

1.0 Background and Purpose

The California deserts (Figure 1) include some 100 communities, two national parks, one national preserve, six military bases, eight counties, 10 state parks, 37 federally recognized Native American Indian tribes, and more than 11 million acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The 25 million-acre desert region is situated within a day's drive of 40 million people and is a well-known destination for hundreds of thousands of out-of-state visitors each year. It is also the home of many unique wildlife and plant species and contains many outstanding cultural and paleontological resources. In addition, the California deserts are critically important training and testing grounds for the U.S. military.

By 2020 the deserts' permanent population is expected to increase by over 1 million and the population of the surrounding area is expected to increase by about 10 million. The demands of increasing use by millions of visitors and permanent residents will create mounting pressure and new challenges for land management agencies in the deserts. A mechanism for addressing desert-wide issues was established in 1994 in the form of the Desert Managers Group (DMG), an interagency group that is coordinating and integrating desert conservation, visitor services, and public safety efforts in the California deserts.

Partners involved with the DMG include the State of California (Fish and Game, Parks and Recreation, and Caltrans), Kern, San Bernardino and Imperial Counties, the Department of Defense (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps), the Department of the Interior (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Geological Survey), and the U.S. Forest Service. More information on the DMG, including the Group's charter, organization, and current events is available at www.dmg.gov.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the accomplishments of the DMG in fiscal year 2006 and describe the goals and objectives established by the DMG for fiscal years 2007-2011. This document was approved by the DMG at its regular meeting on XXXXXXXXXX XX, 2007. As with all crosscutting multi-agency efforts, performance is dependent on the availability of adequate funds and staff for each agency to actively participate in these efforts.

2.0 FY 06 Accomplishments

DMG accomplishments for FY 06 are summarized below.

Goal 1. Restore selected upland and riparian habitats identified for restoration.

- A. DMG agencies actively participated in the Mojave Weed Management Area (MWMA). Major activities focused on developing a plan for inventorying invasive species (tamarisk) and implementing control measures in the Mojave River.

- B. DMG agencies actively participated in the Low Desert Weed Management Area (LDWMA). Major activities focused on developing a top ten list of most invasive plants.

Goal 2. Clean-up and restore illegal dumps that pose a public health or environmental threat and reduce the incidence of illegal dumping in the future.

- A. The DMG, Kern County, and others hosted an Illegal Dumping Prevention Workshop in Ridgecrest on 23 March 2006. The workshop focused on increasing the awareness of illegal dumping, the environmental consequences of illegal dumping, offered several potential solutions for use by attendees and fostered cooperation among state and local governments. Over 100 people from federal, state and local government organizations across California and Nevada attended.

Goal 3. Recover the desert tortoise in the California recovery units.

- A. The DMG implemented a multifaceted education and outreach campaign.
 - 1. Supported the Desert Tortoise Outreach Coordinator (DTOC). To date \$208,480 in grant funding has been received for projects. Applied for \$32,486 in three environmental education grants. This grant funding will go towards purchasing a desert tortoise costume, travel to nature festivals, teacher workshops and the Mojave Max Emergence Contest in Southern California.
 - 2. Conducted a Mojave Max Emergence Contest in California. Letters of introduction and Mojave Max rack cards were sent to eight Southern California county Outdoor Education Specialist, libraries, turtle and tortoise groups, youth clubs, and scouting organizations. Public Service Announcements were recorded and sent with press kits to a variety of Southern California radio stations. Environmental educators and interpretive staff were asked to include information about the Emergence Contest in their programs. A print story about Mojave Max was written and issued as a press release. The story was sent to various newspapers and posted to the DMG web page. 204 students entered the contest. Five students entered winning guesses. Approximately 150 students participated in associated classroom events. The FY 07 goal is to have 1000 student entries.
 - 3. The tortoise outreach program partnered with the Joshua Tree N.P. Association on a grant to the California Community Foundation. The Joshua Tree N.P. Association received \$4,000 for desert tortoise outreach activities from the Community Foundation through the Desert Legacy Fund. This funding provided awards for winning teachers, students and classrooms.

4. Created a series of PSA's about desert tortoises, OHV use, and raven management. The PSA's were broadcast to an estimated listener audience of 260,000 people.
5. Wrote and released three news stories on desert tortoises to the print media. The stories were written by journalist Mark Wheeler.
 - i. Mojave Max Emergence Contest. The story covers how the contest started, why it is needed, who is running it, and how to enter.
 - ii. Headstarting. The article describes how military bases are using science to increase desert tortoise populations.
 - iii. Desert Managers Group. This piece focuses on what efforts government agencies are making to bring about recovery of the desert tortoise under the national tortoise recovery plan.
6. Desert Tortoise education kits (Tortoise Trunks) were developed by Joshua Tree National Park's professional education staff in cooperation with the DMG and the DTOC. The kits were reviewed by classroom educators experienced with using environmental education activities in the classroom.
7. The first edition of *Tortoise Times* was completed and published in July 2006.
8. A second printing (20,000 copies) of the Defenders of Wildlife color brochure *You're in Desert Tortoise Country* was received and is currently in distribution. A third reprint is in process. The brochure targets desert recreation users with information and behavioral protocols for tortoise friendly desert recreation.
9. The desert tortoise public attitude survey was designed and approved under contract to Dr. Jerry Vaske of Colorado State University's Department of Natural Resource Recreation & Tourism, Human Dimensions in Natural Resources Unit. The study area for the Project includes the entire California desert (OHV Form D). Phase One of the survey was mailed to participants and is in progress.
10. The Defenders of Wildlife has completed text for a raven brochure. They are currently contracting with a graphic designer to design the brochure.
11. The DTOC, in conjunction with the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program and the University of Redlands, Redlands Institute initiated development of a desert tortoise web portal. The desert tortoise web portal will contain scientific research papers and data available on a password-protected area of the site. Public information on the site will be built around three primary themes: a desert tortoise calendar, tortoise news releases, and

links to other websites dealing with desert tortoise conservation issues. FWS agreed to submit an application for the www.deserttortoise.gov domain name.

12. The desert tortoise outreach work group in cooperation with the Joshua Tree National Park Association developed a marketing tag line, ***One desert. One tortoise. One chance.*** Joshua Tree National Park Association is working with a graphic designer to develop a stylized desert tortoise logo using line art with Mexican/ Hispanic motifs.
- B. The DMG assisted the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and the Center for Collaborative Policy in completing a situation assessment to determine the feasibility of developing regional recovery action plans in a collaborative process.
 - C. Coordination among DMG member agencies has continued relative to the Ft. Irwin desert tortoise translocation project as well as current headstarting activities.
 - D. The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office Science Advisory Committee (SAC) reviewed the current status of knowledge of disease in desert tortoises at its September 16-17, 2006, meeting. The committee is now collecting information needed to make recommendations to prevent or minimize transmission of disease between tortoises.
 - E. A summary report of the 2001-2005 range-wide monitoring efforts was completed in October 2006. The report is posted and available on the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office web page and the Desert Managers Group website.
 - F. A preliminary evaluation of the range-wide monitoring program, including Line Distance Sampling (LDS), was included in the 2001-2005 summary report. The program continues to be evaluated and modified, as necessary, in preparation for sampling in 2007.
 - G. Opportunities to integrate LDS and PSP efforts remain on hold, although draft recovery criteria under development by the SAC may lead to specific recommendations.
 - H. All LDS data from 2001-2005 have been provided to the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) for incorporation into and distribution via a web accessible database. A temporary web-accessible database is currently available (www.mojavedata.gov/lds) allowing DTRO controlled access to the data.
 - I. All tortoise data related to the Ft. Irwin desert tortoise translocation project are currently being provided to and managed by MDEP, as stipulated in the FWS recovery permit for the project. Integration of data from other tortoise projects and identification of data requirements are pending development of the recovery database.

- J. FWS prepared a preliminary NEPA document for reducing raven predation on juvenile desert tortoise that has been reviewed by the DMG Raven Work Group and the FWS Office of Migratory Birds.
- K. FWS coordinated with Native American Tribes on the proposed NEPA action to reduce raven predation on the desert tortoise.
- L. FWS worked with DMG Federal agencies to incorporate additional raven management actions, outlined in the proposed action, on lands they manage.
- M. FWS met with electrical utility companies and discussed ways they could help manage ravens on their facilities.
- N. USGS continued G0 tortoise activity studies.
- O. USGS completed a draft of the Desert Tortoise Habitat Model and is cooperating with the FWS DTRO for evaluation of FY07 monitoring strata using output from the draft model.

Goal 5. Protect cultural resources and enhance public awareness of the sensitivity and value of paleontological and cultural resources in the California deserts.

- A. A subgroup of the PACRAT conducted testing and evaluation of the automated Mojave Desert Cultural Resource Program (MDCUP) formerly known as MDHRGIS. The deliverables from this significant partnering effort between the DMG and the California Office of Historic Preservation that has spanned the last four years were completed in October 2006. This system allows cultural resource specialists to conduct queries of the underlying cultural resources database by text, site number, or map interface and allows downloading of site data, shape files, and site reports.
- B. Conducted DMG member agency training on the MDCUP system at the NPS offices in Barstow on November 29, 2006.
- C. The Edwards AFB Cultural Resources Program sponsored a survey of looting and vandalism of archaeological sites among member agencies that also included information about what each agency was doing to protect their cultural resources.
- D. The group conducted focused discussions on the burgeoning development of major energy corridors throughout the desert. Little could be accomplished in FY 06 by the group however, cultural resource managers of member agencies are now alerted to this issue and its possible implications for their jurisdictions.

Goal 6. DMG agencies will strive to understand and work collaboratively to resolve conflicts in each agency's mission.

- A. Through regular DMG meetings and related activities, DMG agencies gained a greater appreciation of each agency's mission and programs.

Goal 7. Develop a coordinated interagency system for delivering useful, comprehensive and consistent information about desert resources and recreation opportunities.

- A. The Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) maintained the California deserts website, www.californiadesert.gov.
- B. California State Parks maintained and operated the interagency "gateway" visitor center at Lancaster, California.

Goal 8. Coordinate scientific studies and monitoring programs needed for effective resource management.

- A. A book length manuscript, *THE MOJAVE DESERT: Ecosystem Processes and Sustainability*, resulting from the Mojave Desert Science Symposium, was submitted and externally peer-reviewed by University of Nevada Press. Based on those reviews it was accepted for publication.
- B. USGS worked with representatives from NPS, BLM, USFWS and UNLV to develop a disturbance/restoration database for Clark County, Nevada that will be used to document disturbances based on a standard protocol for all agencies and document the details of restoration activities so that restoration success can be monitored in the future. Agencies are currently populating the database with data on their disturbances/restoration efforts.
- C. The Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (MDEP) developed a web accessible Research Inventory Database. The database template is online and available for use at <http://www.dmg.gov/science/>.

Goal 9. Inventory, monitor, and protect desert water resources.

- A. DMG agencies utilized the Level I protocols provided by the Desert Research Institute for inventorying the hydrological and biological characteristics and quality of desert springs.
- B. DOI agencies held coordination meetings in accordance with the 2004 Amargosa Basin MOA.

Goal 10. Integrate and share data and database management systems needed for effective resource management and planning.

- A. The MDEP maintained its GIS database (www.mojavedata.gov) of natural and cultural resources in the California deserts.

Goal 11. Ensure the orderly and efficient operation of the DMG and its work groups.

- A. The DMG updated and finalized its FY 06 Work Plan and accomplishment report in April 2006.
- B. The Mojave Desert Ecosystem Program (DOD) maintained the DMG website (www.dmg.gov) to allow for the efficient dissemination of information about the DMG and its work group activities.
- C. The DMG continued coordination with the Clark County HCP on development and implementation of its desert tortoise education and outreach program in California.

Goal 12. Garner support for the DMG, its mission, activities, and funding initiatives.

- A. Briefings on DMG activities and accomplishments were provided to a variety of government and non-government entities.

Goal 13. Make high priority Abandoned Mine Land (AML) sites that pose a significant environmental and safety threat safe by reducing or removing physical and chemical hazards associated with the site.

- A. The HAZMAT Work Group initiated discussion on development of a comprehensive list of AML sites within the DMG's area of influence.
- B. The HAZMAT Work Group conducted briefings on the capabilities of each member jurisdiction to restore and render safe AML sites.
- C. The HAZMAT Work Group initiated discussion on prioritization of AML sites in the California deserts and the availability/sources of funding to restore these sites.

Goal 14. Ensure the long-term protection of Mojave Ground Squirrel habitat and the viability of the species.

- A. The DMG Mojave Ground Squirrel Work Group (MGS WG) developed a rough draft conservation strategy for the species and distributed it for review and comment.
- B. DMG MGS WG members briefed the California Mojave Ground Squirrel Technical Advisory Group on the effort to develop a draft conservation strategy.
- C. As part of the conservation strategy development, the DMG MGS WG developed a draft revised MGS range map.

- D. MGS trapping was conducted in the Fort Irwin expansion area, on Edward's Air Force Base and in several other areas within the Mojave Desert.
- E. The DMG MGS WG initiated planning for a Mojave Ground Squirrel monitoring work shop.