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UPDATED STRATEGY TO REVISE THE 1994 RECOVERY PLAN
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Background

In a memo to the Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) on November 3, 2004, Steve Thompson announced the formation of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office (DTRO) and plans to coordinate with regional recovery implementation work groups to develop 5-year recovery action plans as the basis for revising the 1994 recovery plan. As the formation of these work groups proceeded in early 2005, the need for facilitation assistance to better integrate non-government and government stakeholders into a collaborative process became apparent. In August 2005, after investigating several facilitation organizations, the DTRO contacted the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute) for their assistance in facilitating a collaborative recovery planning effort.

After determining that the proposed regional recovery planning process had collaborative potential, the U.S. Institute recommended that a feasibility assessment be conducted before proceeding further. The assessment would help identify the challenges that would need to be addressed in designing and conducting an appropriate collaborative recovery planning process and determine whether there was interest among other agencies and stakeholders in participating in such a process. The assessment team presented preliminary findings to the MOG on August 15, 2006, and the assessment report was completed in September. In analyzing the findings from >100 interviews to determine whether key conditions exist for successful collaboration, the assessment team did find support for a collaborative process. However, the assessment team's best professional judgment was that the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) should *not* proceed to establish regional working groups until and unless it is able to confirm the availability and commitment of adequate funding and staffing resources to support the proposed collaborative process. In addition, the assessment team reported significant uncertainty among stakeholders about the science underlying recovery efforts and recommended establishing a broadly accepted and scientifically credible base of information as the basis for developing recovery action plans, prior to convening regional working groups. The process proposed by the assessment team expanded the concept originally proposed by the Service and anticipated a draft revised recovery plan by March 2009.

Based on feedback during and after the August MOG meeting, it is clear that funding resources among agencies to commit to a fully collaborative process are unlikely to be available at this time. Given this situation, as well as the fact that recovery of the desert tortoise will be a long-term process, the Service has determined that the current recovery plan revision must be completed well before March 2009. Therefore, the Service proposes a modified approach to work directly with the MOG to complete a revised draft recovery plan by September 2007. This approach would necessarily limit broad-scale collaboration as described in the assessment report, but only in the short term. The Service does commit to immediately begin implementing recommendations in the assessment report in order to build stronger collaborative relationships for recovery implementation and future five-year reviews and recovery plan revisions.

New Approach to Recovery Plan Revision

As noted above, a significant hurdle to successful, broad-based collaboration is uncertainty surrounding the scientific foundation for desert tortoise recovery. A few primary issues dominate this uncertainty: 1) the relative importance of various threats affecting the desert tortoise, 2) the effectiveness of specific recovery actions in mitigating threats, and 3) baseline data on desert tortoise populations, habitat, and threats. The Service acknowledges these uncertainties and has crafted a document (attached) that specifically outlines the scientific foundation on which the current recovery plan revision will be based. The “foundation for recovery plan revision” summarizes the general scientific basis, assumptions, and conclusions relevant to the current status of desert tortoise recovery. The Service will use this foundation to develop regional recovery actions, including specific actions that address key scientific uncertainties, in coordination with the MOG. The DTRO will work with the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) to review and integrate draft recovery action plans and other input from the MOG with recovery criteria and research priorities. Regional workshops will provide opportunities for broader stakeholder input into the recovery action plans. The outline below provides a general timeline for each step.

- December 2006 - January 2007: DTRO works with Redlands Institute (RI) to compile current regional threat/management information.
- January 18, 2007: MOG meeting to review strategy.
- January 2007: USGS and University of Nevada, Reno, complete habitat model and range-wide monitoring spatial analysis.
- January-February 2007: Regional meetings with MOG members (e.g., the DMG Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group) to review threat/management data, with support from RI.
- February 10-11, 2007: SAC finalizes draft recovery criteria.
- March-April 2007: Regional meetings with MOG members (e.g., the DMG Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group) to develop regional recovery action plans, with support from RI.
- March-April 2007: SAC revises draft recovery units.
- May 2007: SAC reviews recovery actions and provides research priorities.
- May-June 2007: DTRO compiles information into draft recovery plan. Regional recovery action plans modified, as necessary, to conform to draft recovery units.
- June-July 2007: Regional workshops to incorporate non-government stakeholder input (including an open forum with SAC and MOG).
- August-September 2007: DTRO revises draft recovery plan based on SAC and stakeholder input.
- September 2007: Draft recovery plan submitted to California-Nevada Operations Office, FWS, for review.

Relative to the collaboration spectrum presented in Figure 1 of the assessment report (attached), the Service has and will continue to “Inform” and “Consult” with the public and interested parties about the recovery planning process. The Service will “Involve” interested parties through the regional workshops identified for June-July 2007 and will “Collaborate” with MOG members in the development of regional recovery action plans.

Implementation of Assessment Team Recommendations

While time and funding limitations preclude a fully collaborative recovery planning process at this time, the Service will begin addressing several issues and implementing additional recommendations in the assessment report to improve the scientific foundations for desert tortoise recovery. These steps extend beyond the current recovery plan revision as long-term commitments to build relationships for broad-based collaboration in recovery implementation and subsequent reviews. The table below lists the key issues identified in the assessment report (pages 5-7) and describes current action items to address these issues.

Issue/Action Item	Implementation Start Date
<p><i>1. Information for Decision-Making About Desert Tortoise Recovery</i></p> <p>Report baseline data on desert tortoise populations</p> <p>1. Range-wide monitoring summary report completed</p> <p>Formalize population monitoring plan</p> <p>2. Complete study plan outline (in progress)</p> <p>3. Complete full study plan</p> <p>Address threats through effectiveness monitoring</p> <p>4. Incorporate into revised recovery plan</p> <p>5. Develop decision support system to integrate effectiveness monitoring and adaptive management</p> <p>6. Facilitate increased research in this area</p>	<p>October 2006</p> <p>Spring 2007 Spring 2008</p> <p>September 2007 January 2007</p> <p>Current/ongoing</p>
<p><i>2. Implementation of 1994 Recovery Plan</i></p> <p>Establish short- and long-term performance measures</p> <p>7. Incorporate measures into revised recovery plan</p> <p>Facilitate recovery implementation</p> <p>8. Work with regional recovery implementation teams (including government and non-government stakeholders)</p>	<p>September 2007</p> <p>October 2007</p>
<p><i>3. Funding of Desert Tortoise Recovery Efforts</i></p> <p>Improve recovery funding</p> <p>9. Identify/develop funding partners</p> <p>Identify/clarify funding priorities</p> <p>10. Incorporate priorities in revised recovery plan</p> <p>11. Integrate funding priorities with decision support system</p>	<p>Current/ongoing</p> <p>September 2007 January 2008</p>
<p><i>4. Revised Recovery Plan</i></p> <p>Identify regional threats and address accordingly</p> <p>12. Incorporate current information into revised recovery plan</p> <p>13. Facilitate research to identify relative importance of different threats (<i>Action Item 5 also relevant</i>)</p>	<p>September 2007 Current/ongoing</p>
<p><i>5. Trust Among Participants in Desert Tortoise Issues</i></p> <p>Build long-term trust with/among stakeholders (<i>see Action Item 8</i>)</p> <p>14. Commit to/continue written reporting mechanisms (<i>Action Item 5 also relevant</i>)</p>	<p>Current/ongoing</p>

Issue/Action Item	Implementation Start Date
<p>6. Institutional Arrangements and Capacity for Collaboration and 7. Design and Procedures for Proposed Collaborative Process Build capacity for more formal collaboration in recovery implementation and future recovery plan revisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Clarify role of MOG (<i>also addresses Assessment Report Recommendation #6, page 30</i>) 16. Increase coordination and consistency among FWS offices 17. Incorporate collaborative recovery implementation teams (Action Item 8) into revised recovery plan 	<p>January 2007</p> <p>Current/ongoing September 2007</p>
<p>Assessment Report Recommendation #2 (pages 20-21) Explain or clarify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) how the concepts of recovery units, distinct population segments, and desert wildlife management areas (DWMAs) fit within the recovery planning process; b) the relationship between mitigation requirements under a Section 10 take permit and permittee’s responsibilities regarding implementation of the revised recovery plan; and c) the possibility that the revised recovery planning process could result in i) modifying the location, boundaries, or number of recovery units; ii) adjusting the location, boundaries, or number of DWMAs; iii) establishing “Safe Harbor” agreements with private landowners; iv) revising critical habitat designation for the desert tortoise; and v) delisting the desert tortoise by recovery unit or region as recovery criteria are achieved. <p>18. Clarify in “foundations” paper</p>	<p>December 2006</p>

Reference

U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and Center for Collaborative Policy. 2006. Feasibility assessment report for collaborative desert tortoise recovery planning process proposed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Report to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Reno, Nevada.

Figure 1. Integrated Approach to Engaging Others in Recovery Planning Process

