



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



DESERT TORTOISE RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS
Revised Terms of Reference
2012

Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) as Threatened in 1990 and is responsible for coordinating its conservation and recovery. A revised recovery plan for the desert tortoise was approved on May 6, 2011, which provides guidance for future recovery efforts, prioritization of research to ensure that new information will contribute toward the greatest needs, and recommendations for development of effective monitoring to allow FWS to track recovery implementation and species status. The revised plan calls for the establishment of regional, long-term Recovery Implementation Teams (RITs). The RITs will be appointed recovery teams, per section 4(f)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (Act), and therefore, will be advisory to the FWS. The Act specifically exempts such recovery teams from the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), but otherwise, does not provide specific guidance related to the conduct of recovery teams; guidance for the conduct of the recovery implementation teams is the responsibility of the agency and is provided herein. Regional RITs will bring together partners from land management, scientific, conservation, and land-use groups to work together with the FWS on implementing, tracking, and evaluating recovery actions.

Fish and Wildlife Service Responsibilities

Within the FWS, the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 8) has the lead responsibility for activities related to recovery planning and implementation for the desert tortoise. The Region 8 Regional Director has appointed the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office (DTRO) to direct this effort. The DTRO is responsible for: 1) serving as the liaison between each RIT and the Region 8 Regional Director, Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG), Science Advisory Committee (SAC), and appropriate regional groups; 2) serving as the focal point for coordinating the activities of the different RITs; 3) providing guidance, coordination, and facilitation for completing RIT products; and 4) supplying staff support.

Local FWS field offices also have responsibilities for desert tortoises, so to facilitate collaboration between these field offices, those offices will be notified of RIT meetings and encouraged to participate.

RIT Responsibilities and Organization

The primary responsibility of each RIT is to partner across local and regional jurisdictional boundaries to plan, implement, and evaluate actions related to desert tortoise recovery. The teams are essential because of the many jurisdictions and stakeholders involved in implementing actions related to desert tortoises. A cooperative/coordinated effort among land managers, wildlife agencies, stakeholders, and scientists will:

1. Accomplish recovery goals that would be unattainable on a local scale;
2. Reduce duplication of effort and increase the efficient use of resources and expertise; and
3. Increase public and federal/state/local agency support for recovery by providing consistent information on the status of desert tortoise recovery implementation throughout the species' range.

Organization of three RITs will be based on recovery units and land management planning areas, configured in a manner that will also be logistically practical from a jurisdictional perspective:

1. California Mojave RIT
 - a. West Mojave workgroup
 - b. Northeast Mojave workgroup
 - c. Colorado Desert workgroup
2. North-East Mojave RIT
 - a. Southwest Nevada workgroup
 - b. Southeast Nevada workgroup
 - c. Utah and Arizona workgroup
3. Upper Virgin River RIT/workgroup

The FWS' Region 8 Regional Director will appoint approximately 10 to 15 individuals to each RIT workgroup. Members will be appointed by the Regional Director based on demonstrated interest and past participation in the recovery planning process. Others will be considered upon request. Actual RIT members should participate in RIT meetings.

In rare cases when a RIT member cannot attend a RIT meeting, after member notification to and approval from the FWS liaison to the RIT, the RIT member may send a representative to attend the meeting. This representative may serve as a proxy for the actual RIT member and may vote on the RIT member's behalf.

When appropriate and after approval from the FWS liaison to the RIT, a limited number of technical consultants may attend RIT meetings to provide information regarding their specific areas of expertise. However, technical consultants will not be able to vote on any tasks at hand.

RIT members must have a commitment to working collaboratively for recovery of the desert tortoise and be knowledgeable about desert tortoise issues, including related management issues. Membership may include the following:

Agency representatives:

1. land management
2. wildlife management
3. county government
4. tribal resource agency

Stakeholder representatives:

1. resource-use group
2. recreation group
3. conservation/environmental organization
4. scientific community

RITs will coordinate directly with regional groups such as California Desert Manager's Group, and landscape and regional-level alternative-energy coordination efforts, as appropriate. All members will be encouraged to coordinate among their colleagues and among fellow interest

groups regarding any information that the RIT has determined is relevant. Time will be built into the process for members to inform and seek advice from interested parties outside of the RIT.

The specific tasks for each RIT workgroup are to:

1. Develop a science-based Recovery Action Plan for its assigned geographical area;
2. Coordinate implementation of recovery actions contained in the Action Plan;
3. Provide/secure/coordinate the necessary resources for implementation of Action Plans;
4. Assess effectiveness of implemented recovery actions;
5. Compile results into a range-wide database and local-level decision support system;
6. Report findings and status annually to appropriate regional groups and the MOG; and
7. Review Action Plans and revise as necessary.

During the development of Action Plans (task 1) and subsequent implementation and effectiveness tracking of these plans, RIT workgroups will work collaboratively, using the spatial decision support system developed by the DTRO in collaboration with the University of Redlands and other scientists. Science-based outputs of the spatial decision support system will serve as the foundation for the Actions Plans (task 1). The underlying models and data within the system have been and continue to be developed and defined by the best available science, and have undergone (and continue to undergo) rigorous scientific review. Action Plans should be completed and submitted to appropriate regional groups and the MOG for endorsement within the first year of publication of the revised recovery plan. Data on threats and recovery-action implementation will be updated throughout the process.

All implementation of recovery actions will occur within existing land-management and environmental-review processes. RIT-developed Action Plans (task 1) will provide on-the-ground prioritization for implementing actions each year (*e.g.*, which stretches of highways or roads to specifically target for installation of tortoise-exclusion fencing), and will be coordinated by RIT workgroups (task 2) using resources that have been secured for each workgroup area (task 3). Regular updates will occur on an ongoing basis in conjunction with the annual report to the appropriate regional management group, MOG, and SAC.

The remaining RIT tasks (4-7) take advantage of the diversity of workgroup participants to help evaluate, synthesize, and report on recovery actions on an active, on-going basis. After 3 years of implementation (approximately one adaptive management cycle), the recovery action planning process will be reviewed by the FWS to evaluate the effectiveness of the teams.

Terms of Service

RIT members will be asked to serve a term of service of 2-5 years. Members may be reappointed to the workgroup upon completion of their term. The FWS Regional Director may disband the team or replace or reappoint members of the RIT at any time if they no longer meet the requirements under which they were approved, fail or are unable to participate regularly in RIT meetings and work, or if removal is in the public interest.

Each RIT and associated workgroups will meet 1-3 times each year. Additional meetings may be called by the MOG or DTRO in connection with special needs (for example, updating decision support system data). Each RIT is expected to be convened until recovery goals are met and will

periodically review the recovery plan and Action Plans to advise the FWS if revisions to recovery-related documents are recommended.

We estimate that participation on a RIT workgroup will require approximately 5 to 10 days per year of the member's time, depending on travel. This includes online webinar meetings, 1 in-person meeting, time to prepare for meetings, and workload between meetings. For many members, some proportion of this workload is anticipated to be related to their existing work.

RIT members are expected to:

- Communicate information to and from their organizations and interested constituents.
- Offer the perspective of a good citizen, an independent thinker and trustworthy individual.
- Build trust amongst all participating RIT organizations.
- Contribute data/information to clarify issues and eliminate false assumptions.
- Not represent individual perspectives as views of the entire RIT.
- Work to ensure acceptance and understanding of recommendations made by the RIT.

Conflicts of Interest

Recovery Implementation Team members are advised to avoid conflicts of interest and other ethical problems in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Members must disclose when a matter being discussed by the RIT may have a direct and predictable effect on their personal financial matters, those of a client, or those of a company by which they are employed, apart from matters which are inherent in their employment or outside affiliation.
2. Members must not solicit business for themselves or their firms or seek an economic advantage based on their position on the RIT.
3. Members must hold any non-public information obtained as a result of their services on the RIT in confidence and ensure that it is used exclusively for official purposes.
4. Members must not use the resources available to the RIT for the purposes of assisting a political campaign or for any campaign business.

Funding

The FWS will provide funds for RIT administrative costs, as appropriate; however, the FWS will not pay for salaries or travel to non-FWS members or advisors. The FWS will provide administrative assistance (such as photocopying and the procurement of supplies) and expenses related to the printing and distribution of materials.