

Summary
of
Desert Tortoise Recovery Actions
Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit

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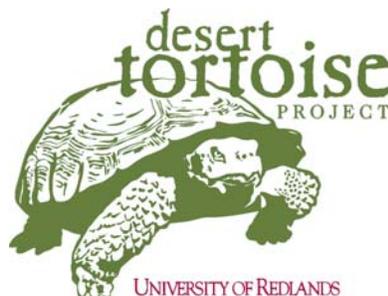


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Recovery Task Summary – Redlands Institute Desert Tortoise Project

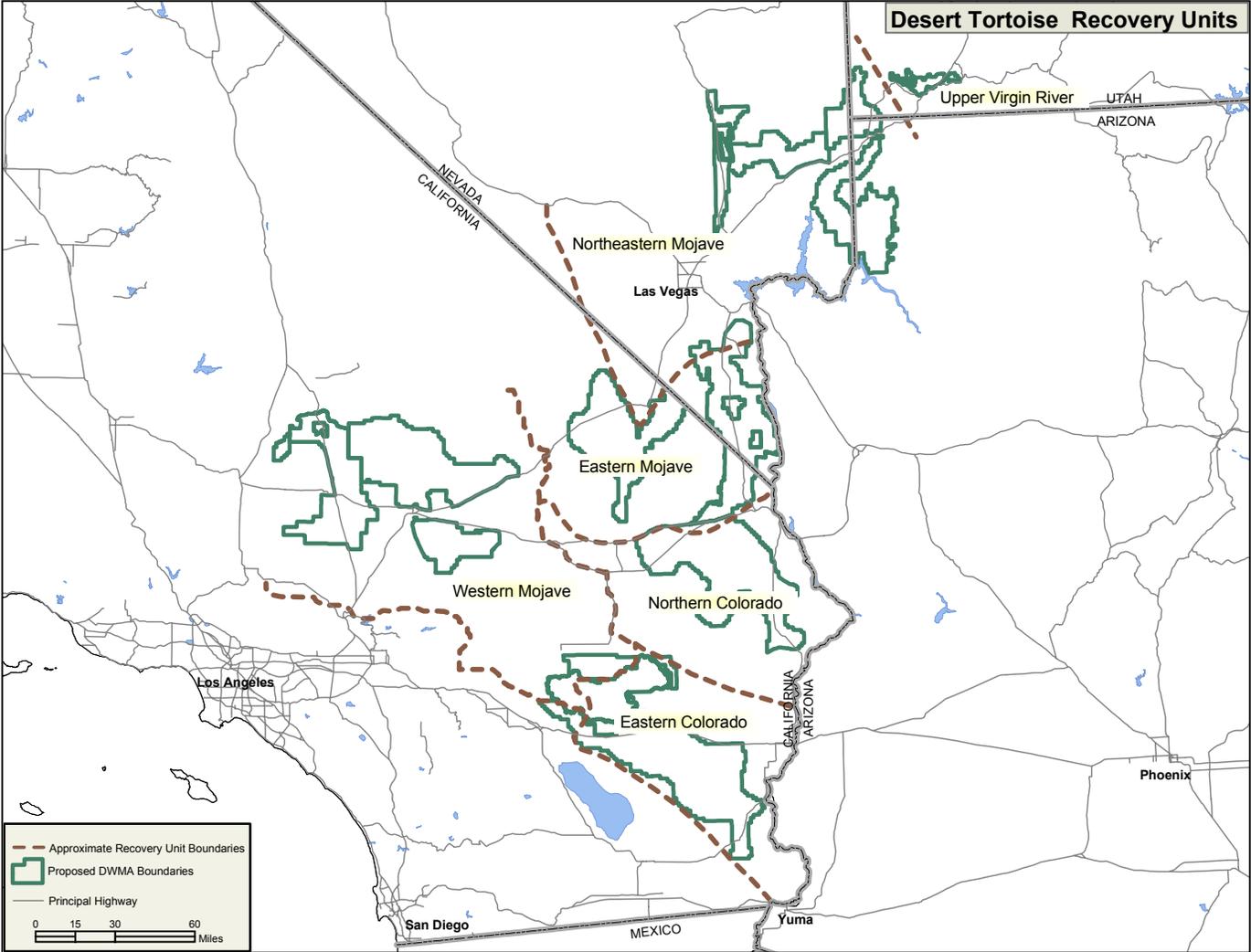


Figure 1. Desert Tortoise Recovery Units in the Mojave Desert

Recovery Task Summary – Redlands Institute Desert Tortoise Project

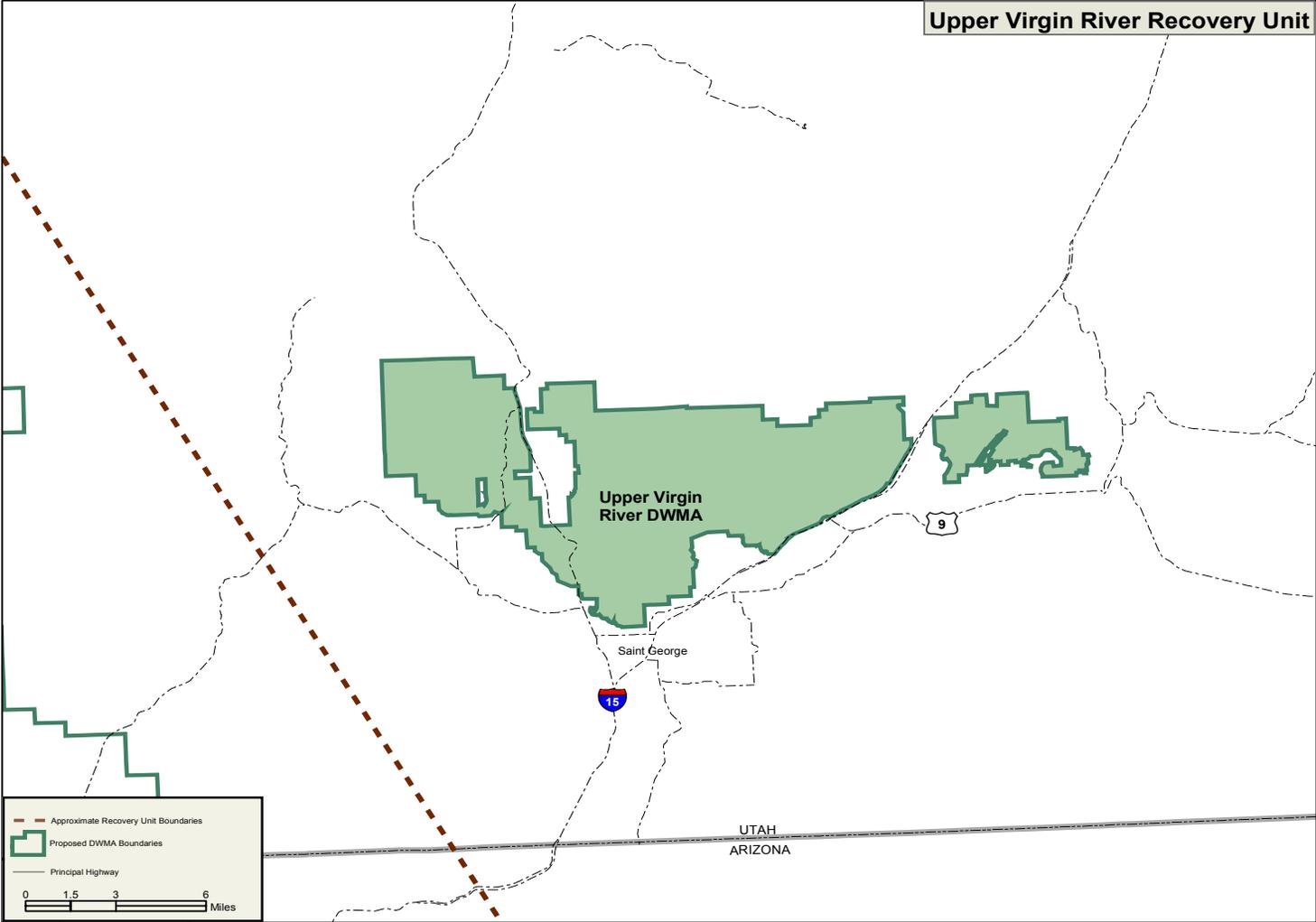


Figure 2. Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit

Introduction

The following report provides a summary of completed and ongoing recovery, monitoring, and research actions for the desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii* in the Upper Virgin River Recovery Unit. Information is summarized by each of the recovery actions identified in the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan (USFWS, 1994). Information was obtained from surveys conducted in July 2002 of the land and resource agencies and entities responsible for desert tortoise recovery and management. The information provided within this document was taken directly from the survey responses. Where no answer was provided the corresponding cell was left blank. No attempt has been made to independently verify the accuracy and completeness of the information provided on the surveys. Contact information has been provided for the individuals who completed the questionnaire to aid in the evaluation of the information contained herein.

The information in this report will be used by the Desert Manager Group (DMG) and the Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) to plan and manage an effective and coordinated recovery program for the desert tortoise. The report will be updated annually. Copies of these reports can be obtained from the DMG website at www.dmg.gov/documents.

Comments on the report are welcome and should be sent to:

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Recovery Action Summary – Upper Virgin Recovery Unit

DWMA	Upper Virgin River	
Agency	UTBLM	Washington County (UT)
Recovery Action		
<p>Establish at least one desert wildlife management area of at least 1,000 square miles in each recovery unit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Consolidate public lands with in RC Reserve for desert tortoise management (SGFORMP, FW-02, FW-16) · Established RC Reserve (approximately 62,000 acres), (Implementation Agreement, SGFORMP, FW-16) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The county and the USFWS signed the Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan for desert tortoise in March 1996; the plan designated the 62,000 acre (100 square miles) Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. The Upper Virgin River is the smallest DWMA; known to be far below recommended size in the 1994 recovery plan. · The HCP created an ongoing administration within the county government for the purpose of minimizing, mitigating, and monitoring impacts on the desert tortoise in the county. Acquisition of habitat, fencing, enforcement, education, and removal of competing uses comprises the mitigation for take outside of the reserve.
<p>Secure habitat within desert wildlife management areas</p>	<p>· A total of 7,766 acres of private and state lands (estimated value \$61,631,500) has been acquired in the RC Reserve by BLM and the State of Utah. Of this figure, the State has acquired 1196 acres with BLM assistance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Development impact fees were assessed beginning in 1991 to fund the HCP · The county hired an HCP Administrator in 1994. A biologist and field assistant were hired in 1996. · Following signing of HCP, HCP partners (including Washington County) worked cooperatively and diligently to acquire privately owned properties located with the boundaries of the reserve. BLM and State of Utah have acquired through purchase and exchange over 7,766 acres of privately owned land within the reserve since the signing of the HCP. A significant exchange of State Trust Lands Property (SITLA) within the reserve is currently being considered by congress; the proposal would immediately transfer 2500 acres to the BLM for management as part of the reserve, and provide for the acquisition of the remaining SITLA acres over the next several years. When the reserve was established, 18,600 acres within its boundaries owned by private, municipal and State Trust Lands were targeted for acquisition on a willing seller basis.

Recovery Action Summary – Upper Virgin Recovery Unit

DWMA	Upper Virgin River	
Agency	UTBLM	Washington County (UT)
Recovery Action		
<p>Secure habitat within desert wildlife management areas</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fencing, funded by the HCP, was begun immediately to secure habitat in vulnerable areas such as along major roads (I-15 and U-18). The boundary of the reserve is being fenced incrementally as development occurs nearby. Fencing keeps tortoises in and incompatible uses, (OHV especially), out. · The county facilitated the collaborative development of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Public Use Plan which specifically addressed recreation and other uses. The plan carefully designated trails and roads and closed unnecessary and redundant routes. It was adopted by the county commission in July 2000 and the BLM in 2001.
<p>Connect functional habitat within recovery units wherever enough extant desert tortoise habitat exists</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Connection of functional desert tortoise habitats in the RC Reserve has been accomplished through acquisition of 7,766 acres of private and state lands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The reserve (the only DWMA within the recovery unit) was designed to achieve this objective.
<p>Number (or miles) of roads closed or rehabilitated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Approximately 3.5 miles of closed road has been rehabilitated to date. · It is also estimated that over 17 single width trail routes, 8 double width and many other roads have been closed to non-motorized travelers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · It is estimated that 40 dirt roads exist in the reserve; only 5 roads remain open for public travel. · Service roads have been gated and locked. · As resources allow, roads which have been closed are being rehabilitated.

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Recovery Action		
<p>All competitive and organized events on designated roads</p>	<p>· Competitive recreation events were originally not allowed in RC Reserve (SGFORMP, FW-16), however, through the Public Use Plan, low impact events can be authorized on designated roads only by BLM and Snow Canyon Park.</p>	<p>· The HCP restricted competitive and organized events by management zone (the reserve is divided into 5 zones). In the most sensitive areas, it recommended that such events not be allowed, yet such uses may be allowed on designated roads in areas of low density habitat.</p> <p>· The Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Public Use Plan further restricted competitive and organized events. It requires that such events must first obtain a special use permit, and the permit can only be issued if listed criteria are met.</p>
<p>Prohibit habitat destructive military maneuvers</p>	<p>· No such activities allowed (SGFORMP, FW-16)</p>	<p>· The HCP restricted vehicles to designated roads. There is no known history of military maneuvers in the reserve.</p>
<p>Prohibit clearing for agriculture, landfills, and any other surface disturbance that diminishes the capacity of the land to support desert tortoises, other wildlife, and native vegetation</p>	<p>· RC Reserve has the following provisions governing surface disturbing activities: closed to fuel wood and mineral material sale, right-of-way avoidance area, withdrawn from mineral entry, oil and gas category 3 (No surface occupancy), use restrictions on recreational activities (SGFORMP, FW-16). BLM has issued several right-of-ways to utility companies for power lines, pipelines, and wells. These are allowed in the HCP with installation being completed using utility protocols for protection of desert tortoises.</p>	<p>The HCP prohibits such activities within the reserve, except for minimal construction and maintenance disturbance for utilities such as wells and powerlines. Surface disturbance within the reserve must follow a USFWS approved utility development protocol developed as part of the HCP.</p>

Recovery Action Summary – Upper Virgin Recovery Unit

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<p>Prohibit clearing for agriculture, landfills, and any other surface disturbance that diminishes the capacity of the land to support desert tortoises, other wildlife, and native vegetation</p>	<p>Compensation has been paid where permanent loss of desert tortoise habitat has occurred (SGFORMP, FW-16).</p>	
<p>Acres of grazing allotments (sheep and cattle) closed or bought out for conservation</p>	<p>· A total of 30,725 acres of livestock grazing lands in the RC Reserve have been bought out and are closed to livestock grazing (SGFORMP, WL-16).</p>	<p>· The county has met its obligation under the HCP by purchasing and retiring all grazing allotments located within the reserve on a willing seller basis. A total of 1517 AUMs were retired at a cost of \$113,775.</p>
<p>Number of wild horses and burros removed</p>	<p>NO</p>	<p>· No wild horses or burros were present within the reserve when it was established.</p>
<p>Prohibit vegetation harvest, except by permit; collection of biological specimens, except by permit</p>	<p>· Harvest of vegetative material is prohibited in the RC Reserve except by permit for scientific purposes (SGFORMP, FW-16, Public Use Plan).</p>	<p>· The RCDR Public Use Plan expressly states that such harvesting and collecting is prohibited within the reserve without appropriate permits issued by USFWS and UDWR.</p>

Recovery Action Summary – Upper Virgin Recovery Unit

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Recovery Action		
Number of illegal dumps cleaned up (and tons of trash removed, if this information is available)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One illegal dump was cleaned up with 28 tons of material removed. A conservation easement was obtained for the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The county worked closely with St. George City and the BLM to clean up the old city dump located within high-density tortoise habitat in the reserve. Debris was removed with the help of volunteers and the dump site capped with top soil and reseeded. Countless illegal dumpsites, estimated at over 30 in number, have been cleaned up by the county with the help of volunteer groups.
Prohibit deposition of captive or displaced desert tortoises or other animals, except under authorized translocation research projects	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The county administers the translocation of wild, displaced, ELISA negative desert tortoises into a designated area of the reserve. This particular location was selected for its general lack of native tortoises. UNR conducted research (led by Dr. Richard Tracy and funded by USFWS) prior to the initiation of the county's translocation program to determine if translocation could be successful at this particular site. USFWS continues to fund blood testing for tortoises taken under the county incidental take permit. Captive tortoises which come to the county are transferred to the county's secure temporary care facility, where they are kept separate from displaced animals, until UDWR places them in the state's captive program.
Prohibit uncontrolled dogs out of vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uncontrolled dogs are prohibited in the RC Reserve (Public Use Plan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HCP and the Public Use Plan both state that pets must be on a leash within the reserve. The county facilitated the adoption of municipal and county ordinances requiring dogs to be on leash within the reserve.
Restrict establishment of new roads in desert wildlife management areas	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HCP restricts the development of new paved roads within the reserve. If new utility access roads are approved by the Habitat Conservation Advisory Committee (multi-agency and local interests represented), roads must be constructed following a Utility Development Protocol which avoids take and is approved by USFWS.

Recovery Action Summary – Upper Virgin Recovery Unit

DWMA	Upper Virgin River	
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Recovery Action		
Location and miles of desert tortoise fencing installed (include number of culverts designed or suitable for desert tortoises)	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The county has funded or coordinated the installation of 40 miles of tortoise fencing. One mile of fencing was funded by a \$7,000 grant the county received from the National Wildlife Federation. · The county facilitated the adoption of municipal and county ordinances requiring adjacent landowners to enter into an approved fencing agreement prior to development. · fencing along the reserve boundary is typically designed to be people proof, pet proof, and tortoise proof.
Number of acres or list of revegetation projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Approximately 6 acres of disturbed habitat in the RC Reserve have been reseeded. · Approximately 4 acres of habitat in the RC Reserve have received active rehabilitation or naturalization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the county has reseeded an estimated 5 acres of old roads within the reserve
Sign and fence desert wildlife management areas as needed	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Perimeter and hazard fencing funded and installed by HCP and development · Boundary signs inform people when they are entering reserve and advise of vehicle, pet, and target shooting restrictions. · Trail signs identify designated trail routes, mark trail junctions, and advise users to stay on designated trails. · Trailhead bulletin board signs include map of trails, reserve regulations, and resource information.

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Recovery Action		
<p>Establish environmental education programs and facilities.</p>	<p>· Several lectures (Brown Bag Lunches) have been made to the Public concerning the RC Reserve and management of desert tortoise in Washington County. Brochures on special status animals in the RC Reserve are disseminated from the Interagency Office Information Center.</p>	<p>· The county has an education outreach program, which travels to schools, civic groups, and municipal government meetings to educate the public about the reserve and the area’s wildlife. Captive animals are used very successfully to increase audience receptivity.</p> <p>· The county published the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Map and Trail Guide in June 2002, the first official map and significant educational publication on the reserve and its resources. The publication is available for the public to purchase at outdoor retailers in the area.</p> <p>· Using resources from the Map and Trail Guide, the county posted an informative website about the reserve and its resources. The URL is www.redcliffsdesertreserve.com</p>
<p>Monitor desert tortoise populations within recovery units</p>	<p>NO</p>	<p>· To date the county has funded five years of population monitoring conducted by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources at \$115,000 per year</p>
<p>Initiate research necessary to monitor and guide recovery efforts</p>	<p>· The BLM is presently developing a challenge cost share agreement with Northern Arizona University to complete a Human Impact Monitoring Study in the RC Reserve.</p>	<p>· The county blood tests all displaced tortoises for URTD. Blood tests are paid for by USFWS. To date, 220 tortoises have been blood tested; 51 (23%) have tested ELISA positive. ELISA positive animals were transferred to Colorado State University for research purposes.</p>
<p>Activities associated with predator control</p>	<p>· BLM has coordinated with APHIS on several control measures in the RC Reserve where predators (coyotes) were affecting private lands adjacent to the RC Reserve.</p>	<p>· The county obtained a raven depredation permit in the event individual ravens need to be eliminated as threats to tortoises.</p> <p>· The county maintains a database of known raptor and raven nest sites, which enables monitoring of hatchling predation.</p>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

Glossary

Glossary

Common Abbreviations

ACEC	Area of Critical Environmental Concern
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CALTRANS	California Department of Transportation
CDCA	California Desert Conservation Area
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DEVA	Death Valley National Park
DFG	Department of Fish and Game
DTNA	Desert Tortoise Natural Area
DTPC	Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
DWMA	Desert Wildlife Management Area
Edwards AFB	Edwards Air Force Base
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ELISA	Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay
FONSI	Finding Of No Significant Impact
GFD	Game and Fish Department
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
HCP	Habitat Conservation Plan
INRMP	Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan
JOTR	Joshua Tree National Park
LAME	Lake Mead National Recreation Area
LDS	Line Distance Sampling
LVFO	Las Vegas Field Office
NA	Not Applicable
NBS	National Biological Survey
NECO	Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert Planning Unit
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Agency
NTC Ft Irwin	National Training Center Fort Irwin
NPS	National Park Service
MCAGCC	Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
MCLB	Marine Corps Logistics Base
MOJA	Mojave National Preserve
MSHCP	Multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan
UDWR	Utah Department of Wildlife Resources
UNLV	University of Nevada Las Vegas
URTD	Upper Respiratory Tract Disease
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps

OHV	Off-Highway Vehicle
ORV	Off-Road Vehicle
RMP	Resource Management Plan
SCA	Student Conservation Association