



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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ENDANGERED STATUS NOT WARRANTED FOR
PORTION OF DESERT TORTOISE POPULATION

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced that the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise will not be proposed for addition to the endangered species list.

Service Director John Turner said extensive studies conducted by the agency indicate the Sonoran population is widespread throughout its range and does not appear to be affected by disease and habitat loss. The presence of similar threats led to listing the Mojave population of the desert tortoise as endangered in April 1990.

"We have gathered a great deal of comprehensive information on the health of the Sonoran population," said Turner, "and found little evidence to indicate the respiratory disease afflicting the Mojave population of this species has had an impact on the Sonoran tortoises. In addition, the Sonoran's habitat is much less suitable for recreational vehicle use, livestock grazing, and other potential impacts."

The Sonoran population of the desert tortoise is found in Arizona south and east of the Colorado River in rocky canyons

(over)

and steep slopes, and in Mexico. The endangered Mojave population is found north of the Colorado, in the states of California, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona, and in western Mexico.

In Arizona, about 70 percent of the Sonoran habitat occupied by tortoises is on Federal land. Land-managing agencies, including the Service, the National Park Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, have specific management policies that provide protection for the desert tortoise. In addition, the Arizona Desert Wilderness Act of 1990 protects some 1,460 square miles of undisturbed desert habitat on BLM and Service land.

Recent surveys by the Service and the Arizona Department of Fish and Game indicated there are nearly 10,800 square miles of potential desert tortoise habitat in Arizona.

The Service's decision responded to a 1984 petition requesting endangered status for the entire desert tortoise population. The Service determined in 1985 that listing was warranted but precluded by other pending proposals of higher priority.

In 1989, substantial new information was received concerning population declines among some tortoises due to the upper respiratory disease syndrome. That information resulted in an emergency listing of the Mojave population in 1989, with a final listing in 1990, and the continued status review of the Sonoran population to determine whether listing was warranted. Only isolated reports of the respiratory disease have come from the range of the Sonoran desert tortoise. The Service will continue to monitor the status of the Sonoran population as well as its habitat.