

Mojave Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group June 14, 2018

Start Time: 9:00 am

Conducting: Mike Senn, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 8, Deputy Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services, Glen Knowles, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Field Supervisor, Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

Facilitator: Mary Orton, The Mary Orton Company, LLC

The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) met on June 14, 2018, at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting included discussion and review of the new Recovery Implementation Team project list, a presentation on the Science Advisor recommendations on research needs for recovery, presentations on restoration of fire-affected desert tortoise habitat, and an update on the 29 Palms translocation project and associated research, among other topics.

Upcoming Meetings

- *MOG conference call:* September 13, 2018 (details TBD)
- *MOG meeting:* December 6, 2018, Springs Preserve, Las Vegas, Nevada
- *Desert Tortoise Council Symposium:* February 21-23, 2019, Westward Look Wyndham Grand Resort & Spa, Tucson, Arizona (<http://www.deserttortoise.org/symposium/index.html>; numerous presentations on current research and management relative to tortoise recovery).

	Action Items	Owner(s)	Due Date
1	Distribute template for proposals for Renewable Energy Action Team/National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (REAT/NFWF)	Ken Corey	Completed (attached)
2	Let FWS know about proposals that could use mitigation funds	All	Ongoing
3	FWS assist in identifying process for DoD to deposit funds into a NFWF account for recovery implementation	Glen Knowles	Sept. 13
4	Follow up with REAT relative to concerns about alignment with MOG priorities	Jerry Perez	Sept. 13
5	Follow up with MOG to determine need to formally endorse research recommendations by the Science Advisory Committee	Glen Knowles	Sept. 13
6	Use Recovery Action Tracking Tool (module in the spatial decision support system [SDSS]) to track all recovery actions	Roy A-M	Sept. 13, ongoing
7	Let Walter Christensen know if you want to use translocation data from MCAGCC for research purposes	All	Ongoing
8	Let Glen Knowles know of interest in regional raven management framework	All	Jun 29

Suggested Future Agenda Items	
1	Status of Recovery Action Tracking tool (Sept. 13 conference call)

	Suggested Future Agenda Items
2	Highway fencing model
3	Captive desert tortoise survey results by Tortoise Group
4	Presentation on climate refugia models (suggested at June meeting)

Meeting Summary

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Mike Senn, Region 8 Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services Chief, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS); Glen Knowles, Field Supervisor, Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office; and Mary Orton, The Mary Orton Company, Facilitator

2. **Purpose and Agenda Review:** No changes to the agenda proposed.

3. **Opening Comments from MOG Executives**
 - a. Diane Elam, USGS: Kristin Berry recently published a paper on desert tortoise crowding in pens.
 - b. Cameron Rognan, Washington County: The County continues to pursue acquisition of inholdings within the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve. Funding is being sought to acquire a set of parcels that is available at 10% cost.
 - c. Dawna Ferris, Beaver Dam Wash and Red Cliffs NCAs, BLM: Partners have been persistent in pursuing Land and Water Conservation Funds to acquire habitat in the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve and Beaver Dam Wash.
 - d. Cody Leslie, Marine Corps Logistics Station, Barstow: Working to find funding for raven issues and I-40 fencing along their boundary.
 - e. Larry Zimmerman, Edwards AFB: EAFB is pursuing a Saharan mustard project that ties into Recovery Implementation Team project #CA13.v2 (see RIT project list distributed with the meeting agenda). The project involves mapping and developing a treatment plan for 70 miles of roadside and treating over 3-4 years.
 - f. Walter Christensen, MCAGCC: MCAGCC funded range-wide monitoring in the Ord-Rodman critical habitat unit in spring 2018, fulfilling a commitment made at a MOG meeting a couple of years ago. Plans include continued funding monitoring in of this unit in the future.
 - g. Scott Cambrin, Clark County MSHCP: The County is extending the post-translocation monitoring project in the Boulder City Conservation Easement (BCCE); funding a predator-prey dynamics study (USGS) and developing a predator management plan for the BCCE (Bill Boarman); conducting a population connectivity project with the University of Nevada, Reno; and embarking on an extension of BLM/FWS's culvert/camera study relative to tortoise-highway crossings; among other tortoise projects.
 - h. Cris Tomlinson, NDOW: NDOW has initiated a new study with BLM and FWS at Red Rock NCA using telemetered tortoises and citizen scientists to evaluate the functionality of the population linkage on the west side of Las Vegas. They also began a study funded by BLM on raven use of powerlines in southern Nevada.
 - i. Shawn Sartorius, FWS: The Arizona ES Office is continuing work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Mohave County on a General Conservation Plan for

the desert tortoise, and is seeking funding for 3 RIT projects they consider high priority, all of which are fuels reduction projects.

- j. Cristina Jones, AGFD: Cristina has been working with USGS and FWS on developing training courses for biologists, especially including basic tortoise handling to facilitate agency biologists' qualifications to move tortoises out of harms' way.
- k. Jerry Perez, California State Office, BLM: BLM is prioritizing projects that require NEPA analysis to ensure compliance with SO 3355, which requires EISs be completed within 1 year of the notice of intent. BLM completed a 45-day comment period and 8 public meetings on reviewing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and is now gathering the comments and working on the scoping report.
- l. Josh Hoines, Death Valley National Park: The Park continues to emphasize public education to reduce road mortalities of desert tortoises (the 10-year average rate of mortality was 1/year, but last year saw 5 road kills). They are also trying to secure funding for line distance sampling for tortoises in the Park.

4. **Recovery Implementation Teams Current Project List and Funding Status** (see RIT project list distributed with the meeting agenda and posted on Desert Tortoise Recovery Office [DTRO] website)

Roy Averill-Murray (FWS-DTRO) noted that among recently funded projects, range-wide monitoring surveys were completed this spring. The DTRO was unable to use BLM funding for this spring's surveys due to the duration of required DOI review of funding expenditures, but the review subsequently approved use of BLM funds for next year's surveys. FWS coordinated with NFWF to fund the "reboot" of the SDSS, which should be running later this summer. Attendees were requested to transfer additional funding for 2019 surveys to FWS by the end of December 2018 to ensure that agreements can be modified in time to apply the funding during the spring field season.

Roy also reviewed the RIT list of projects in need of funding. Comments and suggestions included:

- Add a row or other mechanism to track funding to date.
- Integrate tracking of projects initiated outside the MOG/RIT process (e.g., projects proactively funded by a particular agency or office) (*Action Item #6*)
- Highlight the MOG priorities at the top of the table.
- Double-check to determine whether project RW02 already has been funded.
- Provide a proposal template for accessing mitigation funds from the REAT (*Action Item #1*); see the attached proposal template. Project ideas should be submitted to the FWS (*Action Item #2*).
- Questions came up about the extent to which REAT and MOG priorities are aligned (*Action Item #4*).
- DoD needs assistance from FWS to identify a process for DoD to contribute funds to a NFWF account for recovery implementation (*Action Item #3*).
- Clark County is preparing to fund project #NE12 in their upcoming biennial budget.
- Project #6 on the "in development" list is already being funded in large part by Clark County (SNPLMA); any discrepancies in the project goals can be coordinated with the County to incorporate rather than funding separately.

5. Science Advisory Committee (SAC) Report on Priority Research Needs for Recovery

Lesley DeFalco (USGS and SAC member) updated the MOG on the SAC's discussion of research needs at their March meeting:

- Given the continued emphasis on *translocation* of desert tortoises in the path of development and concerns related to *disease*, key research topics relate to Recovery Actions 3.4 and 5.4:
 - Retrospective analysis of translocation and health from past projects
 - The impact of drought/nutritional status on disease and understanding the frequency and impact of recrudescence on tortoise health
 - Spatially explicit social networks altered by translocation (implications for pathogen transmission)
- Another important topic is better understanding *habitat quality* (Recovery Action 5.1). Understanding habitat factors that contribute to greater than average reproductive output and recruitment has implications for habitat management (e.g., conservation/loss of source vs. sink habitat blocks), connectivity/fragmentation, and restoration. Initiating demographic study areas (Recovery Action 4.1) would help with this research topic.
- Continued research on the relative importance of different *habitat restoration* projects for recovery is needed (Recovery Action 5.2).

Discussion revolved around whether the list of recommendations should be or needed to be formally endorsed by the MOG (*Action Item #5*). No decision was made at this meeting.

6. Revegetating fire-affected desert tortoise habitat in the Red Cliffs & Beaver Dam Wash NCAs

Ann McLuckie, Wildlife Biologist, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, and John Kellam, Wildlife Biologist, BLM-Utah St. George Field Office gave presentations on habitat restoration projects in Utah. Their presentations are posted to the DTRO website.

7. Update on Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Expansion and Desert Tortoise Translocation

Walter Christensen updated attendees about MCAGCC's land expansion and translocation efforts, including protocols followed, challenges addressed, and (early) lessons learned. His presentation is posted to the DTRO website.

8. Raven Management Framework Update

Ken Corey provided several raven updates. 1) Over the last couple of years, Hardshell Labs has tested egg oiling on natural nests with almost 100% success in preventing hatching and little to no re-nesting by adult ravens. They recently conducted a demonstration of drone-applied oiling on a mock transmission line tower and plan to move to real application. 2) Raven monitoring in 2018 found 14 nests of offending ravens (i.e., tortoise shells beneath the nests), and 16 ravens were lethally removed. 3) An RFP to analyze the raven monitoring data to date recently closed.

Glen Knowles reported that FWS Region 8 and NDOW are actively engaged in a western states coordinated effort for raven management. We are in the process of assembling a Raven Management Core Team with staff from the FWS western regions and will be using our Conceptual Species Conflict Framework to develop a broad plan. We will be looking to engage the States and other stakeholders on that very soon. Anyone interested in more information or in participating should contact Glen (*Action Item #8*).

9. Eastern Mojave Landscape Conservation Design

Boris Poff, BLM, updated attendees on the LCD project and a recent workshop, which addresses desert tortoise conservation within a broader landscape-scale conservation effort. His presentation is posted to the DTRO website.

10. California Highway Fencing Needs and Coordination Among Agencies

Ken Corey mentioned the ongoing work to develop a model to prioritize highway fencing that addresses biological factors (e.g., on-the-ground recovery benefit), as well as logistical factors (e.g., checkerboard land ownership, at-grade roads). An update is planned for the December MOG meeting.

Ken mentioned the desire to develop a programmatic EA for highway fencing to facilitate proactive projects that do not already have NEPA analyses completed. A volunteer(s) is needed to spearhead the effort similar to the process to develop the raven management EA.

11. Review of Action Items (see above)

12. Public Comments

No public comments were offered.

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

- a. Meeting evaluations were collected by Mary and will be used to improve future meetings.
- b. Future meetings and agenda items (see above, first page)

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

Agency	Name	Title/Office
Clark County Nye County Washington County QuadState Local Governments Authority	Scott Cambrin Darrell Lacy Cameron Rognan Gerry Hillier	Desert Conservation Program Director, Community Development Red Cliffs Desert Reserve Manager Executive Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife Nevada Department of Wildlife Utah Division of Wildlife Resources Arizona Game and Fish Department	Ali Aghili Cris Tomlinson Ann McLuckie Cristina Jones	Senior Environmental Scientist, Supervisor Wildlife Diversity Wildlife Biologist Nongame Branch
BLM, Arizona BLM, California BLM, Nevada BLM, Utah	Jody Weil Jerry Perez Raul Morales John Kellam	Deputy State Director State Director Deputy State Director Wildlife Biologist
Death Valley National Park Lake Mead National Recreation Area	Josh Hoines Mark Sappington	Resources Division Chief Natural Resources Program Manager
FWS, Region 8 FWS, Region 2	Mike Senn Shawn Sartorius	Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services Acting Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office
USGS	Diane Elam	Research Manager
Edwards Air Force Base Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Marine Corps Logistics Base, Barstow USMC Installations West	Larry Zimmerman Dan Leavitt Walter Christensen Cody Leslie Bill Berry	Natural Resource Manager Natural Resource Officer Regional Conservation Program Manager