

# Mojave Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group Webinar Summary September 13, 2018

**Start Time:** 9:00 am

**Conducting:** Glen Knowles, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Field Supervisor, Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office

The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) convened via webinar/conference call on September 13, 2018. Glen Knowles (USFWS) noted that the primary purpose of the call was to review the MOG’s efforts to streamline recovery development, funding, and implementation. The call also included review of action items and feedback from the December meeting. The call was attended by a diverse group of approximately 36 people including MOG executives, managers, staff, and interested parties. During introductions we learned that Jeff Humphrey has been named the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Arizona Ecological Services Office Field Supervisor, replacing the retired Steve Spangle.

**Action Items from the June MOG Meeting:**

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

**Meeting Summary**

**MOG evaluations from June Meeting**

Glen Knowles reviewed the feedback received from the MOG members after the June meeting, as well as the following changes that will be implemented for future MOG meetings in response to the feedback:

- More time will be allowed for opening comments from the MOG executives at in-person meetings as this is an important item where a lot of important information is exchanged.
- The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office will continue to update the SDSS and recovery action tool with the goal of tracking projects outside of MOG/RIT efforts, and continually update the MOG on progress.
- The planning team will continue to clearly identify on meeting agendas when feedback and decisions are expected from the group.
- The planning team will work to provide a good balance of time between presentations and time for discussion.
- The planning team is looking into other potential venues for in-person MOG meetings, including other cities and other facilities in Las Vegas, to maximize attendance, and improve acoustics and other room issues.
- More tables will be provided at the December meeting at the Springs Preserve.

### **Update on partnership efforts by FWS and DOD to streamline compliance and recovery implementation**

Brian Croft, Division Chief, Mojave Desert Division, Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office, provided information on the FWS-DOD Recovery and Sustainment Partnership. The effort is a high priority for both agencies, signed by Lucian Niemeyer, Assistant Secretary of Defense, and Susan Combs, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the Interior, in June 2018. The goal is to provide greater mission flexibility for installations while also providing a more streamlined approach to contributing to recovery. The Mojave Desert Tortoise is one of 11 other species in our area (all in California) that are included in this partnership. FWS is leading the development of brief implementation plans on 3-5yr time frames (preferably 1-2 years) for these species, which will be approved by DOI and DOD leadership. The desert tortoise plan is intended to dovetail with the MOG/RIT process with hopes to develop more flexible funding mechanisms, such as via NFWF, that will allow DOD to support recovery actions outside their installations.

### **Update from the June MOG meeting on desert tortoise recovery funds**

Glen Knowles explained that at the June MOG meeting during the discussion of the RIT Team Project list and funding status, there were several questions about the Renewable Energy Action Team account which led to an action item for Jerry Perez on how the REAT's priorities align with the MOG priorities. This agenda item is to follow up on that and expand on it to provide the MOG an overview of the CA and NV funds used for recovery. We also now have a form on the DTRO website that MOG members can fill out to submit projects for this funding.

Glen Knowles explained that in Nevada, both BLM and FWS manage funds for desert tortoise recovery that are funded through remuneration fees collected as mitigation through section 7 consultation with BLM or other federal agencies on projects (a per acre fee for permanently lost desert tortoise habitat). BLM maintains its fund, and FWS has a fund maintained by NFWF. Funds are expended out of the BLM fund by mutual agreement between FWS SNFWO and the BLM NV State Office. Funds are expended from the FWS NFWF fund by the SNFWO and DTRO based on input from the MOG and desert tortoise recovery needs and priorities (e.g., revitalizing the desert tortoise spatial decision support system). The NFWF fund can only fund projects relevant to Nevada, but otherwise has few restrictions.

The status of BLM's ability to continue collecting remuneration fees is uncertain under BLM's recent national Instructional Memorandum on mitigation (which states that BLM will no longer collect mitigation fees). We hope to have more information on the implications to desert tortoise projects at the December MOG meeting.

Ken Corey explained that in California, two NFWF accounts are available for funding implementation of regional raven management activities in California. Activities funded under these accounts fit within the framework of the regional raven management program outlined in the FWS 2008 Environmental Assessment for raven management in the California desert. Both accounts receive funds assessed through a \$105/acre fee on development projects that have the potential to provide long-term subsidies to common ravens. One of the accounts, known as the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) raven account, collects fees from renewable energy projects that are authorized under BLM, CEC, CDFW, and FWS authorities. Project proposals for funding under this account are brought to one of these agencies and can be funded if the four agencies reach a consensus decision to approve funding. The second account, known as the DMG (Desert Managers Group) raven account, collects fees from all other projects in the California desert that have the potential to create raven subsidies. The fees are assessed by DMG member agencies through their permitting authorities. Consequently, funds in this account can come from counties, BLM, CDFW, and other permitting agencies. Project proposals for funding under the DMG account can be brought to the FWS for discussion and consideration by the DMG. Some DMG member agencies have delegated their authority for project approvals to the FWS.

### **Follow up with MOG on recent research recommendations from the Science Advisory Committee**

Roy Averill-Murray, Desert Tortoise Recovery Coordinator, explained that at the June MOG meeting, Leslie DeFalco presented the recommendations of the Mojave Desert Tortoise Science Advisory Committee. The recommendations were as follows:

- 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).

Continuing discussion from the June MOG meeting, the group concluded that there was no need to formally endorse the recommendations, particularly given that there is no mechanisms for the MOG to collectively fund research projects. In addition, these recommendations are not exclusive of other potentially valuable research topics listed in the recovery plan, or that may be identified in the future. Nevertheless, the point was made that there is value in MOG discussion of progress in priority research, and the group committed to follow up on the status of the SAC's recommendations at future meetings.

**Update on Recovery Action Tracking Tool**

Roy Averill-Murray explained that, using the Nevada NFWF Account for desert tortoise funds, a contract was put in place to rebuild the Mojave Desert Tortoise Spatial Decision Support Tool. This project will also develop what we have been calling the Recovery Action Tracking Tool. We plan to have a demo of the Recovery Action Tracking Tool to share with the MOG at the December meeting.

**Action Items**

	<b>Action Items</b>	<b>Owner(s)</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>1</b>	Distribute Memorandum of Understanding between DOD and DOI establishing a Recovery and Sustainment Partnership Initiative	Glen Knowles	Completed (attached)
<b>2</b>	Provide more information/documentation of available funds for desert tortoise recovery	Glen Knowles	Dec. 6
<b>3</b>	Distribute link to the Environmental Assessment to Implement a Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Task: Reduce Common Raven Predation on the Desert Tortoise <a href="https://www.fws.gov/carlsbad/PalmSprings/DesertTortoise/Raven%20EA%20Final%203-08.pdf">https://www.fws.gov/carlsbad/PalmSprings/DesertTortoise/Raven%20EA%20Final%203-08.pdf</a>	Glen Knowles	Sept. 13
<b>4</b>	Distribute the March 10, 2018 Science Advisory Committee Research Recommendations to the RITs	Roy Averill-Murray	Completed

**Future MOG meetings**

December 6, 2018 - Springs Preserve, Las Vegas