



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
DESERT TORTOISE RECOVERY OFFICE
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234
Reno, Nevada 89502
Ph: 775-861-6300 ~ Fax: 775-861-6301



Arizona-Nevada-Utah Recovery Planning Work Group

Threat Session Summary March 22-23, 2007 USGS, Henderson, Nevada

Desired Outcomes

- Establish up-to-date geospatial inventory of threats within jurisdictional boundaries of land management agencies and across AZ-NV-UT portion of the desert tortoise's range.
- Establish up-to-date geospatial inventory of current recovery actions within jurisdictional boundaries of land management agencies and across AZ-NV-UT portion of the desert tortoise's range.
- Identify best agency contacts to provide additional data on threats and current recovery actions to Redlands Institute.
- Determine and start collecting baseline information for prototype Desert Tortoise Recovery Decision Support System.
- Initiate preparation for developing Recovery Action Plans during next round of workshops.

Day 1

The workshop began with an overview of the recovery planning process, mainly focused on the steps between this workshop and the deadline to complete a revised draft recovery plan by September 2007, as well as sideboards within which the work group will be operating (attached to this summary and approved by consensus of the work group). The concept of the recovery decision support system was introduced, particularly with regard to its role in compiling and using available information, along with various decision-making criteria and conceptual models, to help evaluate various management alternatives and in providing a framework for adaptive management throughout the process of recovery implementation. Importantly, the decision support system is expected to be developed to the "prototype" stage during the current planning process, with revision and improvement to occur over time, especially as new information becomes available. Redlands Institute (RI) staff also presented an overview of the threat and recovery action data that they have compiled in preparation for the workshop. Copies of the presentations are currently available on the Redlands Institute's recovery planning website at www2.institute.redlands.edu/DTRO/, but will ultimately to be transferred to deserttortoise.gov.

The participants divided into three regional breakout groups (southern Nevada, Beaver Dam Slope/Arizona Strip, and Upper Virgin River) and reviewed/added to the threats maps that RI staff had compiled. One note from the BDS/Arizona Strip group was that the most comprehensive way to get detailed threat information is through BLM's NEPA logs. In the Arizona Strip Field Office, they have 10-15 projects every year to build public facilities, give leases for facilities, schools, parks, cemeteries, etc. However, fire is perceived to be the biggest current threat to desert tortoises. The groups identified many potential threats on the maps, completed forms with more information, and identified additional data to forward to RI.

Day 2

After a brief overview and introductions, representatives of each of Day 1's breakout groups presented a summary of what they identified in their groups. Much less information was available to RI for this part of the tortoise's range, and the groups filled in a lot of gaps. Again, fire was reiterated as a significant, if not the most significant, threat in the region.

The next activity had the participants divide into four new breakout groups (BLM, counties, state/federal wildlife agencies, coop extensions/public) to identify recovery actions already being implemented from the comprehensive list from the 1994 recovery plan. One issue that arose from these discussions is that while the recovery plan recommended *prohibition* of various activities, current management often focuses more on *limiting* those activities, especially depending on the specific location. Another point that came up was that many of the recovery actions are negative. Emphasizing more positive actions may garner more public support and improve public perception. Education is extremely important (adult, as well as children), and opportunities for citizen science can lead to positive results. The groups then spent some time recording ongoing recovery actions on maps.

The workgroup then brainstormed a list of criteria that managers consider when choosing management actions to implement. These criteria can be customized by agency and input (and weighted) into the decision support system to help filter various management alternatives, which will be initiated prior to the next workshop. Criteria or considerations identified by the workgroup included:

- Is it supported by literature
- Is it a recommendation in an existing recovery plan
- Current discretionary action involved
- Would it minimize an exiting/potential threat
- Cost/funding opportunities
- Is there a history of success with similar actions?
- Would the action reverse the downward trend in tortoise pop or habitat loss?
- Is it non-controversial, does it have public support?
- Is there benefit to multiple species?
- Does it improve law enforcement among agencies?
- Are there funds certain/available to monitor the effectiveness of the action?
- Is the activity effective? Do we know that it's effective?
- Is the financial cost worth the benefit?
- Is the benefit of the action worth the impact that it would have to humans?
- Is it already in someone's budget to implement?
- Are all required partners available and do they have the required capacity to participate?
- Can all required partners accept the funding?
- Is NEPA required?
- Is it in a high or low priority area?
- Is it politically palatable (same as public support)
- Is a political figure an advocate of the project?
(Bill, Mohave County, says - these above also apply for us)
- Will more than one species be affected?
- Whether or not the economic impact is obvious or diffused

Whether the idea or activity has a positive spin/presentation? (eg: instead of saying 'prohibit something')

Is it an ongoing thing, and are we going to keep doing it?

Will this action complete a larger investment?

Is it political and depending on the constitution of the tribal committee or chair?

We try to do dust control as a good neighbor

We try to plan development instead of being haphazard

Does it affect one or multiple species habitat?

Is it in a remote area that won't be developed?

Is there funding available?

Is there political will?

Are there cultural/spiritual issues/sensitivities?

Coordination between fish and wildlife and BIA?

Integration of such actions with tribal sovereignty?

Does it affect multiple species?

Is it being a good neighbor?

Are there education opportunities?

does it address the biggest threats and highest priorities?

Can it easily be monitored, and/or monitored at low cost?

Can it be applied throughout the whole geographic area, or the entire range.

Can we get funding for multiple years - long term, rather than for one time?

Finally, the workgroup again divided into breakout groups and started the process of associating specific recovery actions with specific threats to the desert tortoise, including a first-cut, qualitative ranking of how well an action addresses particular threats. Until now, these linkages and assumptions have generally been implicit rather than explicitly. Making explicit connections between threats and recovery actions will improve the decision-making process in the recovery decision support system. Results from all of these activities will be integrated into the next workshop, which will focus on developing specific recovery actions for the revised plan. The workgroup scheduled the next workshop for **May 9-10** in Las Vegas, anticipating that the first day will begin at 1pm, and the second day will run from 8am to approximately 5pm. The public may be invited to attend the full workshop.

In the meantime, additional threat or recovery action data should be sent to Lisa Benvenuti at Lisa_Benvenuti@institute.redlands.edu.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
DESERT TORTOISE RECOVERY OFFICE
1340 Financial Blvd., Suite 234
Reno, Nevada 89502
Ph: 775-861-6300 ~ Fax: 775-861-6301



Recovery Plan Revision Sideboards

- The goal of the Recovery Plan revision process is to identify actions to improve the status of the desert tortoise and its habitat to the point that the species is no longer threatened and can be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species.
- Substantial uncertainty surrounds the scientific basis for the relative importance of various threats affecting the desert tortoise and the effectiveness of specific recovery actions in mitigating threats. The “foundation for recovery plan revision” summarizes the general scientific basis, assumptions, and conclusions relevant to the current status of desert tortoise recovery.
- *Where specific scientific data do not exist*, workshop participants will not debate the factual basis for the importance of particular threats or recovery actions (e.g., from the listing decision, 1994 recovery plan). Instead, participants will focus on suggesting ways to resolve relevant scientific uncertainty.
- Provisional areas of emphasis for recovery will be based on a new habitat model and a spatial analysis of the 2001-2005 range-wide monitoring data, as forwarded by the SAC (projected from its March 31-April 1 meeting).
- Any disagreements over the nature of identified threats or recovery actions will be documented, but the FWS retains the ultimate decision-making authority to move the work group’s process forward.
- Workshop results (i.e., recommended recovery action plans) will be used by FWS to revise the desert tortoise Recovery Plan, including any revisions to recovery unit boundaries recommended by the SAC. Public and scientific review, including but not limited to the Science Advisory Committee, will be provided for as part of the Recovery Plan revision process.
- Given the scientific uncertainty noted above, the Recovery Plan revision process is not expected to produce definitive recovery action plans that prescribe the ultimate recovery strategy for the next 25 years. Rather, this revision of the recovery plan should lay the groundwork to specifically address this uncertainty through adaptive management.
- All recovery actions will be subject to appropriate NEPA/CEQA compliance and associated public review requirements prior to implementation.