

MEMORANDUM

July 18, 2016

To: Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group

From: Ren Lohofener, Regional Director, Pacific Southwest Region

Subject: June 21, 2016, MOG Meeting Summary

The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) met on June 21, 2016, at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting focused on updates to the Science Advisory Committee charter; funding range-wide monitoring; progress on recovery implementation, confirming priorities, and providing direction to the Recovery Implementation Teams for 2017; and reviewing updates to DOI mitigation policies. Lesley DeFalco, USGS, also provided a presentation on the state of the science of habitat restoration in the Mojave Desert.

Upcoming Meetings

***MOG:** December 6, 2016 at the Springs Preserve, Las Vegas

Desert Tortoise Council Symposium: February 24-26, 2017, Sam's Town, Las Vegas
(numerous presentations on current research and management relative to tortoise recovery)

Action Items	Owner(s)	Due Date
1. Send notices of Science Advisory Committee meetings to MOG members.	Roy A-M	As needed
2. Distribute biosketches of current Science Advisory Committee (SAC) members to MOG	Roy A-M	Attached
3. Provide input on SAC membership, nominate other desired expertise, identify priority topics for SAC advice	MOG members	August 31, 2016
4. Approach the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative about potential funding for the range-wide monitoring program	Mike Senn and Steve Spangle	August 31, 2016
5. BLM (NV, CA, AZ and UT) will coordinate internally on implementation options for Range-wide monitoring	Raul Morales	December 6, 2016
6. R-W Monitoring subgroup (SMOG) to meet to determine priority of range-wide monitoring and identify funding opportunities.	Raul M., Gerry H., Bill ? (DOD), Mike S.	December 6, 2016
7. Include USGS presentation with minutes.	Roy A-M	In process
8. Develop projects for MOG/agency consideration	Roy A-M, Flo Gardipee, RITs	December 6, 2016
9. Approach Juan Palma, next TNC Nevada Director, to gauge interest in working with MOG to help with communication	Raul Morales	December 6, 2016
10. Spearhead development of a team of agency communication specialists to develop and disseminate desert tortoise conservation framework focusing on our recovery priorities.	Jody Holzworth, FWS	December 6, 2016

Future Agenda Items

1. Raven management status and update, cooperative opportunities with Desert Managers Group (DMG).
2. Share Education and Outreach goals and objectives (FWS lead with assistance from NPS)
3. Opportunity to provide input on science priorities for coming year. Include an update on status of disease research during the research overview and update.

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and Introductions: Welcome provided by Ren Lohofener, Regional Director, Region 8 USFWS.
2. Purpose and Agenda Review
No changes to the agenda proposed.
3. Opening Remarks
4. Science Advisory Committee Charter
Changes to the SAC charter were endorsed by the MOG members. The SAC will meet at least once annually (with meetings announced to the MOG), and the SAC chair or delegate will interface directly with the MOG at its winter meeting. The MOG will review the current SAC membership (FWS to distribute current membership) and provide input on additional or different expertise desired for the committee, as well as priority topics on which to request SAC advice (action item 3). FWS will report back to the MOG on SAC recommendations at December 6th meeting. Following the December 6 meeting, the DTRO will re-engage the SAC, schedule a meeting to address topic(s) identified by the MOG, and prepare for a briefing at the winter 2017 MOG meeting.
5. Range-wide Monitoring Implementation Subcommittee
The MOG continues to agree that it is important to find the funding to continue implementing range-wide monitoring as it is currently our best means of determining the effectiveness of implementing recovery actions, and it will be needed to demonstrate recovery for any potential delisting proposal under the current Recovery Plan. However, finding dedicated funding remains problematic, with the greatest funding needs in the next four years occurring in California (Ft. Irwin, Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range, and BLM have recently provided funding, and the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center has indicated plans to contribute in the upcoming year). An updated document outlining the program design and funding needs is attached. Mike Senn and Steve Spangle will approach the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative to see whether funding might be available to contribute to range-wide monitoring of the desert tortoise as a focal species within the Mojave portion of the DLCC (action item 4). BLM leadership from NV, CA, AZ and UT will meet prior to the next MOG meeting to discuss funding and implementation on BLM lands (action item 5). Form a subgroup of MOG members (SMOG) to use the Range-wide Monitoring “whitepaper” to discuss relative priority and opportunities to fund Range-wide monitoring (action item 6).

6. **Presentation: State of the Science of Mojave Desert Habitat Restoration**
Lesley DeFalco (USGS) provided an overview of recent work on Mojave Desert habitat restoration, describing the negative effects of invasive exotic grasses and fire on tortoise habitat and tortoise health, as well as work under way to improve restoration efforts and determine their effectiveness, and increase resistance to fire. Tools are emerging to help prioritize landscapes for treatment, and identify appropriate seed sources for restoration projects. The use of herbicides and improved seeding application are showing promise at reducing *Bromus* (red brome and cheat grass) and increasing native plants, at least at small scales, with larger landscape experiments in progress. Diagnostic tests are emerging that will reveal how tortoises respond to habitat condition, thereby providing a measure of the effectiveness of restoration efforts. Ultimately, we are hopeful this ongoing work will allow us to develop a proactive strategy to prioritize and implement restoration projects across the range of the tortoise, as well as making landscapes more resilient to fire. It was requested that a copy of the presentation be distributed with the meeting minutes (action item 7).

7. **Identify Recovery Priorities for the Coming Fiscal year**
Roy Averill-Murray summarized the status of the MOG/RIT funding cycle since last December (see attached diagram). Nine projects (~\$2 million) within the MOG's high-priority categories were funded this year, including several habitat restoration projects in the northeastern Mojave and raven control projects in California. The biggest gap is in tortoise-exclusion fencing along highways in California, but Amy Fesnock (CA BLM) offered to facilitate coordination with the California Department of Transportation based on recent experience implementing a fencing project along I-40 as part of mitigation from the ISEGS solar project. The MOG reaffirmed the current priorities (approved last year) and directed the RITs to continue developing applicable projects for discussion at the December MOG meeting (action item 8).

The need to improve outreach and communication about desert tortoise recovery and Mojave Desert conservation was also discussed. Beyond development of “disposable” educational materials, it is important to increase awareness and buy-in from the public about desert tortoise conservation. Engaging experienced external partners to share educational messages was discussed, and Raul Morales offered to approach the new Nevada TNC State Director in this respect (action item 9). Ren Lohofener also offered that FWS would spearhead the development of a framework for agency communication specialists to help disseminate messages about tortoise conservation (action item 10).

8. **Role and Opportunities for Mitigation Programs to Contribute to Recovery**
Mike Senn provided a short presentation on recent changes to Department of Interior mitigation and compensation guidance and policies. The new BLM and FWS (not yet final) policies allow more flexibility to implement mitigation at a landscape scale, how the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimize, compensate) is implemented, increased stakeholder involvement, promotes mitigating prior to impacts (banking) for unavoidable losses and low value resources, and applies to Endangered Species Act for FWS (previously excluded). The flexibility of the new policies may provide important tools to help develop mitigation strategies that promote recovery of tortoise at a landscape scale.

9. Roles and Functions of Overlapping Regional Workgroups

A brief handout (attached) summarizing background, vision and mission of the current regional workgroups was provided to the group and included: Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG), Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative (Desert LCC), Desert Managers Group (DMG), Mojave Desert Initiative (MDI), and Southern Nevada Agency Partnership (SNAP). There was a brief discussion where the expressed a desire to coordinate MOG recovery priorities with the DMG so that both groups were working together to coordinate efforts to fund and implement priority recovery projects.

Brian Croft provided a short update and handout (attached) on the Mojave Desert Strategic Habitat Conservation Demonstration Project. The goal of the project is to work with partners to identify and implement a shared vision to help achieve long-term conservation for the Mojave Desert that promotes local economies and conservation of important values and resources. The effort is in its infancy and it anticipated that roll-out will begin this fall.

10. Review of Action Items (see above)

11. Closing Comments/Future Agenda Items/Next Meeting Date

Next meeting is December 6, 2016. Future agenda items are capture above.

12. Meeting concluded at approximately 3:30 pm.

MOG Attendees (not including agency support staff or other stakeholders)

Agency	Name	Title/Office
Clark County	Kimberley Jenkins	Desert Conservation Program
Washington County	Lynn Chamberlain	Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Manager
QuadState Local Governments Authority	Gerry Hillier	Executive Director
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Cristina Jones	Turtles Project Coordinator
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Becky Jones	
Nevada Department of Wildlife	Jen Newmark	
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	Ann McLuckie	Wildlife Biologist
BLM, Arizona	Elroy Masters	State Office
BLM, California	Jerry Perez	State Director
BLM, Nevada	Tim Smith	Acting State Director
BLM, Utah	Raul Morales	Acting State Director
FWS, Region 8	Ren Lohofener	Regional Director
FWS, Region 8	Mike Senn (MOG facilitator)	Field Supervisor, Southern Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office
FWS, Region 2	Steve Spangle	Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office
USGS	Todd Esque	Research Ecologist
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center	Walter Christensen	NREA, Natural Resources Officer
DOD/USMC	Bill Berry	MCL West
NPS, Joshua Tree National Park	Michael Vamstad	

Mojave Desert Regional Workgroups Summary

June 16, 2016

Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG)

Background: Originally established in 1988 to coordinate agency planning and management activities affecting the desert tortoise in the BLM's Desert Tortoise Rangeland Plan. The MOG assumed a leadership role in coordinating agency activities directed toward recovery plan implementation following the listing of the Mojave tortoise as threatened in 1989, and publication of the Mojave Desert tortoise recovery plan in 1994.

Vision: Achieve recovery of the Mojave desert tortoise through effective coordination of agency planning and management activities.

Mission:

- Provide oversight and direction to regional Recovery Implementation Teams (RITs) in planning, prioritizing, and recommending recovery actions on lands administered by members of the MOG and elsewhere;
- Assess results and effectiveness of implemented conservation and recovery actions and make changes in conservation and recovery actions as part of an adaptive management framework; formulate and prioritize management-related questions and needs, develop and promote research relevant to those questions and needs, evaluate results, and utilize results to enhance recovery in an adaptive management framework;
- Coordinate resource allocation and budget initiatives and develop partnerships to support implementation of recovery actions.
- Develop and implement through the participating agencies a strategic communication and outreach plan to support and enhance Mojave desert tortoise conservation and recovery.
- Provide a roundtable for sharing information and raising and resolving issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries, including consideration of other species that may affect recovery of the Mojave desert tortoise.
- Provide a forum for stakeholder input on desert tortoise issues (see stakeholder participation guidelines following the charter).

Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative (Desert LCC)

Background: A bi-national, self-directed, non-regulatory regional partnership formed and directed by resource management entities as well as interested public and private entities in the Mojave, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan Desert regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. Through collaborative partnerships, the Desert LCC seeks to provide scientific and technical support, coordination, and communication to resource managers and the broader community to address climate change and other landscape-scale ecosystem stressors.

Vision: The vision for the Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative is "Resilient landscapes capable of responding to environmental challenges and supporting natural and cultural values for current and future generations."

Mission: The mission of the Desert LCC collaborative partnership is to provide scientific and technical support, coordination and communication to resource managers and the broader Desert LCC community to address climate change and other landscape-scale ecosystem stressors. The Desert LCC, through its cooperators, is working to identify the science needs related to climate change and ecosystem stressors at broad spatial scales and facilitate the development,

integration and application of scientific information and decision-support tools that will inform resource management decisions.

Desert Managers Group (DMG)

Background: The DMG was established as the forum for government agencies to address and discuss issues of common concern. Through cooperative management each agency achieves greater operational efficiency, enhances resource protection, and the public is better served.

Vision: To work together to conserve and enhance the California Deserts for current and future generations.

Mission:

- Develop coordinated and complimentary management guidelines, practices, and programs.
- Coordinate and integrate efforts in the California deserts to:
 - Conserve and restore desert resources
 - Provide high quality recreation, public education, and visitor services
 - Provide for safety of desert users
- Develop and integrate the databases and scientific studies needed for effective resource management and planning.
- Promote compatibility in the application of each agency's mission

Mojave Desert Initiative (MDI)

Background: Established as a forum for government agencies and other partners to collaboratively address wildfire and invasive species issues within a defined eco-region of the northeast Mojave Desert in Arizona, Nevada and Utah.

Goals:

- Protect remaining unburned Mojave desert vegetation and reduce burning.
- Restore strategically located islands, key habitat areas, and corridors.
- Improve communication, collaboration, and coordination.
- Maximize leveraged funding.

Actions:

- Develop regional priorities and guidance for Incident Commanders to minimize or avoid further habitat loss to fire.
- Define the Mojave desert eco-region for the Mojave Desert Initiative purpose.
- Complete regional assessment to identify priority areas of work, and develop project selection criteria.

Southern Nevada Agency Partnership (SNAP)

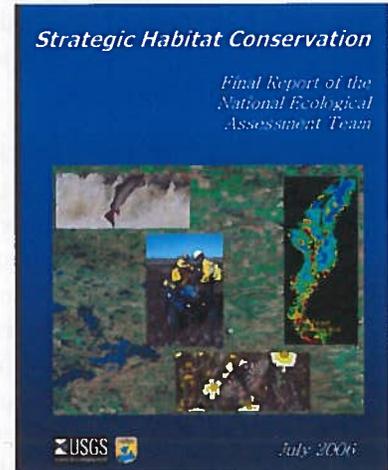
The Southern Nevada Agency Partnership, a partnership of US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service, has been working since 1997 to coordinate the protection, conservation, and use of the federal lands of Southern Nevada.



Mojave Desert SHC Demonstration Project and Climate-Smart Landscape Conservation Planning and Design



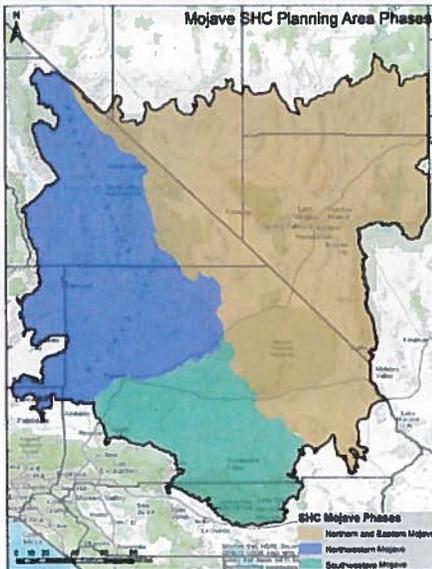
Background: The National Ecological Assessment Team was established by the USFWS and USGS to develop a consistent approach to setting and prioritizing conservation goals for FWS trust resources. The team developed an adaptive, landscape-scale conservation approach targeting factors that limit species populations and ecological integrity. In 2006, the team released a report that outlined this approach - "Strategic Habitat Conservation" (SHC). The USFWS adopted this approach as the foundation for cross-program coordination within the agency and with conservation partners.



Strategic Habitat Conservation is essentially an adaptive management framework. It is an iterative process of developing and refining a conservation strategy, making efficient management decisions, and using research and monitoring to assess accomplishments and inform future iterations of the conservation strategy. It is meant to address conservation problems through intensive collaboration with USFWS partners at large regional scales



Landscape Conservation Cooperatives: Secretarial Order 3289 formalized the establishment, use, and mission of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). The establishment of LCCs was aimed at the need for coordinating management responses to climate change across large regional landscapes. The Secretarial Order directed Interior Bureaus to work collaboratively with partners to establish LCCs that would help coordinate climate change adaptation strategies.



SHC in the Mojave Desert: In 2016, the FWS Pacific Southwest Region identified the Mojave Desert as a location to focus its efforts in the implementation of SHC. To address variation in the Mojave Desert's ecology, resource issues, land uses, land ownership, and stakeholder types, SHC planning subareas were defined.

In 2016, the Desert LCC also selected the northeastern Mojave Desert as a pilot area for its Climate-Smart Conservation Planning and Design Project. Because of geographic overlap, the need to address climate change adaptation as a central part of the SHC effort, and significant overlap in planning processes, the Desert LCC and FWS SHC efforts were combined for the northeast Mojave Desert. The process used for SHC planning in the northeastern Mojave Desert would be transferred to other SHC subareas.

Goal of Mojave Planning Process

Collaboratively identify and implement a shared vision to achieve long-term conservation for the Mojave Desert that promotes local economies and intangible desert values such as open space, maintains ecological processes, conserves iconic species and FWS trust resources, and addresses regional climate change adaptation.



Conservation Planning Principles

- Conservation of large, interconnected blocks of diverse habitats to provide for persistence of wildlife populations and biodiversity, movement of migratory species, and resilience to climate change.
- Maintenance of resilient and functional spring and stream ecosystems that support native aquatic and riparian biodiversity, natural ecosystem and cultural processes and services, and sustainable use.
- Maintenance of high-functioning desert grasslands and shrublands that provide ecosystem services to support human cultures, native species, and ecological processes.
- Identification of development strategies and practices to allow for growth of communities and infrastructure. Management of appropriate areas for recreational opportunities, such as off-highway vehicle recreation, rock hounding, camping, rock climbing, hiking, bird watching, etc.
- Identification of compatible land uses that can be managed without compromising conservation needs.
- Integration of resources from a wide array of partners to provide for consistent planning, funding, and implementation.

Planning Process

- Public and stakeholder outreach to collect additional input relevant to the SHC planning components.
- Refine and finalize planning area boundaries and identify planning partners and relevant stakeholders to participate on the planning team.
- Evaluation of existing land use plans to identify current, baseline approaches to natural resources management in the Mojave.
- Collaboratively develop of SHC/LCC planning goals and measureable objectives to guide for focal resources chosen by the planning team.
- Collate existing information and produce spatially explicit data and information about focal resources;
- Consolidate relevant components of the land use plans into a blueprint and summary document that addresses conservation management components.
- Evaluation of the planning objectives and the planning summary by a science advisory committee to obtain input.
- Identification of a suite of appropriate management strategies to achieve goals and objectives
- Development of action plans that prioritize management actions and climate change adaptation strategies and provides strategies for implementation and integration into existing management frameworks.

