

News Release



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Revised Recovery Plan for the Mojave Population of Desert Tortoise Now Available

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) today announced the availability of a Revised Recovery Plan for the threatened Mojave population of the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Plan takes a new approach to reversing declines in Mojave desert tortoise populations through a coordinated effort of science-based implementation and evaluation of conservation actions.

“This revised recovery strategy is a reflection of years of hard work by multiple stakeholders and recognizes the need to modify recovery efforts of the desert tortoise to accommodate changing management needs,” said Ren Lohofener, director of the Service’s Pacific Southwest Region. “The ability to conserve the Mojave population of desert tortoise and lead to eventual recovery of this threatened species depends on science and innovation. Finding a strategy that works alongside renewable energy development, for example, requires a plan that can incorporate new information and ideas.”

Unlike the previous Recovery Plan, which focused on mitigation measures, this Plan recognizes the need to adjust to the accelerating pace of environmental change and its impact on key resource management issues, such as corridors and connectivity. The Plan will be a living document that advances a natural resource management model where ongoing detection of changes and attribution of causes will provide the basic information on whether or not the desert tortoise or its ecosystem is changing beyond natural variability.

By continuous examination of vulnerability, exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity of the desert tortoise to environmental change, resource managers will be able to update the Plan as it is being implemented with conservation measures that will help the desert tortoise recover. For example, to address the recent impact of renewable energy on recovery of the desert tortoise, the Service will be adding a chapter to the Plan that focuses on measures related to renewable energy projects. The chapter will make clear what recovery implementation will look like in light of renewable energy development and will provide specific recommendations to ensure recovery and continued habitat connectivity.

Under the Plan, Regional recovery implementation teams will bring together partners from land management, scientific, conservation, and land-use groups to work with the Service to implement, track and evaluate recovery actions. To help teams apply the best available science, the Service has developed a system that explicitly describes the current understanding of what threatens tortoise

populations and how recovery actions are predicted to reduce those threats. The system tracks where those actions will have the greatest benefits and where conservation actions have occurred. Teams can compare the performance of on-the-ground actions with what was expected to inform future decisions, and change the course of action as necessary.

Key elements of the revised plan include the following:

- Develop, support, and build partnerships to facilitate recovery;
- Protect existing populations and habitat, instituting habitat restoration where necessary;
- Augment depleted populations in a strategic, experimental manner;
- Monitor progress toward recovery, including population trend and effectiveness monitoring;
- Conduct applied research and modeling in support of recovery efforts within a strategic framework; and
- Implement a formal adaptive management program that integrates new information and utilizes conceptual models that link management actions to predicted responses by Mojave desert tortoise populations or their habitat.

The goal of the ESA is to conserve listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend and to recover species to levels where protection under the ESA is no longer necessary. Recovery plans are blueprints for actions by federal, tribal, state agencies and private organizations that contribute to species recovery. Recovery plans do not obligate the expenditure of funds or require that actions be implemented.

The listed Mojave population of the desert tortoise includes those animals living north and west of the Colorado River in the Mojave Desert of California, Nevada, northwestern Arizona, and southwestern Utah, and in the Sonoran (Colorado) Desert in California.

Most threats to the Mojave population of the desert tortoise or its habitat are associated with land uses. Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation from urbanization, off-highway vehicle use in the desert, linear features such as roads and utility corridors, poor grazing management, mining, and military activities were cited as some of the primary reasons for the decline in Mojave desert tortoise populations. Disease and increased incidence of fire in the Mojave Desert have also been implicated in desert tortoise declines. Global climate change and drought are potentially important long-term considerations with respect to recovery of the desert tortoise.

Copies of the revised recovery plan are available by contacting the Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, 1340 Financial Boulevard, Suite 234, Reno, NV 89502 (tel. 775-861-6300), and at the following web site: <http://www.fws.gov/nevada>.

The ESA provides a critical safety net for America's native fish, wildlife, and plants. The Service is working to actively engage conservation partners and the public in the search for improved and innovative ways to conserve and recover imperiled species. To learn more about the Endangered Species Program, visit <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific

excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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