



Summer

2012

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Nevada Partners Recognized For Conservation



From left to right: Ken Mayer, David Spicer, Ted Koch and Ren Lohofener Photo: USFWS

On September 5, 2012, U. S. Fish and Wildlife (Service) Region 8 Director Ren Lohofener, presented the Service Citizen's Award to David Spicer for his contribution to the habitat restoration and conservation of the Amargosa toad (*Anaxyrus nelsoni*). This national award recognizes private citizens and organizations for their voluntary contributions to the mission and goals of the Service.

Other partners recognized for their contributions to the species' conservation included: Shirley Harlan; Ed Ringle; Beatty Habitat Committee; Town of Beatty; The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Southern Nevada Field Office; Nevada Natural Heritage Program; Bureau of Land Management (BLM),

Tonopah Field Office; Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Las Vegas Service Center; Nye County; Amargosa Conservancy; and Saving Toads through Off-Road Racing, Ranching and Mining in the Oasis Valley (STORM-OV).

Joining Regional Director Lohofener to present certificates and plaques to honor the Nevada partners at Red Rock National Conservation Area, were Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) Director Ken Mayer, Senator Reid's representative Sara Moffat, Senator Heller's representative Chaunsey Chau-Duong, Congressman Joe Heck's representative Brian Weaver, and the Service's Nevada State Supervisor Ted Koch.

Nevada Partners (continued)

By partnering with federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations, local government, and fellow landowners, and acquiring grants, David Spicer and partners have restored 11 springs, enhanced one mile of the Amargosa River, and created or enhanced 57 acres of toad breeding and foraging habitat mostly on private land.

The Amargosa toad was first petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species

Act (ESA) in 1994 due to threats which included invasive species, habitat loss, vegetation encroachment, and ground water pumping.

The Service was petitioned for listing a second time in 2008 and completed a 12-month review of the toad's status in July 2010. The Service determined that the species did not warrant protection under the ESA.

The Service was able to reach this not warranted determination because of the coordinated conservation work by the local community, and agency partners. Their conservation efforts demonstrate that a community working together can help preclude the need to list a species.



Shirley Harlan (left) with Ken Mayer

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

As chair of the Beatty Habitat Committee, Shirley Harlan took on the Beatty Habitat and Trails Project and never gave up, even when funding and support declined. She introduced biologists to landowners in the early 1990s to begin the process of evaluating the status of the species and securing access to private properties for surveys. She has persisted through opposition over the ensuing two decades. Without her persistence, the Beatty Habitat Committee and Friends of the Amargosa Toad would have been distant memories. Shirley has landscaped her property to provide toad habitat, which has served as a source population of toads in the area.



Ed Ringle (center) with Ken Mayer (left) and Ted Koch (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

As a major commercial property and business owner in Beatty, Ed Ringle donated property to the TNC for toad conservation and partnered with TNC to complete toad habitat restoration projects on his property. Mr. Ringle and TNC continue to improve habitat along the Amargosa River, which is part of the parcel donated to TNC for conservation purposes pursuant to prescribed conservation actions in the Amargosa Toad Conservation Agreement and Strategy.



Beatty Habitat Committee

Shirley Harlan, Beatty Habitat Committee (right) Sara Moffat (left), Brian Weaver (left center), Chaunsey Chau-Duong (right center)

Photo: USFWS

The Beatty Habitat Committee was formed in 2000 as a local organization to protect habitat for the Amargosa toad. In 2001, the Committee and Beatty Town Board sponsored a multi-use workshop to discuss and resolve potential problems in the Amargosa River and Oasis Valley area. The Committee helped organize a Charette which served as one of the first landscape planning efforts with a goal to enhance economic development in Beatty and provide for conservation of the toad. The Governor of Nevada proclaimed the day of the Charette as a day in honor of the Beatty Habitat and Trails Project.



Town of Beatty

Erika Gerling, Town of Beatty (center), Ken Mayer (left), Ted Koch (right) Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

The Beatty Town Board formed the Beatty Habitat Committee in 2000 to begin planning for a trail system with conservation projects for the toad. The Beatty Town Board provides meeting facilities for the Amargosa Toad Working Group, and funding for a pocket park and other projects in Beatty.



Nye County

Gary Hollis, Nye County (center), Ted Koch (left), Ken Mayer (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

Nye County became involved with the Amargosa Toad Working Group in October 2000 by signing the Amargosa Toad Conservation Agreement and Strategy. Nye County has provided support and funding for toad conservation efforts including the Beatty Habitat and Trails Project. The County has committed staff resources for the Amargosa Toad Working Group and coordinates county planning efforts with the group to avoid conflicts with the toad. They coordinate with NDOW and Service biologists on ways to control mosquitoes, which may harbor West Nile virus, without impacting toads.



Amargosa Conservancy

Donna Lamm, Amargosa Conservancy (center), Ted Koch (left), Ken Mayer (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

The Amargosa Conservancy is dedicated to the protection of the land, water, and beauty of the Amargosa area in California and Nevada. The Amargosa Conservancy has been actively involved in toad conservation by participating in meetings of the Amargosa Toad Working Group and regularly contributing to the group. The Conservancy recently donated property along the Amargosa River in Beatty for a pocket park, which serves as a demonstration project in support of the Beatty Trails Project. Soil-Tec and STORM-OV donated materials and services to construct the park.



Saving Toads Through Off-Road Racing, Ranching, and Mining in the Oasis Valley

Brad Hunt, STORM-OV (center), Ken Mayer (left), Ted Koch (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

STORM-OV was formed to provide toad conservation through habitat restoration, protection, and community involvement to achieve progress toward goals established in the 2000 Amargosa Toad Conservation Agreement and Strategy. Accomplishments include: projects to avoid impacts to the toad such as construction of culvert systems; removal of invasive salt cedar and thinning of riparian vegetation to improve conditions for the toad; projects to minimize toad predation; and controlled livestock grazing. STORM-OV works with the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and NDOW's Landowner Incentive Program.



The Nature Conservancy, Southern Nevada Field Office

Jim Moore, TNC (center), Ken Mayer (left), Ted Koch (right)

Photo: USFWS

TNC purchased the 130 acre Torrance Ranch in 1999 and the 524 acre Parker Ranch in 2000 to be managed for the Amargosa toad. TNC has worked with the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and NDOW's Landowner Incentive Program to implement several habitat restoration projects benefiting the toad. TNC continues to work with partners and volunteers to remove debris from the banks of the Amargosa River to improve habitat for the Amargosa toad and restore habitat on the parcel donated by Ed Ringle.



Bureau of Land Management, Tonopah Field Office

Thomas Seley, BLM (center), Ken Mayer (left), Ted Koch (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

BLM provided funding for invasive salt cedar removal to improve toad habitat and implemented other habitat improvement projects, including construction of a fence to control burro use at Bryan Spring and prepared an environmental assessment for restoring five spring systems. BLM continues to provide biologists for annual toad population monitoring surveys.



Natural Resources Conservation Service, Las Vegas Service Center

Jarrod Edmunds, NRCS (center), Ted Koch (left), Ken Mayer (right)

Photo: D. Nielsen/NDOW

In 2001, NRCS provided funding to TNC under their Wetlands Reserve Program for improvements to 190 acres of the Parker Ranch to benefit the Amargosa toad and other wildlife, the first project of its kind in Nevada. NRCS staff advises the Amargosa Toad Working Group on the benefits of grazing and how it can be used as a tool to improve habitat conditions for the toad. In 2012, the NRCS provided funding to Dave Spicer for toad habitat work on his property.



Nevada Natural Heritage Program

The Nevada Natural Heritage Program chairs and organizes the semi-annual Amargosa Toad Working Group meetings and facilitates many of their administrative functions.

A Passion For Amargosa Toads

With a passion for conservation of the Amargosa toad, David Spicer, a rancher in Beatty, Nevada, has successfully rallied together his community. His leadership brought together environmental organizations, off-road vehicle users, mining interests, ranchers, members of the Nevada business community not usually associated with species conservation, as well as the local community, to implement conservation actions for the Amargosa toad. Their conservation efforts for the Amargosa toad have helped preclude the need to list the species.

In addition to his community leadership, Spicer founded a non-profit organization, Saving Toads Though Off-Road Racing, Ranching and Mining in the Oasis Valley (STORM-OV), and designed and constructed spring outflows to maintain functional toad habitat through Nevadas hot, dry summers.

In response to a petition to list the Amargosa toad, an Amargosa Toad Working Group was formed to provide management and conservation guidance for the toad. Members of this group include NDOW, TNC, BLM, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, NRCS, Beatty Habitat Committee, Nye County, local residents and the town of Beatty, Nevada.

On September 14, 2011, Rob Moroka, Ecologist and Nevada Conservation Advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity wrote Mr. Spicer a letter commending him and the other partners as follows:

“STORM-OV has been able to bring



David Spicer holds Amargosa toads at a restoration project on his private property.

Photo: C. Manville, USFWS

the community, miners, ranchers, motorized recreation enthusiasts, and conservation organizations together to effectively work with the FWS and the Nevada Department of Wildlife in accomplishing significant on-the-ground conservation actions that have benefited the toads and resulted in an increasing population trend. Dave Spicer has been at the heart of these activities and instills a contagious enthusiasm and spirit into the conservation efforts.”

This community working together is the perfect example of successful habitat restoration and species conservation.

Amargosa Toad

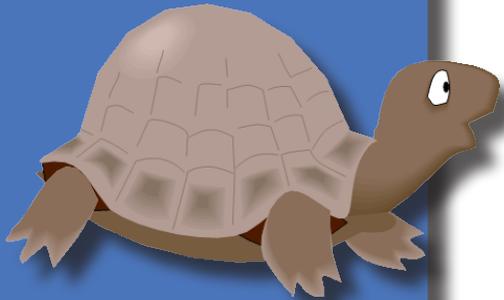
Amargosa toads are members of the family Bufonidae, which includes North American true toads. The species is only found in the Oasis Valley in southern Nye County, Nevada. The historical and current range of the Amargosa toad is estimated to occur along an approximately 10 mile stretch of the Amargosa River and nearby spring systems, roughly between the towns of Springdale and Beatty. The amount of known and potential Amargosa toad habitat is estimated at 6,633 acres, approximately 50 percent of which is on private land.



Photo: M. Burroughs, USFWS

Breeding season for the Amargosa toad begins in mid-February, when egg clutches are laid. A female may lay up to 6,000 eggs in a single clutch, which appears as a long strand of black dots intertwined among vegetation along the edges of a slow-moving stream or shallow body of water. Toads require relatively open water that persists long enough for the tadpoles to metamorphose into toadlets and leave the water. Breeding activity tapers off and ends in July. The eggs typically develop into tadpoles within a week and tadpoles turn into toadlets .

Keep Wild Tortoises Wild and Captive Tortoises Captive



Pet Desert Tortoise Fast Facts



It is legal to be a custodian of a captive desert tortoise if it was in captivity prior to the desert tortoise's protection under the ESA in 1990. This includes their progeny.



It is illegal to collect desert tortoises from the wild.



Captive pet tortoises can be transferred to a new custodian through a new on-line adoption process at: <http://tortoisegroup.org/adoption.php>



Captive tortoises may carry diseases that harm wild populations of desert tortoises. It is illegal to release pet tortoises into the wild.



Desert Tortoise

Photo: DTR0/USFWS

Desert tortoises have lived in the area that is now the Mojave Desert for millions of years. Today, they are rarely seen in the wild and in some places have disappeared entirely. Even though desert tortoise populations have declined in the wilds of the harsh desert, captive pet tortoises have been able to thrive with regular food and water. Their longevity and uncontrolled breeding of captive tortoises has resulted in thousands of unwanted pets.

Keep wild tortoises wild. Keeping wild tortoises in the wild and appropriately managing their habitat is the key to recovering the species. Prior to protection as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1990, desert tortoises were collected as pets and individuals have been legally allowed to keep those desert tortoises as well as their progeny. However, since desert tortoises are now protected under the ESA, state and federal laws prohibit further collection of the species from the wild.

One of the fundamental purposes of the ESA is to conserve the ecosystems

upon which species depend, and raising individuals in captivity does not meet that purpose," said Ted Koch, Service's state supervisor for Nevada.

The primary threats to desert tortoises are habitat based. Simply putting more tortoises out in the wild is not effective if habitat quality is not sufficient to support them, or more importantly, support successful reproduction of wild tortoises already there.

Keep captive tortoises captive. Release of unwanted captive-bred pet tortoises into the wild can threaten the wild population and is an inhumane practice. If a captive tortoise is released into an area that already has a declining population of native tortoises it can create a situation where wild and pet tortoises are competing for limited food, water, and shelter.

"To help address the underlying issues caused by the proliferation of unwanted pet tortoises, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) proposes to implement a change in Nevada Administrative Code (NAC503.093), that would limit

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possession of captive desert tortoise to only one per individual if the tortoise was obtained after enactment of this regulation,” said Laura Richards, NDOW Wildlife Diversity Division Chief. “Public workshops and approval of the regulation change by the Board of Wildlife Commissioners and the Legislative Commission, (or their Subcommittee to Review Regulations) will be required before the amended regulation can be adopted.”

While captive and wild desert tortoises may carry many of the same diseases, pet tortoises can spread disease picked up in captivity to tortoises in the wild. Diseases may not be apparent in a captive situation where the tortoise is well fed and watered, but can progress to become more debilitating and transmissible under the harsh conditions of the desert environment. A desert tortoise pick-up service that has been transporting unwanted captive tortoises to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) near Las Vegas is expected to end in October. Instead, individuals unable to continue

to care for their pets can transfer them to another custodian through an on-line pet tortoise adoption program or surrender them to the Lied Animal Shelter, 655 North Mojave Road, Las Vegas, NV 89101. For more information on the pet adoption program or on pet tortoise care, visit <http://tortoisegroup.org/adoption.php>.

Desert Tortoise Conservation Center.

The DTCC is operated by San Diego Zoo Global in partnership with the Service, BLM, and NDOW. The termination of the pet pick-up service will move the DTCC from a transfer-and-holding facility for unwanted pets to a facility that will support range-wide recovery efforts for the desert tortoise through conservation research, on-the-ground recovery actions, training of biologists, and public education.



Biologists collect a blood sample as part of a desert tortoise's health screening at the DTCC.

Photo: DTR0

“The expertise of the San Diego Zoo will help the Fish and Wildlife Service and our partners to screen tortoises that can be released back to carefully chosen locations in the wild in conjunction with conservation research and management,” said Koch.

GIS Staff Honored By Peers



Cathy Wilson with her Peoples Choice Award Poster

Photo: USFWS

This year, Nevada Fish and Wildlife Office Geographic Information Specialist (GIS) Cathy Wilson took home the People's Choice Award at the annual Nevada Geographic Information Society Conference for her outstanding poster featuring the successful efforts to protect the Amargosa toad.

The conference, held May 16-18, 2012, in Las Vegas, is a statewide gathering of GIS professionals. The award was presented to Wilson by her GIS peers for the best photo.

“This is really an honor, to be selected as the best by other GIS professionals,” said Wilson.

Wilson has been filling the GIS role in Las Vegas since November 2009. Before joining the Service's Southern Nevada Field Office, she attended the College of Southern Nevada and worked at various companies, including Microsoft and Boeing in Seattle, Washington.

The Service's GIS program in Nevada consists of three staff. These behind-the-scene professionals provide maps, geographic data, remote sensing, analysis and technical expertise in support of the Service's mission in Nevada.



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A Message From The State Supervisor

Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt once said at a conference I attended, "We in the conservation community don't celebrate our successes enough." I agree.

However, we in Nevada have had good reason to celebrate recently, and we've not missed the opportunities. As you can see in the cover story of this newsletter, Dave Spicer and partners in Beatty, Nevada, worked together to conserve habitat for the Amargosa toad sufficiently to preclude the need to list it under the Endangered Species Act. In addition, conservation groups who in other instances have litigated the Service to list species supported these conservation efforts and eventually agreed that toads were adequately conserved and listing wasn't warranted.

This successful partnership is a good example of how working together really can make a difference in conservation of a species. We are hopeful that a strong partnership network that is developing and seeking to conserve greater sage-grouse will be as successful as the partnership in Beatty.

Many challenges remain for many of Nevada's species but we're making progress and enhancing existing or forging new partnerships in the process. We look forward to celebrating these and many future success with you.

Sincerely,

Edward D. Koch

