



**Summary**  
**DMG Meeting**  
**September 30 – October 1, 2004**  
**Edwards Air Force Base, CA**

**Note:** The **meeting agenda** and **list of attendees** are attached (attachment 1 and 2, respectively). From 0900 to 1200 of the first day of the meeting (items 1 - 9 below) was open to stakeholder attendance. *Major conclusions and action items are italicized.*

**Day 1 – 30 September 2004**

1. **Introduction and Administration** – Bob Wood, EAFB, welcomed all to the meeting and introduced his support staff for the meeting. Shannon Collis provided an administrative/logistical overview of support available to participants during the course of the meeting.
2. **Edwards Air Force Base Mission and Significant Activities** – Bob Wood provided an overview outlining the strategic mission Edwards Air Force Base plays in the nation's national defense strategy. He also discussed some of the major environmental initiatives underway on the base (attachment 1).
3. **Desert Tortoise Recovery Actions**
  - a. **Feral Dog Management Plan Update** (Glenn Black, CDFG) – Glenn discussed the feral dog incident letter and report form developed by the work group. The letter requests agencies and the public complete the feral dog incident report form for current and past incidents with feral dogs and return to Glenn Black. The group will collect and analyzed data for a year. The work group will publish a formal report, at the end of the research year, addressing the severity and impacts of the issue. The letter and form can be accessed on the DMG website. The group sent the letter to all jurisdictions and user groups. The work group is already receiving responses from outside users. The question was asked whether the group has thought about interviewing potential persons with relevant information. Glenn responded that they are setting up meetings with people and organizations they feel have relevant information to share. The work group also plans to follow-up with those entities they do not here from to determine usability of form. The Forest Service's experience with live trapping was discussed as a possible solution.

The Forest Service's relationship with the City of Fontana may be a model to investigate further. It was also mentioned that the feral dog problem is a safety and human health issue. Therefore, it may be appropriate to put the letter and forms in public places such as local museums and to post them on as many agency/county/city websites as possible. *Managers were asked to have their personnel distribute the feral dog survey to persons and organizations they are aware of that might be able to contribute knowledge of such incidents. They were also asked to encourage their personnel to review the survey letter and, if applicable, complete and submit the feral dog incident form.* The Feral Dog Work Group's next meeting is scheduled for 15 November at the Barstow BLM office.

- b. **Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Update** (Bob Williams, USFWS) – Bob stated the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment Committee (DTRPAC) report is due out the end of October. The report is currently undergoing a thorough review by USFWS. The report will be published as a final draft to allow all agencies one last review. The final draft will be distributed to agencies throughout the range of the tortoise for final review. The DTRPAC report will form the basis for changes to the existing desert tortoise recovery plan.
- c. **USFWS Desert Tortoise Recovery Office Plan (DTRO) Update** (Bob Williams, USFWS) – Bob stated the new recovery office coordinator would be hired and working by the end of November. USFWS is also in the process of hiring personnel to provide staff support to the DTRO. Bob mentioned that a letter from Steve Thompson, Operations Manager, California-Nevada USFWS Operations, is forthcoming that discusses the role and responsibilities of the DTRO and articulates a process for updating and implementing the desert tortoise recovery plan. The process stresses the development of local planning groups, from each part of the range, that will develop step down action plans for implementation of priority recovery actions. No decision has been made on whether USFWS will hire a contractor to assist the DTRO in writing the updated recovery plan.

#### 4. Science and Research Reports

- a. **Research Database** (Debra Hughson, Mojave National Preserve) – Debra identified those agencies that have identified administrators responsible for verifying and coordinating input of research data for their respective agencies. She stated she is working with remaining DMG agencies to identify personnel to serve as points of contact for their respective agency. USGS was lauded for the significant effort made to date in inputting information for current USGS project work. The Park Service, working with MDEP, has also begun downloading relevant information from its national database into the system. This will significantly reduce the amount of work required by NPS DMG members to bring their information current. Debra asked that all managers encourage their personnel to go to the database to check it out and provide any feedback they may have on the site. Debra strongly encouraged those agencies not currently participating to identify contact persons in order to get

their data in the system. Not doing so will result in either no information from their agency in the system or MDEP or NPS submitting information to the best of their knowledge for them. ***Debra encouraged the managers to have their contact persons, that have not already done so, contact Eric Boerner to set up an administrator's account. A list of offices/Managers that need to supply points of contact is located at attachment 2. Contact Debra Hughson (760-255-8826) or Eric Boerner (760-255-8886) for additional information.***

- b. **3<sup>rd</sup> Mojave Desert Science Symposium** (Debra Hughson) – Debra handed out the symposium flyer and reported that DMG member agency donations provided a solid foundation for development and execution of the symposium. 61 persons have already signed up to attend. Debra stated early registration ends Oct. 8 (early registration provides a \$50.00 savings). ***She urged Managers and their appropriate staff to register by Oct 8 to get the discounted registration fee.***
- c. **USGS Research Update** (Dr. Todd Esque/Dr. Keith Miles) – Todd reiterated to the group that, through support from the DMG, USGS received funding support for three desert projects:
  - i. Development of a desert tortoise habitat model
  - ii. Development of desert inventoring and monitoring processes
  - iii. Development of a moisture modelTodd stated that database access and archiving is an overarching issue for all agencies. USGS is also participating in the Fort Irwin Expansion Mitigation Working Group addressing the translocation of desert tortoises from the expansion area. Todd stated the University of Redlands has contacted them offering to share work they have already completed on desert tortoise in the expansion area.
- d. **Dr. Keith Miles** presented a discussion on ecology based land management using a process of ecological risk assessment (attachment 3). He described the project currently underway on Edwards Air Force Base using this approach.

## 5. Stakeholder Comments

- a. **Jerry Hillier**
  - i. Jerry thanked the Managers for allowing stakeholder participation in the meeting. Jerry stated he understands the need for open and closed sessions but asked that stakeholder comments be allowed after each discussion topic during open sessions. Doing so would allow for enhanced stakeholder participation and provide better information sharing.
  - ii. Jerry stated he is actively participating in the feral dog issue and has passed the information out to his board members including all counties except Riverside.
  - iii. Jerry asked Bob Williams if a Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group meeting would occur in the near future. Bob stated he is targeting December for a meeting.

- iv. Jerry also wanted to know how/if the USFWS proposal for the DTRO would interface with existing plans/HCPs. Bob stated that it would and that the exact process would be discussed in the DMG's Ad Hoc work group addressing development of a recovery action implementation work group.
  - v. Jerry stated the agenda for day two of the DMG's meeting included several items he would like to participate in. He did not see controversy in these topics. Jerry stated he understands the need for private discussions but wanted to hear status updates on public involved and related issues/topics.
  - b. **Chris Spofera** – Chris echoed Mr. Hillier's comments on topics on day two of the DMG agenda. He would also like to hear discussions and updates on these topics.
6. **Habitat Restoration** (Russell Scofield)
- a. **San Felipe San Sebastian Wash MOU** – Russell stated he removed the indemnity section in the MOU as a result of concerns from the DOI Solicitor and USGS. A copy of the MOU is available on the DMG website under DMG documents for review. *Russell will circulate the revised MOU for signature.*
  - b. **Riparian Habitat Restoration Strategy** – Russell distributed a handout (attachment 4) describing a strategy for addressing tamarisk and restoration actions in general. *Russell requested all Managers review the document and provide feedback/concurrence on 1) the purpose and need articulated in the document and 2) the strategies outlined in the document and the watersheds to which they would apply.*
    - i. **Tamarisk Control** – the overarching strategy outlined will help coordinate range wide control efforts. Agencies reviewing and approving grant proposals want to see aggressive, collaborative strategies before they will review and approve submissions for possible funding. A collaborative strategy will also assist in seeking potential congressional funding.
    - ii. **Strategy Review** – Russell reviewed the approach used to construct Table 1 in the restoration strategy (Table 1 identifies priority watershed for restoration). Russell reviewed of all NPS and BLM spring sites to insure all areas of concern were included. They are included as part of their corresponding watershed. The Colorado River is currently outside the scope of the existing plan. The current plan focuses primarily on the California portion of the Amargosa watershed. He is working with the Nature Conservancy to address parallel efforts for the Nevada portion of this watershed. It was stated the strategy may eventually need to include the Colorado River which would also require coordination with Arizona, Needles and El Centro planning areas. The group asked how this effort ties in with existing Mojave Weed Management Area (WMA) efforts. Russell stated he is actively coordinating with the WMA and keeping the group informed

of his actions. The Mojave WMA will be a part of the strategy and be included as an appendix to the strategy document. DOD lands are not currently included as part of the strategy. Fort Irwin agreed to provide Russell information on restoration activities they are pursuing. MCLB Barstow is actively seeking to become active in the Mojave WMA. They are initiating a wetlands study to determine the extent of tamarisk problems on their lands along the Mojave River. They are attempting to work with the Mojave WMA Mojave River project to address tamarisk issues. It was suggested the flood control agency be contacted to determine their level of interest in participating in development of a strategy. They currently participate in the Mojave WMA who needs to be a major partner in this effort.

- iii. **Restoration Strategy Prioritization Schema** – Based on the limited funding available to implement restoration efforts a prioritization scheme must be developed to prioritize funding against requirements. *Russell stated he will staff prioritization criteria with agency biologists to gain consensus agreement with proposed criteria and meet with agency representatives to obtain agreement and set priorities for final DMG approval.* It was suggested the strategy include long-term continuous maintenance and monitoring of treated areas. Additional recommended prioritization criteria included 1) feasibility of long-term maintenance and 2) an element relating to the probability of success in removing tamarisk and keeping the area clean. It was recommended that Caltrans drainages be included as part of the strategy. *The Managers approved the proposal to develop a work group to establish restoration priorities. Interested Managers were encouraged to send their representatives to the meeting. It was agreed to sublist military WMA participants under the Mojave WMA on table 1. Further discussion is needed concerning the coordination between this DMG effort and ongoing Mojave WMA efforts.*
- iv. **Restoration Priority Setting Meeting and Field Trip for Potential Funders** – *Russell is to finalize a draft strategy for members attending the priority setting meeting. Tentative dates for the Riparian Restoration strategy review and field trip for potential funders are Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>.*

7. **Caltrans Rest Area Project and Update** (James Woolsey, Mojave National Preserve; Elaine Downing, BLM, Needles) – James reported the posters for the I-40 and I-15 rest areas were completed. Examples were available for members to view. One spelling correction was noted. Unless comments are provided by the end of the meeting, the posters will be finalized. James stated Caltrans is also rebuilding rest areas on I-10. The Rest Area work group has hired a design firm (LSA Associates) to develop a conceptual design for the Valley Wells Rest Area on I-15. A \$1.3m grant is available to design and construct environmental exhibits at the rest area. James Woolsey indicated the DMG needs to develop an efficient mechanism that allows

cooperators to pool money to implement interagency projects like Valley Wells. The processes used for current projects were difficult and inefficient and need to be improved. The Valley Wells project will be a prototype for other Caltrans rest area rehab projects in the desert.

8. **Death Valley National Park 2004 Flash Flood** (JT Reynolds, Death Valley National Park) – JT provided a slide presentation depicting the damage sustained by the park during a recent flash flood incident which cost two visitors their lives (attachment 5). All park resources were affected in one way or another by the incident. Many roads and trails in the park are still closed due to damage and blockages. Reconstruction and repair of facilities and services is ongoing but will take some time to complete.
9. **Stakeholder Comments** – (Jerry Hillier, Quad State County Government Coalition)
  - a. Stated he is working with San Bernardino County to get them involved in the Mojave Weed Management Area group. Jerry asked who/how prioritization of WMA projects is accomplished.
  - b. Jerry asked if the Rest Area work group was working with county parks to obtain their input for developing appropriate posters. Both Elaine Downing and James Woolsey responded they are seeking county park input.

## **Day 2 – October 1**

10. **Follow-up of Day 1 Discussions** – No comments made/no discussion required.
11. **Effects of Recent Court Ruling on Desert Tortoise Biological Opinions** (Ray Bransfield, USFWS) - Ray summarized the recent court ruling on the biological opinions issued concerning treatment of DT critical habitat in several BLM land Management plans (attachment 6) –This decision raises several questions:
  - a. Will the entire biological opinion be invalidated or just the portion dealing with critical habitat?
  - b. Are incidental takes in the BO now invalid?
  - c. Does USFWS have to retroactively look at all BOs and retrofit them to be consistent with the new court ruling?Ray stated this ruling may require a change to the section of the Code of Federal Regulations dealing with adverse modification of critical habitat. He further stated all new BOs will use either the Judges definition or guidance from the USFWS regional office which has not yet been completely formulated. For future BOs, USFWS will provide greater focus on the impact of a project on the recovery of the species (not just survival of the species)
12. **Desert Tortoise Head Starting** (Mark Hagan, EAFB) – Mark provided a presentation on EAFB's desert tortoise head starting project (attachment 7). Questions were asked on how USFWS views captive bred animals:
  - a. Are captive bred tortoises protected under the Endangered Species Act?
  - b. Why isn't head starting used in a broader scope to recover the desert tortoise?

Bob Williams stated head starting is an important tool in desert tortoise recovery but, USFWS has yet to determine whether desert tortoises raised in captivity and released into the wild will be counted towards achieving recovery goals

**13. Desert Tortoise Monitoring – Line Distance Sampling (Bob Williams, USFWS)**

- a. Bob provided an update on the status of the 2004 LDS field season. Preliminary numbers of transects walked, kilometers walked, live encounters, and carcass encounters was provided at the San Diego DMG meeting. Since that time the USFWS sponsored Desert Tortoise Monitoring Implementation Committee (DTMIC) met in September to discuss analysis of 2004 data. By all accounts, 2004 was a good year. A lot of up front planning went into the effort which was very helpful.
- b. Bob stated the start of the LDS project in 2001 was a good one in terms of data. However, in 2002 and 2003 decisions were made concerning the distribution of transects that resulted in a decreased value in the data collected. This knowledge was included in planning for the 2004 effort making it much more effective.
- c. As part of an adaptive process, the DTMIC anticipates it may take several years to standardize the monitoring effort to obtain the maximum potential from the technique. The DTMIC is also addressing the data management and data analysis aspects of monitoring.
- d. A priority for the new DTRO will be to provide detailed reports on all previous years monitoring activities and to provide future reporting in a timely manner to assist managers in making management decisions.
- e. Planning for the 2005 LDS field season is underway. The new desert tortoise coordinator will be on board in sufficient time to start addressing funding issues. Bob stated USFWS is exploring alternative funding sources to help relieve funding pressures on each of the agencies.
- f. Monitoring is a major component of DTRO duties and responsibilities. USFWS wants to expand monitoring efforts to include collecting habitat and threats data. Future monitoring will also include additional blood data for genetic and disease research.
- g. CDFG voiced a concern over the use of toenail clipping to obtain blood samples from desert tortoises. USFWS and CDFG need to collaboratively review the process to resolve concerns and potential challenges.
- h. Bob was also asked how USFWS plans on comparing and integrating head starting data, permanent study plot data, and LDS transect data. Bob stated this would be a focus of the DTRO once it was established.

**14. Northern and Eastern Colorado (NECO) and Northern and Eastern Mojave (NEMO) Land Management Plan Implementation (Dick Crowe, BLM CDD) -**

Dick provided a discussion on BLM's approach to implementing the management prescriptions contained in the NECO and NEMO plans (attachment 8). BLM sees implementation of both plans as a cooperative endeavor requiring two levels of participation. The first level of cooperation would occur at the bioregion level where resource specialists from the cooperators involved in each plan would work to deal

with day to day issues and details. The second level of cooperation would involve the Managers of the DMG. The bioregion work group would bring broad, range wide issues not solvable at the bioregion level to the DMG for resolution. This would include changes to existing strategies based on adaptive management. Dick outlined the need for regular bioregional cooperator meetings to begin this process. The initial meeting for the NECO plan has already been held.

15. **Desert Tortoise Education and Outreach Project Update** (John Hamill, DOI) - John provided a handout (attachment 9) outlining the status of the project. The DMG submitted a grant to the OHV Commission to partially fund the outreach and education effort (\$75K). The Commission staff requested CDFG become involved collaboratively and fiscally. CDFG has verbally committed to providing \$35K in funding to support the project. A request for \$68K was sent to the US Fish and Wildlife Foundation. No word at this time on the likelihood of funding as a result of this request. The Defenders of Wildlife have asked to participate in the program. They have volunteered to hire an outreach coordinator that would work with communities on educating them on the impact of ravens on tortoises. Their contribution would be considered matching funds. ***John asked the Managers to designate a lead agency for the Project on behalf of the DMG.*** The lead agency would be responsible for recruiting an outreach coordinator position and would be the focal point for handling all funding received for the project. ***John requested approval from the Managers for (a) JTNP to serve as the lead agency for the project and (b) Defenders of Wildlife participation in the project. The Managers agreed.*** Funding commitments are in support of a three year education and outreach pilot program. Ultimately, the Managers will need to address how the group will internalize the project for long term maintenance and support when the NGO funding expires.
16. **Raven Management EA – Public Comments and Next Steps** (Amy Fesnock, Joshua Tree NP) - Amy briefed managers that scoping for the Raven Management Environmental Assessment occurred from mid July through mid August. 201 comments were received and have been compiled. There was mixed support for lethal versus non lethal means of controlling ravens. Based on concerns over potential lawsuits, the work group needs to thoroughly reassess the existing document to insure it is legally sufficient. Based on comments received, concerns exist within the ad hoc group that an Environmental Impact Study may be necessary. If this occurs, timelines for the project will be extended significantly. ***The ad hoc work group will meet on 9 Nov. 2004 and discuss whether the EA should transition to an EIS as a result of comments received during scoping.***
17. **Desert Tortoise Ad Hoc Work Group Report/Recommendations Related to the Role of the DMG in Desert Tortoise Recovery** (John Hamill, DOI) – John provided a presentation on the work the Ad Hoc work group has done to date (attachment 10). He mentioned USFWS is developing a letter to be sent to all concerned addressing the establishment of a Desert Tortoise Recovery Office and the process to be used in updating the existing Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. ***The Managers requested to see***

*a draft of the proposed letter before it is distributed to the public. USFWS made no commitment to provide Managers a draft prior to distribution.* The process for updating the desert tortoise recovery plan involves the establishment of several implementation planning work groups across the range. Stakeholder participation in this group is required by USFWS. The mechanics for allowing stakeholder participation is not yet solidified and needs to be agreed upon by Managers. The primary focus of the work group is to agree upon and recommend high priority recovery actions that all involved agree to implement. To assist in this process, the University of Redlands, Redlands Institute, was approached to determine the feasibility of conducting a review of current land management plans, the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment Committee Report, and the recovery plan to develop a list of common recovery actions from which to develop the required high priority recovery actions. *The Managers agreed, in principle, to establish a DMG sponsored Desert Tortoise Recovery Action Implementation Planning work group. The Ad Hoc work group was tasked to define the mission, responsibilities and membership of the work group and the process for stakeholder participation. The Managers also concurred with Redlands Institute conducting a land management plan/recovery action evaluation.*

18. **Mojave Desert Historical Resources GIS (MDHRGIS)** (Clarence Everly, DOD; Steve Miksell, California OHP; John Thomas, California OHP; Eric Allison, California OHP) – Clarence began the session by providing a historical overview of the MDHRGIS. He described how it originated, briefly described development of the existing system, discussed the DMG’s participation in the project to date, and outlined what the DMG’s issues are with the current system. Clarence also stated his appreciation for the proactive approach Mr. Wayne Donaldson, the current SHPO, is using to address DMG concerns and ultimately provide a useable/useful tool for cultural resource specialists.
  - a. Mr. Steve Miksell, the Deputy SHPO, offered Wayne’s apologies for not being able to attend the DMG meeting and provide comments to the group. Steve relayed, on behalf of Wayne, the SHPO is committed to providing a useful product that meets the DMG’s needs and wants to use this task as a means to enter into a long-term, fruitful relationship with the Managers addressing continued maintenance and functionality for the system.
  - b. Eric Allison, the SHPO’s MDHRGIS project officer, gave the DMG an overview of the direction in which the project is going, provided estimated timelines for major project component completion, and provided a tentative final delivery date (attachment 11). Training on the system was also discussed and the SHPO is very aware that at least two training sessions will be conducted for users. Eric also discussed the difference between the data OHP maintains and that found in Information Centers. The SHPO is endeavoring to provide all the OHP data and as much Information Center data in the system as is possible.
  - c. *All MDHRGIS partners will receive a copy of the interface developed to access the data and a copy of the final database. These items will be*

*distributed through MDEP. The SHPO will continue to work with John, Clarence, and PACRAT to provide the best product possible.*

19. **Coordinated Natural Resource Monitoring Update** (John Hamill, DOI) – John provided an overview of the purpose and intent for the planned Coordinated Natural Resource Monitoring meeting (attachment 12). He stated the meeting would focus on what should be monitored and how it should be monitored versus data management of monitoring data. John asked the Managers if they still supported such an effort. *The Managers agreed that coordinated natural resource monitoring, to the extent possible, was a good idea and supported sending their resource specialists to the meeting.*
20. **Interagency Fire Management Plans for the California Desert Conservation Area** (Ron Woychak, BLM) – In light of last years extensive, multi-jurisdictional fires, the Department of the Interior has directed all of its agencies to redo and standardize fire management planning. Many Interior agencies used different approaches in fire management planning. Standardizing these efforts would enhance coordination in execution of fire fighting efforts. The approach being used is to divide the California desert into different fire management areas. Interior agencies have begun a coordinated analytical process. They are reaching out to all fire fighting agencies in an effort to gain as much information as possible on high risk areas. All DMG member fire fighting agencies are invited to participate in this process. *Ron requested information from all managers. He will forward the information requests through Clarence and John to be routed to appropriate personnel.*
21. The next DMG meeting will be held at the Anza Borrego State Park on 12 – 13 January 2005.