



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service DESERT TORTOISE RECOVERY OFFICE



DISCUSSION SUMMARY FROM RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION TEAM WEBINARS  
18-20 November 2014

### General

- Land management should avoid impacting areas identified for recovery and where recovery investments have been made or are recommended, such as tortoise conservation areas and linkages. For example, DRECP and Las Vegas RMP planning should be consistent with recovery planning relative to where development is proposed (e.g., Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area).
- UVR identified 2 topics for discussion/potential incorporation into version 2 of the Recovery Action Plans: expansion of translocation program and survey/monitoring outside the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve

### Project Concept Proposals

- Time and funding is important, but so is the initiative/ability of staff biologists to get the project done, as well as assistance by staff in other work units. Implementation success hinges on management direction and prioritization rather than these actions falling into collateral duties.
- The project-development process was useful. For example, 2 restoration proposals in Utah anticipate being funded in the next couple of months; the project-concept development process was beneficial in instigating more focused thinking of how to get funding of on-the-ground actions.
- Range-wide proposals are good ideas, but funding/implementation across a hodge-podge of land jurisdictions will be difficult or impossible, especially without high-level management prioritization and commitment. Other complex topics like disease and predator control require similar high-level commitment across agencies.
- Priorities
  - California: priority projects that were discussed included ravens (esp. given available funding), highway fencing, and those in the western Mojave (given greatest population declines in that recovery unit); getting ahead of weeds along roads in CA, like has been done in NV, also mentioned
  - Education: support for range-wide education efforts was raised by some members, however, priority toward on-the-ground projects that directly reduce mortality was emphasized by others instead of education projects
  - Emphasize smaller projects that can show immediate success on the ground and build up to larger projects from there.
  - UVR: acquisition of inholdings within Red Cliffs Desert Reserve; wildfire prevention and restoration
- How do project proposals reduce risk to tortoises, as predicted by spatial decision support system? This is reflected at a general level in histogram of project proposals vs. SDSS ranking. Analysis could be applied at project-footprint level, if desired.

- Coordination
  - More coordination and refinement will be necessary, especially for less-shovel-ready projects. Individual RIT members may take initiative to modify, refine, or combine project concepts via intra-RIT coordination to make them more fundable or implementable. The DTRO can also assist.
  - It may be beneficial to coordinate among authors and to prioritize numerous habitat restoration proposals in the NE Mojave
  - Berm-modification project in Chuckwalla could be expanded across California
  - NPS raven proposals might easily be combined
- Multiple raven-related proposals, including a programmatic, range-wide approach, in California could be combined and/or addressed with REAT mitigation funds (>\$4 million). Commitment to dedicated (i.e., non-collateral) coordination is important, especially with turnover in previous workgroup leadership. Projects need to engage utilities to remove raven nests from powerline poles; a letter from MOG to the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee might be helpful to prompt utilities to integrate nest removal into ongoing activities related to preventing electrocution.
- Road berm reductions and raven nest removal associated with utility infrastructure could be implemented right away as the utilities conduct regular maintenance activities. Help is needed to coordinate with the various land management agencies so we can consistently conduct these beneficial operations with consistent guidelines from the respective agencies.
- SE Nevada workgroup: BLM's travel management planning is on hold until the Las Vegas RMP amendment is complete (end of 2015 or beginning of 2016); then, funding (i.e., potential new project proposals) will be needed for travel management planning.
- Questions about funding decisions will be informed by the MOG discussion on Dec 18.

#### Dissent Reconciliation

- Documenting dissents is important to show various opinions, but some (e.g., those related to grazing) may not be resolvable among all participants. These should simply be acknowledged and considered as management actions are implemented.
- In future, place greater emphasis on dissenting opinions providing scientific rationale or evidence for dissents. Develop 1- or 2-page rationale papers that address dissenting opinions (e.g., effects of mining) as education tools about particular threats; information can come from recovery plan, more recent studies, and language from biological opinions
- Specific dissent topics
  - The use of herbicides should not be excluded as a habitat restoration tool. Application should be done in concordance with the best available science and with appropriate care, certification, and regulation.
  - Recommendations for grazing as a habitat management tool may be better characterized as research topics.
  - California dissent related to road-fencing recommendation most specific to use of county funds; no dissent to using other sources of funding
  - UVR dissent relative to fencing Red Hills Parkway is resolvable by emphasizing process of evaluating fencing priorities, in general, instead of focus specifically Red Hills Parkway