

# Mojave Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group February 27, 2019

**Start Time:** 9:00 am

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

The Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (MOG) met on February 27, 2019, at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting included the annual report on Mojave desert tortoise recovery, discussion and review of the current Recovery Implementation Team project list, and presentations on remote egg oiling, strategic road effect planning, programmatic approaches to NEPA, and the captive desert tortoise population in Las Vegas.

## Upcoming Meetings

- *MOG conference call:* July 11, 2019 (details TBD)
- *MOG meeting:* October 29, 2019, Springs Preserve, Las Vegas, Nevada (details TBD)

## Meeting Summary

1. **Welcome and Introductions:** Mike Senn, Region 8 Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services Chief, FWS; Glen Knowles, Field Supervisor, Southern Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office, FWS
2. **Purpose and Agenda Review:** No changes to the agenda proposed.
3. **Action Item Tracking Report:** No changes to the action item tracking report proposed.
4. **Opening Comments from MOG Executives**
  - a. Brian Croft, FWS: FWS Palm Springs is developing programmatic BOs with Caltrans, Mojave National Preserve, and BLM that should free up staff time to work on proactive recovery projects. Also working on Department of Defense (DOD)-DOI Department of the Interior (DOI) Recovery and Sustainment Partnership Initiative (RSPI) to integrate DOD funding with MOG priorities.
  - b. Kim Tripp, Washington DC Office, Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Working on a blanket Memorandum of Agreement with NFWF for compensatory mitigation, and in the meantime working to spend down all desert tortoise mitigation monies currently held by BLM. Also working on contracting with Conservation Science Partners to stitch together all BLM desert tortoise recovery actions across field offices which ultimately will contribute to Spatial Decision Support System (SDSS) and strategic recovery planning.
  - c. Walter Christiansen, Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Station (29 Palms): Post-translocation monitoring continuing at 29 Palms. Also working on transferring funds

- to FWS for desert tortoise recovery projects. Also working on RSPI, specifically working with FWS to develop a recovery crediting strategy for DOD installations. Also working on a programmatic NEPA document for raven depredation permits on DOD lands.
- d. Dan Leavitt, China Lake: Working on a programmatic BO with FWS on range expansion, and working with US Geological Survey (USGS) on a project to look at desert tortoise connectivity in the region.
  - e. Joe Stout, California State Office, BLM: Currently acting State Director for California, exploring CA BLM's funding streams, mitigation, and needed conservation actions for desert tortoise. The West Mojave Trail Management EIS is ongoing; plan to release final EIS and Plan Amendment in April. Implementation of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is also ongoing, currently in public scoping period.
  - f. Jen Newmark, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW): Currently tracking desert tortoise in Red Rock National Conservation Area, connectivity and human impacts of encroachment. Also working on a raven study of rights-of-way and powerlines with GPS tracking of individual ravens – an interesting early result are the large numbers of red tailed hawks in the study area.
  - g. Jeff Humphrey, Arizona Ecological Services Office, FWS: Continuing to develop Mojave County General Conservation Plan, still looking for a non-Federal permit holder. Have recently completed consultations that move livestock grazing on the Arizona Strip from year-round to seasonal grazing. Also working to find ways to establish fuel breaks on the strip.
  - h. Scott Wilson, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): Currently have a heavy workload in California Endangered Species Act (CESA) permitting, working with Palm Springs FWS to better integrate application of mitigation to desert tortoise recovery.
  - i. Christina Jones, Arizona Game and Fish Department: Working with FWS to help establish Mojave County GCP. Coordinating with FWS, Desert Tortoise Council, and others to develop another desert tortoise health assessment training.
  - j. Ann McLuckie, Utah Department of Wildlife Resources: Continue studying restoration study plots. Also developed Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) project assessing Esplanade for weed control, and assessing translocation in Red Cliffs Zone 4.
  - k. Marci Hansen, Clark County: Acknowledged Kristina Drake for Desert Tortoise Council Award for research and recognition as a woman scientist. Clark County currently has 27 active desert tortoise projects including supporting range-wide monitoring, managing the Boulder City Conservation Easement, connectivity modeling in Clark County, post-translocation monitoring, Mojave Max program, off-highway vehicle outreach “Shred to the Max” campaign, new projects to use volunteers to help maintain desert tortoise fencing, a new road mortality study, and a new study looking at population viability in translocation sites.
  - l. Larry Zimmerman, Edwards Air Force Base: Continuing monitoring of last head-start release, supporting San Diego Zoo/USGS habitat study with the use of head-start pens. Has completed a study of desert tortoise habitat use on base, completed

- helicopter surveys of entire base for invasive species, also working on a Sahara mustard treatment plan.
- m. Abbie Jossie, Utah State Office, BLM: Currently working on several desert tortoise habitat restoration projects, also finalizing St. George Field Office Transportation Plan this year. Also actively working on habitat acquisition.
  - n. Jody Weil, Arizona State Office, BLM: Currently working to develop several fuel break projects on the Arizona Strip.
  - o. Jon Raby, Nevada State Director, BLM: Continuing to collect restoration funds until the national policy is completed. Also continuing a study of annual invasive grass treatments, and supporting a project to evaluate the Large Scale Translocation Site (LSTS).

## 5. Progress Towards Recovery Annual Report:

Roy summarized the MOG recovery priorities and RIT projects that were funded and initiated in the last year (see RIT project list distributed with the meeting agenda and posted on Desert Tortoise Recovery Office [DTRO] website:

[https://www.fws.gov/nevada/desert\\_tortoise/dtro/index.html](https://www.fws.gov/nevada/desert_tortoise/dtro/index.html)). Additional high-priority work that has been initiated in the past year include partial funding of the development of an aversive training device for raven predation reduction by a DoD Small Business Innovation Research grant, BLM funding of surveys in the Tonopah field office to better understand tortoise distribution in an under-surveyed part of the range and their potential contribution to recovery, and BLM/FWS support to round out the FY19 effort of the connectivity study in Ivanpah Valley conducted by USGS. Work on rebuilding the desert tortoise spatial decision support system is continuing, and BLM provided additional funding to update data layers and to further develop the ability to estimate increases/decreases in risk from specific projects once the base system is back up and running.

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

- Jon Raby said BLM Nevada is interested in funding RW02 Seed Increases for Desert Tortoise Habitat Restoration in Southern Nevada (total project \$140,000), and could help fund NE11 Installation of Desert Tortoise Fencing and Culverts on Nevada State Route 159 within Red Rock Canyon NCA (\$637,905) and NE12 Installation of Desert Tortoise Fencing and Culverts on U.S. Highway 95 from Tule Springs to Indian Springs, Clark County, Nevada (\$955,150).
- Joe Stout said he would follow up with staff on specific projects and is interested in helping fund, if necessary, RW02, and in funding or helping to fund CA30 Desert Tortoise Barrier Fencing: Interstate 40 near Kelbaker Road (\$543,500).
- After several questions and discussion about the need and efforts to capture non-RIT recovery projects, FWS requested MOG members to send information on implementation of non-RIT recovery projects to Flo Deffner (*Action Item #1*).
- FWS will provide annual updates on the status and implementation of Line Distance Sampling (*Action Item #2*).

**6. Remote Egg Oiling: Limiting Raven Reproduction with Emerging Technology**  
Tim Shields, Founder & Chairman, Hardshell Labs, and Mercy Vaughn, President, Sundance Biology, Inc., gave a presentation on their work developing a drone-equipped egg-oiling device to eliminate raven recruitment from electrical transmission-line towers. The presentation are has been posted to the DTRO website.

**7. Strategic Road Effect Planning**

Kerry Holcomb, FWS, gave a presentation on a model to prioritize road effect projects including fencing and culverts that addresses biological factors (e.g., on-the-ground recovery benefit), as well as logistical factors (e.g., checkerboard land ownership, at-grade roads). His presentation is posted to the DTRO website.

- After some discussion, MOG members requested both the model itself and a prioritized list of road reaches for recovery projects based on the model output (*Action Item #3*).

**8. A Programmatic Approach to NEPA**

Brian Croft, FWS, provided a presentation on the potential to develop programmatic NEPA among agencies to facilitate implementation of desert tortoise recovery projects.

- Several MOG members expressed interest in working to develop programmatic NEPA to implement habitat restoration projects, install tortoise barrier fencing along highways, and to improve on the Raven Management EA to expand the geographic area and types of control and improve the decision process for phasing.
- There was also some discussion on ECOS determination keys being developed by FWS to streamline section 7 consultation; BLM expressed interest in funding FWS for this effort. This item was also added to the list of future agenda items.
- FWS will organize a small group of MOG members to identify high priority programmatic NEPA needs for desert tortoise and report at a future MOG meeting (*Action Item #4*).

**9. Captive Desert Tortoise Survey Results**

Kobbe Shaw, Tortoise Group, reported on efforts to estimate the population size of captive desert tortoises in the Las Vegas valley. There was a good discussion of how to reduce pet tortoise overpopulation and associated threats to the wild population. His presentation is posted on the DTRO website.

**10. Review of Action Items (see Action Item Tracking Report below)**

**11. Public Comments**

No public comments were offered.

**12. Closing Comments/Future Agenda Items/Next Meeting Date**

- a. Glen asked MOG members about the new Spring/Fall meeting schedule and MOG members indicated they support the new schedule.
- b. Future agenda items (see below): During this agenda item, attendees discussed the pressing need to better understand how development is affecting movement corridors for

desert tortoise. FWS will work with other agencies and entities to organize a presentation or session on crucial connectivity corridors for desert tortoise (*Action Item #5*).

- c. Meeting evaluations were collected by Glen and will be used to improve future meetings.
- d. Future meetings: MOG conference call, July 11, 2019 (details TBD), in-person MOG meeting, October 29, 2019, Springs Preserve, Las Vegas, Nevada (details TBD).

<b>Suggested Future Agenda Items</b>	
<b>1</b>	Effects Pathways Manager and consultation tool in FWS ECOS
<b>2</b>	Crucial connectivity corridors for desert tortoise

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

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Title/Office</b>
Clark County	Marcy Henson	Desert Conservation Program
QuadState Local Governments Authority	Gerry Hillier	Executive Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Scott Wilson	Senior Environmental Scientist, Supervisor
Nevada Department of Wildlife	Jen Newmark	Wildlife Diversity
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	Ann McLuckie	Wildlife Biologist
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Ty Gray	Director
	Cristina Jones	Nongame Branch
BLM, Arizona	Jody Weil	Deputy State Director
BLM, California	Joe Stout	Acting State Director
BLM, Nevada	Jon Raby	State Director
BLM, Utah	Abbie Jossie	Deputy State Director
FWS, Region 8	Mike Senn	Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services
FWS, Region 2	Jeff Humphrey	Acting Field Supervisor, Arizona Ecological Services Office
USGS	Todd Esque	Research Ecologist
Edwards Air Force Base	Larry Zimmerman	Natural Resource Manager
Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake	Dan Leavitt	
Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center	Walter Christensen	Natural Resource Officer

## Mojave Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group Action Item Tracking Report

Note: Items marked “Closed” will be removed from the next iteration of the report.

Item Date / No.	<u>Action Item</u>	Assigned To / Due Date	Status
Item 2017 Sep#01	Provide list of RIT projects/descriptions/budgets to MOG	DTRO	Ongoing
Item 2018 Jun#01	Let FWS know about proposals that could use mitigation funds	All	Ongoing
Item 2018 Jun#02	Use Recovery Action Tracking Tool (module in the spatial decision support system [SDSS]) to track all recovery actions	DTRO	Ongoing
Item 2018 Sep#01	Provide more information/documentation of available funds for desert tortoise recovery	Glen Knowles	Open
Item 2019 Feb#01	Send information on your non-RIT Recovery Actions to Flo Deffner ( <a href="mailto:Flo_Deffner@fws.gov">Flo_Deffner@fws.gov</a> )	All	Open
Item 2019 Feb#02	Report annually on range-wide line distance sampling surveys	Glen Knowles	Open
Item 2019 Feb#03	Provide table of high priority road fencing needs and road priority model to MOG – MOG members should send GIS data on existing exclusion fencing along roadways to Kerry Holcomb ( <a href="mailto:Kerry_Holcomb@fws.gov">Kerry_Holcomb@fws.gov</a> )	Kerry Holcomb	Open

<b>Item Date / No.</b>	<b><u>Action Item</u></b>	<b>Assigned To / Due Date</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Item 2019 Feb#04</b>	Brian Croft will work with interested MOG members to identify high priority programmatic NEPA needs for desert tortoise and report at a future MOG meeting – please let Brian know if you want to be involved ( <a href="mailto:Brian_Croft@fws.gov">Brian_Croft@fws.gov</a> , 760-322-2070 x410)	Brian Croft	Open
<b>Item 2019 Feb#05</b>	Roy Averill-Murray will work with other interested agencies and organizations to develop a session on crucial connectivity corridors for desert tortoise	Roy Averill-Murray	Open