

## MEMORANDUM

July 27, 2017

To: Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group

From: Paul Souza, Regional Director, Pacific Southwest Region

Subject: June 13, 2017, MOG Meeting Summary

The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) met on June 13, 2017, at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting focused on updates to the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office; funding range-wide monitoring; progress on recovery implementation, confirming priorities, and providing direction to the Recovery Implementation Teams for 2017. Cody Hanford, Executive Director, Transition Habitat Conservancy provided a presentation regarding Cooperative Habitat Management in the Western Mojave Desert.

**Upcoming Meetings**

\*MOG: **December 7, 2017** at the Springs Preserve, Las Vegas

**Desert Tortoise Council Symposium:** February 23-25, 2018, Sam's Town, Las Vegas, Nevada (numerous presentations on current research and management relative to tortoise recovery).

	<b>Action Items</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>1</b>	Report on efforts to revive the SDSS and desert tortoise recovery project database, including tracking of non-RIT projects	Roy A-M	Next meeting
<b>2</b>	Provide a presentation on recovery strategies outlined in the Mojave desert tortoise recovery plan, putting the MOG/RIT process into context with other strategies (e.g., proactive measures, monitoring)	Roy A-M	Next meeting
<b>3</b>	Guidance to RITs to add fire management and prevention to existing MOG priorities	Roy A-M/ Flo Gardipee	Next RIT meeting
<b>4</b>	Distribute DRECP durability agreement	Russell Scofield	Completed
<b>5</b>	Update on efforts to establish a raven management framework	Mike Senn/ Raul Morales	Next meeting
<b>6</b>	Email Ken Corey if interested in participating in subgroup to develop a strategic outreach plan for Mojave desert tortoise	All	Open
<b>7</b>	Update on development of a strategic outreach plan for Mojave desert tortoise	Ken Corey	Next meeting
<b>8</b>	Update from Range-wide Monitoring Subgroup on efforts to streamline funding and contracting and determine FY18 funding needs	Raul Morales/ Roy A-M/ Glen Knowles	Next meeting
<b>9</b>	Update on efforts to engage transportation agencies: transportation organizations invited to become MOG charter members will report on their willingness to become signatories	Ken Corey/ Glen Knowles	Next meeting

## **Suggested Future Agenda Items not included in Action Items**

1. Science Advisory Committee recommendations for appropriate metrics/parameters for monitoring effectiveness of recovery actions.
2. Presentation on climate refugia models
3. First-year translocation results from MCAGCC

## **Meeting Summary**

1. Welcome and Introductions: Welcome and opening remarks provided by Mike Senn, Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services, Region 8, USFWS.
  - a. The MOG has been around since the 1980s and began with participation by state agencies and has enjoyed great participation by Federal, state, and local agencies since then.
  - b. Research has increased and the research community has been expanded as a result of MOG efforts. These efforts have also been successful in bringing in outside research funding and resulted in an increase in published data and peer-reviewed papers that support the recovery process.
  - c. Energy independence and dominance is currently emphasized by the new administration.
    - i) How do we address this while conserving resources?
    - ii) How can we be more strategic with using our dollars and resources?
2. Purpose and Agenda Review: No changes to the agenda proposed.
3. Opening Remarks
  - a. Tribes have no funding for ESA issues. Moapa and other tribes are involved with renewable energy development projects that may affect federally-listed species such as the desert tortoise.
  - b. Federal highways should be involved to identify cost-efficient and effective mitigation. Infrastructure may become a more important issue, and threats from transportation projects may increase. Therefore, it is great to have participation from the federal and state transportation agencies.
  - c. Washington County HCP is still in progress. Several amendments have been proposed. It continues to be a slow process, but there is strong commitment.
  - d. The Department of Defense has been a great partner. There are many new faces and local participation is important.
4. Identify Recovery Priorities for the Coming Fiscal Year  
Roy Averill-Murray summarized the status of the MOG/RIT funding cycle since last December (presentation posted to the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office [DTRO; [link](#)]). The MOG's top five priorities have been restore habitat, education, decrease predator access to human subsidies, predator control, and install barrier fencing (on-the-ground management actions at higher priority than education).

A number of high-priority recovery actions have been funded or committed to since the December MOG meeting:

<b>RIT and Other (non-RIT) Projects (rank)</b>	<b>Cost</b>
UVR: Fire mgmt in DT habitat: awareness handout for firefighters (16)	In-house
Tortoise surveys in the UVR Recovery Unit (NA)	~\$25,000
NV BLM: Genomic & biogeographic analysis of <u>M. agassizii</u> & <u>M. testudineum</u> (NA)	\$122,507
<i>Native species seed hardening (1)</i>	\$50,000
<i>Silver State plant replacement (1)</i>	\$325,000
<i>Shrub transplant study (1)</i>	\$100,000
<i>Soil crust study (1)</i>	\$150,000
<i>Culvert study (20)</i>	
NV/WO BLM: <i>Seeds of Success/common gardens/seed menus/seed grow-out (1)</i>	
Transition Habitat Conservancy partnership, CA: <i>Habitat restoration (1)</i>	
CA REAT: Raven nest monitoring and management program (3/4)	\$627,839

Range-wide monitoring occurred in most areas this spring, although funding was put on hold midway through the project due to a DOI review of large agreements; surveys in Ivanpah, Fenner, and Chemehuevi were cancelled. Based on 2004-2014 distance sampling data, there appear to be stable or slightly increasing populations in the Northeastern Mojave, Fenner, and Joshua Tree National Park, with declines elsewhere (see maps in presentation).

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. The MOG recognized that feedback from the RITs is vitally important to identify priorities. Fire management and prevention was identified by all three RITs as a high priority, and the MOG agreed that this will be added to their top priorities. Funding of RIT recovery actions was discussed. Since there are no funds available directly from the MOG, recovery actions are funded by individual agencies, including via mitigation. Roy discussed the need to do a better job of collecting information regarding projects funded outside of the RIT process that benefit desert tortoise recovery. For example, Clark County is implementing a number of recovery actions under their MSHCP, including education and outreach, translocation, fencing and associated maintenance, habitat restoration and effectiveness.

Roy provided an update regarding the spatial decision support system (SDSS), which is currently not functional and needs to be moved to a new host. A webinar is scheduled on June 16, 2017, to discuss moving the SDSS to a new platform. MOG members recommended this should be a high priority. Roy will report on efforts to revive the SDSS at the next MOG meeting. In the meantime, information regarding funded projects, including shapefiles, could be collected and archived for future loading into the SDSS.

In response to MOG comments regarding population augmentation, Roy stated that the translocation plan, which is currently in progress, will inform augmentation efforts and help us be more strategic in selecting areas for augmentation. MOG members mentioned that many of the current priorities are defensive in nature and questioned whether the MOG should also be prioritizing more proactive measures. MOG members also mentioned that monitoring was not reflected in the priorities output provided by the SDSS. MOG members

expressed the need to have a larger discussion regarding the current recovery strategies and recommended that Roy do a presentation regarding the recovery strategy at the next MOG meeting.

5. Identify Shared Resources, Funding Opportunities, and Initiatives

- a. Presentation: Cooperative Habitat Management in the Western Mojave Desert, Cody Hanford, Executive Director, Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC): Cody described the THC and their organizational priorities, such as developing partnerships among multiple land managing agencies, land acquisition, route/road management and restoration, and public outreach and education. Most of their protection and restoration activities have been in the West Mojave. Their lands include about 4,176 acres acquired since 2012, mostly northeast of Kramer Junction. They have been working closely with BLM in Ridgecrest and Barstow in this region, with the intent of recovering tortoises and implementing MOG's five top and other priorities. Cody also discussed the collaborative work THC is involved with in the Fremont-Kramer ACEC and their effort in engaging the public in habitat restoration, particularly the OHV community. There was a recommendation to set up a reporting system with THC for them to share their data with the DTRO and the MOG.
- b. Presentation: Compensatory Mitigation Presentation, Russell Scofield: Russell reported that compensation has always been a part of offsetting impacts to tortoises. The DRECP ROD was signed in December 2016 and identifies compensation as acquisition or enhancement, and DRECP places greater focus on enhancement rather than acquisition. The counties strongly support this approach because it would reduce expansion of public lands and reduction of their tax base. A 2015 agreement between BLM and CDFW emphasized "durability" of mitigation actions. Russell forwarded the durability agreement (attached to this summary).
- c. Ad-hoc MOG Raven Workgroup, Mike Senn: Mike reported that at a November 2016 raven workshop in Palm Springs (see DTRO webpage [\[link\]](#)) development of a multi-state raven management plan was discussed. Such a plan would follow a similar plan being completed for sage grouse, in which actions are based on monitoring raven populations and implementing reduction activities when certain thresholds are met. This plan includes a three-tiered approach that links increasing management actions to raven densities relative to sage grouse demographics. Subsequently, a draft raven management plan was developed by the Nevada Department of Wildlife, BLM, and USFWS, which would also begin with addressing raven impacts to sage grouse in Nevada. Mike expects that this plan should be completed soon and available for MOG discussion in December. Because the Nevada plan will be expanded to include desert tortoises, it could contribute towards a future revision of the California EA for raven management. A one-day workshop involving a panel of experts may be planned.
- d. Strategic Outreach Plan, Ken Corey: The public and many stakeholders may not be aware of what the MOG is, what it is doing for tortoise recovery, and how they can help. We need to find a way to get the word out regarding the MOG to the general public, stakeholders, and other agencies. Ken Corey asked the MOG to identify how much public

outreach regarding tortoise recovery actions should be accomplished under an outreach plan that would be led by USFWS in the first year. He would like four or five public affairs experts affiliated with MOG organizations to work with him to identify specific strategic messages for public outreach (a public demonstration of Tim Shields' laser work as a raven deterrent was given as an example).

- e. Range-wide Monitoring Subgroup, Raul Morales: Over \$700,000 per year has been allocated to survey BLM lands in all recovery units over the next five years, with most of that funding going to conservation areas in California. Funding for monitoring has also been supplied by the Department of Defense (DOD) and Clark County. Funding for 2017 would have covered all areas, but the grant review process currently implemented by the new administration prevented the DTRO from being able to pass through some funding and complete monitoring in all areas.

USFWS needs to have funding completely in place by February each year to determine what can and cannot be surveyed. Raul, Roy, and Glen need to identify a system for accepting funds for monitoring. 29 Palms Marine Corps may be able to provide about \$75,000/year to support distance sampling in the Ord-Rodman Critical Habitat Unit. Linda Allison indicated that DTRO has money left over from BLM in 2017 (partly due to the DOI review of agreements in 2017) that will be available for next spring to help cover California.

## 6. Additional Action Item Reports

- a. Science Advisory Committee (SAC): The SAC will meet in Tucson, Arizona, on September 15 and 16 to discuss recommendations for appropriate metrics/parameters for monitoring effectiveness of recovery actions. They will meet again in Las Vegas in December prior to the next MOG meeting and will discuss their recommendations at the MOG meeting.
- b. Engage Transportation Departments, Ken Corey/Glen Knowles: We are actively working on getting greater participation from transportation agencies with the MOG. Two representatives from transportation attended today's MOG meeting: Steve Cooke, Chief, Environmental Services Division, Nevada Department of Transportation, and Dr. Abdelmoez Abdalla, Environmental Program Manager, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Nevada Division. Caltrans has difficulty attending meetings in Nevada because of state travel restrictions. They have been proactive in installing both tortoise fences and culverts along highways and freeways through tortoise habitat. It is currently standard operating procedure for transportation departments to fence all new highway widening projects, for example. Caltrans has been collecting raven fees for some projects. Issues with third-party mitigation were discussed, including Caltrans being open to a NFWF-type process to fence highways with third-party mitigation funds.
- c. Engage DOD, Ken Corey/Glen Knowles: Ken Corey thanked Fort Irwin, MCAGCC, Edwards Air Force Base, Nellis Air Force Base, and Marine Corps Logistics Base at Barstow for being represented today. USFWS will be working with various branches of

the military to develop interagency memoranda that will, among other things, facilitate transfer of money among signatory agencies. The Sikes Act encourages military installations to give preferential consideration to state and federal resource agencies through mechanisms identified in their various resource management plans.

7. Solicit Feedback on Focal Resources/Indicators for the Eastern Mojave Landscape Conservation Design Project, Genevieve Johnson: A brief presentation was given by Genevieve regarding progress of the LCD Project. The Desert Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) began implementing its Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) pilot study in early 2016. Potential indicators include studying desert tortoises to consider connectivity, Mojave fringe-toed lizards to study aeolian processes, studying Amargosa vole concerning freshwater emergent wetland habitat, and various rare bird species concerning riparian habitats, etc. Their goals are stated as achieving lasting conservation in the East Mojave by promoting effective collaboration and leveraging existing resources; to support coordinated management across multiple jurisdictions in the pilot area, which is eastern California and western Nevada. Continued funding of the LCD Project is uncertain under the currently proposed budget for FY 2018.
8. Review of MOG Process  
Glen Knowles solicited feedback from executive members to see how the MOG process may be improved. The discussion highlighted the need to ensure that the current attendance of personnel at executive levels is maintained and future attendance isn't delegated to non-decision makers, and to improve communication among MOG members/stakeholders between MOG meetings.
9. Closing Comments  
Raul Morales requested that progress reports be emailed in the off quarters between in-person meetings to keep the MOG informed and to gather information from action-item owners. **The next meeting has been changed to December 7, 2017.**

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

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title/Office</b>
Clark County	Marci Henson	Desert Conservation Program
Washington County	Cameron Rognan	Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Manager
QuadState Local Governments Authority	Bill Lamb	Executive Director
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Cristina Jones	Turtles Project Coordinator
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Ali Aghili	Senior Environmental Scientist, Supervisor
Nevada Department of Wildlife	Jen Newmark	Wildlife Diversity Bureau Chief
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	Ann McLuckie	Wildlife Biologist
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Chip Lewis	Western Regional Office
BLM, Arizona	Roxi Trost	State Office
BLM, California	Jerry Perez	State Director
BLM, Nevada	Raul Morales	Deputy State Director
BLM, Utah	Abbie Jossie	Deputy State Director, Natural Resources
FWS, Region 8	Mike Senn	Deputy Assistant RD
FWS, Region 8	Glen Knowles (MOG Facilitator)	Field Supervisor, Sothern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office
FWS, Region 2	Steve Spangle	Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office
USGS	Todd Esque	Research Ecologist
Edwards Air Force Base	Larry Zimmerman	Natural Resource Manager
Fort Irwin	Clarence Everly	Natural Resource Manager
Marine Corps Logistics Base	Leslie Benjamin	Environmental Division
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center	Walter Chritensen	Natural Resource Officer
USMC Installations West	Bill Berry	Regional Conservation Program Manager