

Draft
Conference Call Summary

Title: Desert Tortoise Science Work Group

Date: 19 Dec 03

Participants: Bill Boarman (GS); Todd Esque (GS); Linda Hansen (BLM); Ray Bransfield (FWS); Becky Jones (CDFG); Clarence Everly (DOD); John Hamill (DOI)

Purpose:

1. Develop a charter for a proposed Desert Tortoise Science Work Group, including the responsibilities/duties for the work group,
2. Identify potential members
3. Identify amount, kind and source of staff support needed for effective operation of the Work Group

Summary/Conclusions:

1. The participants discussed the need for a Science Work Group and whether the DMG was the appropriate body to establish and oversee the group. Participants agreed that it is impractical for each agency and/or jurisdiction (BLM, NPS, WEMO etc) to organize and support a separate a Science Group. Scientists don't have the time to be involved in multiple groups. FWS has no apparent plans to establish a science group under the MOG that will advise recovery efforts throughout the range. Science/Technical Advisory Groups have been or are being organized as part of the Clark County (NV) and Washington County (UT) HCPs. In summary, there was consensus that there was a need for a DT Science Work Group fro California and that the DMG was the appropriate forum to organize and oversee the group.
2. A draft charter for the work group (attached) was developed for consideration by the DMG.
3. All members of the DMG should be invited to submit nominees for the work group.
4. FWS believes that the group should only be established after completion of the DTRPAC report.
5. Bill Boarman will present the finding and recommendations to the DMG on January 15, 2004

DRAFT
Charter
Desert Tortoise Science Work Group

Background: Desert tortoise research, recovery, and monitoring activities will require scientific support for many years. Many uncertainties exist with respect to (a) the factors that are impacting desert tortoise populations, (b) the actions that will contribute most towards recovery of the desert tortoise, and (c) the effectiveness of recovery actions. These uncertainties will be addressed through an adaptive management program that answers specific questions in a scientifically defensible manner.

General direction for the group would be provided by the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan and new scientific information collected since the plan was developed or revised.

Goals/Mission:

1. Ensure recovery actions are based on the best available scientific information and implemented using an adaptive management approach.
2. Coordinate research, recovery and monitoring activities related to the desert tortoise.
3. Link research activities and results with land management actions/decisions
4. Assess the short and long term benefits/effectiveness of recovery actions.

Responsibilities:

1. advise the DMG and the agencies on the overall scientific direction of the DT recovery effort,
2. review work plans, proposals and annual and final reports to ensure that studies/recovery actions and conclusions are scientifically sound and supportable.
3. develop, review and/or approve scientific standards/guidance for the conduct of DT research, monitoring, and adaptive management;
4. identify high priority research needs;
5. coordinate scientific endeavors related to DT recovery;
6. synthesize documents/information that frame recent advances in science and ecosystem knowledge in a format that is useful to the DMG; and
7. coordinate with other groups (MOG, Clark County HCP, etc) as needed to effectively carry out its mission/responsibilities.

Work Group Membership: The work group will include (a) 3-5 knowledgeable DT scientists with different disciplines related to DT conservation (e.g., ecology, physiology/disease, behavior, genetics, statistics, population modeling), and (b) and [how many? Which agencies?] agency management biologists. The work group will also include one general ecologist working outside the desert tortoise arena—their job will be to keep the work group from being too myopic while focusing on new data, methods and opinions related to desert tortoise.[Membership will be approved by the DMG and nominations for membership will be solicited from DMG agencies and stakeholder groups]. Work group members will be expected to serve personally on the work group and not send alternates/representatives. The work group will elect its own chair and operate according to established DMG meeting protocols and policies.

Non DMG agencies/groups will be invited and encouraged to nominate scientists to attend meetings, observe and offer input/suggestions. Qualification requirements will be established for member and nonmember participation.

Staff Support: Staff support will be critical to the efficient and effective operation of the Work Group. Staff support responsibilities/needs include:

1. plan and coordinate meeting and prepare meeting summaries
2. compile and disseminate information and meeting review materials
3. draft documents, summarize data and conduct meta analyses for use by the work group; and
4. coordinate external peer reviews and summarize review comments for the work group

A post doctorate student working will be hired/assigned to fulfill the technical responsibilities. Administrative assistance will be provided by the DMG. Primary direction would be provided by the Chair of the work group.

Budget: The Work Group will require an annual budget to pay for support staff, stipends and travel expenses of non DMG –affiliated member(s) and expert witnesses asked to participate in specific meetings, meeting facilities, and materials (e.g., photocopies) required for meetings and review activities.