

News Release

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Statement Regarding Media Reports on Status of Desert Tortoise at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center in Nevada

Recent media reports regarding the status of desert tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (DTCC) have implied that the FWS is currently euthanizing desert tortoises at the facility. We want the public to know that the FWS is not euthanizing healthy tortoises.

The DTCC was established in 1990 to receive wild tortoises in harm's way from development and has taken in unwanted pets since 1996. Over 1,000 tortoises arrived at the DTCC each year, and approximately 98 percent of those are surrendered or stray pets. Science-based protocols developed for desert tortoises brought to the DTCC have been instrumental in helping the FWS maintain a healthy population of desert tortoise in the wild. Managing to recover desert tortoise, a threatened species, is a complex task in which all options need to be considered, and all risks and benefits to the species must be assessed.

Many pet tortoises, unfortunately, are diseased or otherwise in poor health, and run the risk of spreading disease to wild tortoises. These tortoises cannot be relocated to the wild, or otherwise contribute to recovery of the desert tortoise population. Sometimes euthanasia of *unhealthy* pet tortoises is necessary, but only as last resort, and only after we evaluate other options. All healthy tortoises at the DTCC will be relocated to sites that will support the recovery of the species.

Progress is being made on translocating the healthy DTCC tortoise population to the wild. A Programmatic Environmental Assessment is complete, and tortoises are already being translocated by the FWS to an approved site in Trout Canyon, Nevada. Public scoping for a second translocation plan was completed Aug 22, 2013, for a proposed translocation area south of Coyote Springs, Nevada.

The Animal Foundation (TAF), Lied Animal Shelter continues to take in unwanted pet tortoises from the public. However, the fact remains that the DTCC does not currently have the capacity or the funding to accept and care for additional tortoises.

Recovery of the desert tortoise in the wild continues to be our top priority. However we are deeply concerned about the growing number of unwanted pets, and will continue to work with our partner agencies toward finding a suitable solution for tortoises that cannot be returned to the wild.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen,

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