

March 8, 2006, Third-party Facilitator Interviews

Dear Interested Governments, Agencies, Organizations, Parties, and Individuals in Desert Tortoise Recovery Planning Issues:

You are cordially invited to help the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution select an independent and impartial mediation team on Wednesday, March 8, at the Redlands Institute in Redlands, CA.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Desert Tortoise Recovery Office has sought the assistance of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution to independently and impartially assess the feasibility of convening a broadly representative, consensus-based, multi-stakeholder southern California Working Group to assist in developing recovery actions for integration into a range-wide revised Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The proposed Working Group would utilize the best available information to explore options and develop recommendations for actions designed to effectively address the specific threats to the Desert Tortoise in the southern California region. The group would be asked to work together in good faith to build agreement on a set of geographically specific recovery actions to recommend to the Fish and Wildlife Service that are feasible, practical, broadly supported, scientifically sound, and implementable. The efforts of the proposed Working Group would be coordinated closely with the work of the Science Advisory Committee, established by the Fish and Wildlife Service for the Desert Tortoise recovery planning.

The U.S. Institute is seeking to engage interested and potentially affected stakeholders, both governmental and nongovernmental, in helping us select an assessment team of highly skilled and experienced mediators. (The U.S. Institute's announcement to recruit a pool of appropriately qualified candidates, which was sent to 35 members of the Institute's National Roster of Environmental Dispute Resolution and Consensus Building Professionals, is attached for your information.)

Once selected, the U.S. Institute would then contract with and oversee the work of the independent team of mediators to impartially assess the current situation and evaluate the feasibility of convening a successful Working Group process. This assessment process, as currently envisioned, would consist of a number of confidential interviews with a broad range of stakeholders. The results of the interviews will help determine if there is sufficient support for the idea of using a Regional Working Group process as a way to develop broad agreement on recovery actions to be incorporated into the Fish and Wildlife Service's revised Recovery Plan for the Desert Tortoise.

If the decision is made to proceed with a Working Group process based on the results of the assessment, the U.S. Institute would then design the actual process in close consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group, and interested stakeholders.

You are cordially invited to participate in selecting the assessment team of mediators who will work in cooperation with and under the supervision of the U.S. Institute. You are welcome to participate in one of two ways:

1. You can review the proposals submitted by the final candidates and then participate directly in their in-person interviews on March 8, at the Redlands Institute in Redlands, CA.
2. If you cannot attend in person, you can review the proposals of the final candidates identified by the U.S. Institute and submit your written comments on their qualifications;

If you would like to attend the interviews, you will have an opportunity to ask questions of the candidates and to indicate your preferences among the different candidates at the conclusion of all the interviews. Although the U.S. Institute will be making the final selection decision, we have a strong interest in identifying an assessment team that is both highly skilled at evaluating parties' potential readiness to work together in resolving difficult challenges and who are also acceptable to stakeholders with an interest in Desert Tortoise recovery issues. The U.S. Institute will contract with and directly oversee the work of the selected team of mediators.

Interviews with final candidate are scheduled for Wednesday, March 8, from 8:30am to 5:00pm, at the Redlands Institute, in Redlands, CA. As the U.S. Institute's Senior Program Manager assigned to this project, I will be facilitating the interview process. You can expect it to be a long – but hopefully informative day. I understand and appreciate that this is a big commitment of your time. Without your assistance, however, and your willingness to engage in a good faith effort to work with other stakeholders and the responsible agencies in developing viable recovery actions, the proposed collaborative Working Group process cannot be successful. So, the contribution of your time and your thoughtful perspectives on the qualifications of the different teams of mediators would be greatly appreciated. In fairness to all the prospective candidate teams, if you do intend to participate in the selection process, I will ask that you prepare by reading all the proposals in advance and that you attend all the scheduled interviews.

PLEASE RSVP BEFORE MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEWS TO SELECT THE SITUATION ASSESSMENT TEAM. Please contact Pat Lewis by email (lewis@ecr.gov) or by phone (520-670-5299). We will then provide you with the proposals of the final candidates to review in advance of the interviews.

If you cannot participate in the interviews but would like to review the proposals of the final candidates and provide your written comments on their qualifications, please let Pat Lewis know, as well. We will be able to email you the 3-4 finalists' 15-page proposals on or around Wednesday, March 1. We will need to receive your written comments no later than Monday, March 6, so they can be considered in making the final selection decision.

The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution is an independent federal agency established by Congress to assist parties in resolving environmental, natural resource, and public lands issues and conflicts. The U.S. Institute serves as an impartial, non-partisan institution providing professional expertise and services to all parties involved in resolving environmental conflicts, regardless of who funds the efforts. For further information about the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, please see our website at: www.ecr.gov.

If you have any concerns or questions about the situation assessment team selection process, please feel free to contact me at the email address or phone number below.

Thanks for your interest and assistance in selecting an appropriate mediation team. Your active involvement in these early stages will help create the foundation for what can hopefully become a successful Working Group process.

Review of Dates To Remember:

- RSVP to participate in in-person interviews with final assessment team candidates – 2/27/06
- RSVP to only review proposals of final assessment team candidates – 2/27/06
- Approximate date for distributing proposals of final candidates – 3/01/06
- Deadline for submitting comments on finalists' proposals if not attending interviews – 3/06/06
- In-person interviews with final candidates – 3/08/06

NOTE: Our email distribution list of interested stakeholders is still being developed. Please pass this email along to others you think might be interested. Thank you.