asked whether the U.S. Institute will give a detailed overview of their findings to the DMG at a future meeting of the group. Roy stated the DTRO is currently reviewing options for providing detailed findings to the public. Conducting regional public meetings is one of the options being reviewed. A future DMG meeting would be a good venue through which to provide this information.

Linda Allison provided a status update on FY 2007 desert tortoise monitoring. She met with the Monitoring Committee at the end of June to begin initial discussions on monitoring in 2007. Two more meetings are currently scheduled before the end of September to continue

these discussions. Linda stated her goals for the FY 2007 monitoring effort are to focus on improving the precision of desert tortoise monitoring, focus on desert tortoise population monitoring as a whole and to gain more information on where tortoises are actually found. Roy stated once the range-wide program is on track (i.e. applying current data and what we have learned so far to address the above goals), Linda will also start looking at more detailed questions that may not be suitably covered by a range wide monitoring program. Bob Wood asked what the funding levels for 2007 monitoring will be. He stated the DTRO should develop a 5 year plan (business strategy), to include budgeting, for desert tortoise monitoring. This would greatly assist managers in planning and programming long range budgets to support the monitoring effort. Roy stated managers should plan on funding 2007 monitoring at the 2005 level. He also stated that exploring habitat and threats monitoring, especially in terms of effectiveness of management actions, will be necessary. Roy also mentioned the monitoring report and all years of Line Distance Sampling and GSub0 data will be available for download via the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program website by the end of August 2006.

4. **Fort Irwin Land Expansion.** Mickey Quillman and Priscilla Kernek provided Managers with an overview of the current status of the Fort Irwin Land Expansion project.
5. **Stakeholder input.**
 - a. Mike Conner, Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee – Mr. Connor asked several questions related to Fort Irwin’s expansion effort.
 1. Mr. Conner stated he heard a rumor concerning a lawsuit for the return of grazing to the Harper Lake Grazing Allotment. He requested an update on the status of the Harper Lake Grazing Allotment relinquishment process – have letters of relinquishment been obtained from the allotment owners? Is there a guarantee that DOI/BLM will not let grazing occur on this allotment? Ms. Kernek, the Fort Irwin Land Expansion Project Manager, stated the Barstow BLM Office has submitted the relinquishment, and any other necessary paperwork to their solicitors for review and action. She confirmed there has been a request for use of the Harper Lake Grazing Allotment but the request was denied by BLM.
 2. Mr. Conner asked if BLM would fight a lawsuit to reopen the Harper Lake grazing allotment if it were submitted. Since this was a hypothetical question, no response could be provided.
 3. Mr. Conner requested an update on the activities occurring at the East Gate area of the Fort Irwin expansion. Specifically, he asked what the take of desert tortoise has been since the area was opened for training. Ms. Kernek stated USGS currently has a desert tortoise study ongoing in the East Gate area. She further articulated the majority of training in the East Gate area will occur in flat areas and not in the elevated areas near the mountains where the majority of tortoises are found in this area. Mickey Quillman, Fort Irwin Chief of Natural and Cultural resources stated there has been no take of desert tortoises that he is aware of. He further stated only limited training has occurred to date in the East Gate expansion area.
 4. Mr. Conner asked if any desert tortoises have been translocated along the installation southern border yet. Mickey stated no translocations have occurred to this point.

5. Mr. Conner asked for an articulation of the Copper City Road realignment effort. Mickey stated San Bernardino does not want to maintain the road since portions of it will go through the western Fort Irwin expansion area. Fort Irwin's plan is to create a new road where the existing Copper City Road enters the western Fort Irwin expansion area. This new road will join the existing Copper City Road where it meets the southern border of the western Fort Irwin expansion area. The new road will travel west along the southern boundary of the western Fort Irwin expansion area until it reconnects with the existing Copper City Road outside of the western Fort Irwin expansion area boundary.
 - b. Jim McGarvie, Off Road Business Association – Mr. McGarvie thanked the DMG for adjusting its agenda to allow stakeholders to listen to and participate in presentations they have specific interest in. He further stated, referencing Max Copenhagen's overview of the San Bernardino National Forest, the USFS OHV process does work well. Designated OHV routes are used by responsible OHVs. The OHV community used some of its own funding to help make it a good program. Mr. McGarvie further articulated the "Youth at Risk Program" is very good. He mentioned the OHV community has a similar program for at risk youth and it is also very successful. Mr. McGarvie congratulated the DTRO for a professionally executed Stakeholder Assessment process and stated he is looking forward to reviewing the findings obtained through the process by the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution.
6. **Raven Environmental Assessment Work Group update.** Judy Hohman, USFWS, provided the DMG with the current status of the environmental assessment (EA). A draft of the EA was sent to work group members for review and comment in May. Comments were received from work group members and incorporated into the document, as appropriate, by the end of June. The draft EA was sent to the Solicitors office the first part of July. Comments are expected from the Solicitors office by the end of August.

Judy met with the major utility companies with facilities in southern California. The purpose of the meeting was to identify common raven issues, if any, faced by the utility companies, identify facility locations, discuss possible solutions and determine next steps. The utility companies identified nesting on transmission facilities and distribution lines as a common problem. Potential solutions were discussed. The meeting adjourned with an agreement to meet again to discuss solutions and address how they can integrate into and assist the DMG raven effort.

At its June meeting, the Raven EA Work Group established a Landfills subgroup to address the important raven issues involving these facilities. The work group recognized that county environmental health departments will be key participants in addressing these facilities. The work group also identified multiple upcoming tasks that must be addressed. These include:

- a. Develop a proposal for a 2007 raven nesting survey to identify offending birds.
- b. Develop a proposal for implementation of Wildlife Services activities to address offending birds. This proposal will be submitted to the DMG for consideration and must be funded by the end of November 2006 for Wildlife Services to implement it in spring 2007.

- c. Convene a meeting of the Landfill subgroup and invite county environmental health departments to participate.
- d. Develop a strategy to work with local jurisdictions on code enforcement.
- e. Work with county public works organizations to remove road kills expeditiously to remove this raven subsidy.
- f. Continue working with utility companies to address common raven issues and remove empty nests from their facilities.
- g. Coordinate with and leverage education and outreach efforts by the DMG Desert Tortoise Education and Outreach Work Group.

The Raven EA Work Group's next meeting is scheduled for 31 August at the BLM California Desert District Office in Moreno Valley.

7. **Level 1 Spring Monitoring Protocols.** Dr. Don Sada of the Desert Research Institute (DRI) provided a presentation on spring monitoring protocols developed under contract for the NPS Vital Signs program (attached). Dr. Sada defined the different types of springs, described the unique resources associated with springs, and articulated how management implications can be quite different depending on spring type. He then outlined the Level I protocols and discussed how knowing more about spring types and their unique characteristics can better aid the decision making process for management of the spring. Dr. Sada also addressed the many unique and often endemic invertebrates located at many Mojave and Great Basin springs.

Chris Warner, Research Associate Coordinator for the Great Basin Institute (GBI), talked briefly about how GBI implemented the Level I Protocols for NPS. He stated he would be willing to work with other DMG agencies to help them implement these protocols. He further stated GBI can provide research associates (interns), many with undergraduate or graduate degrees, for resource or wildlife monitoring and inventorying, NEPA documentation, trail design, etc.

Russell Scofield explained how the need for a standard set of spring monitoring and inventory protocols was identified by the DMG Science and Data Management Workgroup and later by the Water Workgroup in years past. The Water Workgroup and later the NPS Vital Signs program coordinator worked with Dr. Sada to develop a three tier system of spring monitoring protocols. Level I conducts a basic inventory/only collects basic information on a spring site. Level II and III, now fully developed, collect more detailed, long-term monitoring information. Level I Protocols have been implemented at all three NPS units and Ft Irwin. Russell discussed the need to implement the protocols on BLM lands and state parks. He suggested grant funding might be available to fund additional spring monitoring.

8. **BLM Needles Resource Area Springs Program.** Heather McKenny, wildlife biologist, Needles BLM Field Office, provided managers with an overview of the water monitoring program implemented in the Needles resource area (see attached presentation). The Needles resource area program not only inventories natural springs such as those discussed by Dr. Sada, but also inventories and evaluates artificial water sources such as guzzlers. The

database developed by Heather includes many of the parameters from the DRI developed Level I spring monitoring protocols. In addition, it also includes the BLM Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) data fields. The objectives of the Needles program are:

- Obtaining accurate geospatial data
- Mapping access routes
- Inventorying and long-term monitoring to aid management decisions related to
 - Future water source developments
 - Maintenance needs and wildlife issues
 - Invasive and noxious weed control
 - Resource protection

The Needles Field Office is using data from this monitoring program to plan riparian protection, maintain and repair artificial water sources, monitor or control invasive weeds, and plan cleanups and restoration of spring/water sites. Data is also used for rangeland health assessments and wilderness monitoring.

9. **Stakeholder input.** None.

Thursday, 27 July 2006

1. **Mohave Ground Squirrel Work Group update.** Becky Jones, California Department of Fish and Game, articulated to Managers goals, objectives and tasks for a Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation strategy and the format for the document (see attached slide presentation) have been developed and agreed to by work group members. The work group is currently working on identifying and gathering existing information on the Mohave Ground Squirrel for inclusion in the appropriate section of the conservation strategy document. Writing assignments for specific sections of the strategy have been handed out. The work group is also developing a letter for distribution to cities within the Mohave Ground Squirrel range to inform them of the work groups' activities and solicit their involvement/participation in the process and identify any concerns they may have.

Planning for the Mohave Ground Squirrel Workshop continues. The CSU Stanislaus Endangered Species Recovery Program (ESRP) will chair the workshop. The focus of the workshop will be on development of a statistically valid method to determine occupancy, population status and population trends. Proposed dates for the workshop are 3 and 4 October or 10 – 11 October. Three locations have been proposed for the workshop – Barstow, San Jose or Turlock. The work group is pursuing availability of appropriate facilities in each location prior to making a final decision. ESRP and Defenders of Wildlife are contacting potential technical specialists (see attached presentation) in the topic areas to determine their availability to participate in the workshop. This will ultimately determine the date of the workshop. Becky recognized Fort Irwin, ESRP (through a grant with EPA), CDFG, BLM, and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for providing funding to support the workshop.

Update: Cynthia Wilkerson, the primary Defenders of Wildlife (DOF) representative to the work group will be leaving DOF and California for another job in Washington State in September.

2. **Free Roaming Dog Work Group update.** Becky Jones, California Department of Fish and Game, provided Managers with an update on the status of the Free Roaming Dog Work Group efforts. The work group has requested maps of tortoise/dog incidents reported to San Bernardino County Animal Control. San Bernardino County Animal Control has implemented new software that will let them recall and analyze specific data in a much more user friendly manner. This will provide a better picture of the scope of this problem within the county. Glenn Black is trying to set up a meeting with the San Bernardino County Animal control Officer to discuss the issue of free roaming dogs and potential solutions.

The work group sent letters to 133 veterinarians in CA, NV, AZ and UT to solicit input on their perspective of the effects of dogs on desert tortoises in the desert – urban interface. They also asked them to characterize the nature of desert tortoise injuries for tortoises they have treated. The responses received from participating veterinarians confirms domestic dogs cause varying degrees of trauma, sometimes resulting in death, to desert tortoises each year (see attached presentation for detailed statistics). The extent of free roaming dog impacts to “wild” tortoise populations could not be determined from these interviews.

Next steps: Following receipt of information from San Bernardino County Animal Control, rewrite the preliminary draft of work group recommendations and staff with work group members. Following work group review, develop a final draft for distribution to managers for review and comment followed by a formal presentation at the November DMG meeting.

3. **Desert Tortoise Education and Outreach Work Group update.** Anne Staley, the NPS Desert Tortoise Outreach and Education Coordinator, provided Managers with an update of work group activities.
 - a. All contracting issues with the University of Colorado for the desert tortoise attitude survey are resolved. They are currently refining the address list to be used for mailing surveys. The narrative for the second half of funding for the project has been submitted to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). Funding should be forthcoming.
 - b. Printing of additional desert tortoise outreach brochures is complete. Outstanding requests for brochures have been filled. Anyone needing additional brochures should contact Anne at Joshua Tree National Park (760-367-5528 or anne_staley@nps.gov).
 - c. Two outreach news stories have been completed, submitted to local papers and published. A third article is in the submittal, acceptance and publishing process. The first volume of the “Tortoise Times” desert tortoise newsletter was published (handout to Managers) and mailed to the existing work group interested party’s mailing list. A copy will also be posted to the DMG website for viewing and download. A CD containing all public outreach materials developed to date was made available to Managers. Additional CDs may be obtained by contacting Anne.
 - d. The desert tortoise education trunks will be available in September for test use. The contract for purchase of the physical trunk was awarded. Styrofoam tortoise shells have

been requested from USFWS. When all materials arrive, Joshua Tree National Park will fill the trunks with the required materials.

- e. All prizes have been awarded to this year's winners of the Mojave Max contest in California. The award ceremonies/pizza parties went well and very well received by the kids participating in the contest. Over 200 entries were received this year.
 - f. Questions
 1. Anne was asked whether Los Angeles County was notified of the Mojave Max contest. Anne replied they were however, only one entry was received from the entire county.
 2. Anne was asked whether other education efforts could use some of the outreach materials being created by the work group. Anne replied they could, they simply need to contact her.
 3. Anne was asked whether a "free roaming dog" message could be incorporated into the education and outreach program. The answer is yes. The free roaming dog work group needs to coordinate with the education and outreach work group to develop the appropriate message and materials.
 - g. Joe Zarki discussed the current status of the National Fish and Wildlife Fund education and outreach grant funding.
 1. Initial funding from the multiyear NFWF grant was received in September 2005. One full year of funding is available and being spent.
 2. California OHV funding for year two of the program is coming. FWS funding contributions to the program are also on the way. A request for year two NFWF funding has been submitted.
 3. A request has been submitted to the California OHV Grant Commission for year three program funding.
 4. The education and outreach coordinator position is a 4 year term NPS position. The managers were asked to discuss and determine whether they wanted the work group to pursue year 4 funding for the position/program. Consensus of the managers was for the work group to pursue year 4 funding for the program.
 - h. Year 2 of the grant proposal stated the DMG would sponsor a desert tortoise summit. Joe asked managers what the purpose/focus of the summit would be and whether it would be science based or outreach/education based. Consensus of the Managers was this would be an outreach based summit.
 - i. Joe articulated several options to the managers. They included a coordinated effort with the California Desert Nature Festival and a possible opportunity for an event with the National Science Collaborative. ***The managers directed the work group to develop several possible options for presentation and decision at the November DMG meeting.***
4. **Hazmat Work Group Update.** Russell Scofield stated the work group has not met since the last DMG meeting. The next work group meeting is currently planned for early October (exact date not yet available). Objectives of the meeting will be to identify current and planned projects that can be enhanced through collaborative execution. The work group will also focus on identifying and leveraging additional funding sources through the state. Several managers requested they be notified when the meeting date and location are solidified.

Luke Sabola, Physical Scientist/Geologist, Joshua Tree National Park (JTNP), provided managers with an excellent overview of the JTNP Abandoned Mine Lands program. By prefabricating materials in-house, they are able to dramatically reduce the cost of installing bat gates, cupolas, fencing, etc. to protect mines and wildlife and enhance visitor safety. Luke stated JTNP is willing to make their capabilities available to DMG partners for similar work on their lands. Linda Greene, Death Valley National Park, stated they have a similar program achieving similar successes.

5. **Law Enforcement in the National Forest.** U.S. Forest Service Special Agent Denese Stokes provided managers with an informative presentation on the drug interdiction law enforcement actions underway in the California national forests (see attached presentation). Her presentation included discussion of the reasons, indicators, dangers associated with and resource damage caused by illegal drug activities on public lands. Her contact information is: *Special Agent Denese Stokes, 951-315-5872, dstokes@fs.fed.us.*
6. **Hantavirus briefing.** Joe Burns from the California Department of Health Services, Vector-Born Diseases Section, provided managers with an excellent presentation on the history, etiology, symptoms, treatment and risk factors for the Hantavirus (see attached presentation). He also provided managers with an overview of the cost-share agreement between the Vector-borne Disease Section and the Pacific Coast Region of the Forest Service to maintain cooperative surveillance and control of vector-borne diseases within the national forests of California. Joe stated he would be happy to talk with any federal agency having a desire to enter into a similar agreement.
7. **Restoration efforts update.** Russell Scofield provided managers with a brief overview of current DMG restoration efforts.
 - a. The Low Desert Weed Management Area (LDWMA) created a weed brochure for education of the public (attached). The LDWMA MOU signature process is still ongoing. Multiple signatures are still outstanding however, progress is being made.
 - b. Russell provided update on the status of the Barstow Field Office's tamarisk control project at the Amargosa River (see attached presentation). This project is a collaborative partnership between the Barstow BLM Field Office and The Nature Conservancy. The entire project is being funded through grants.
 - c. Russell informed managers the Dos Palmas (Palm Springs Field Office) Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) grant will be on the November WCB docket for funding. The Dos Palmas project is a large tamarisk control effort. The Saline Valley (Death Valley and Ridgecrest) tamarisk control project may also be considered at that time as well. Russell conducted a very successful field trip with WCB and BLM staff this past spring. The group looked at on the ground successes achieved by projects currently funded by WCB in the Needles BLM resource area and in the Dos Palmas area.
8. **Mojave Fringe-Toed Lizard update.** Russell Scofield provided a brief synopsis of the Mojave fringe-toed lizard (MFTL) meeting which occurred in Barstow. Russell stated BLM

and NPS need to make sure current research is designed to help answer the type of questions FWS would ask if there is a twelve-month status review. Both the Barstow and Needles Field Offices have planned research activities. Russell suggested Death Valley National Park could use BLM's work as a match to conduct MFTL research in the park at Ibex Dunes. Russell also stated the need to establish a single, accepted protocol for MFTL monitoring. Russell plans to work with agency ecologists/biologists and researchers to establish this protocol. The next meeting is currently scheduled for October 24th at Barstow Field Office.

9. Next meetings.

- a. The next DMG meeting will be hosted by the National Park Service at Death Valley National Park on 1 – 2 November 2006.
- b. The DMG winter meeting will be hosted by U. S. Geological Survey at their new offices in San Diego. Meeting dates are 31 January – 1 February 2007.