



BLM Mojave desert tortoise “focal area” concept development



MOG meeting | 26 April 2022

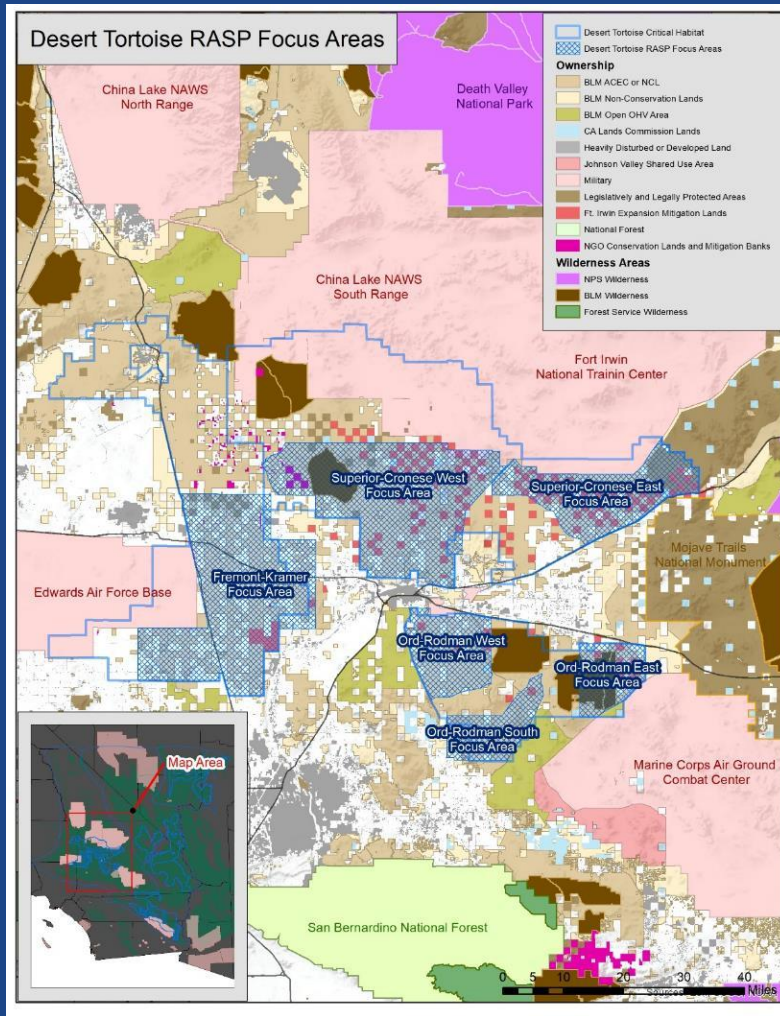


Background

- BLM currently developing rangewide strategic plan for Mojave desert tortoises
- BLM's focal area discussion started with initial ideas from FWS, RASP in November, have been discussing internally and with FWS since
- Filtering initial ideas through BLM's lens
 - Multi-use mandate
 - Existing land use plans, land use designations
 - Existing efforts for tortoises and other resources
- **Ideas, concepts, potential processes, still in development: NOT OFFICIAL BLM APPROACH OR DECISIONS**
- This presentation is meant to summarize thought process and discussions thus far, and stimulate discussion among broader MOG members, including other land managers

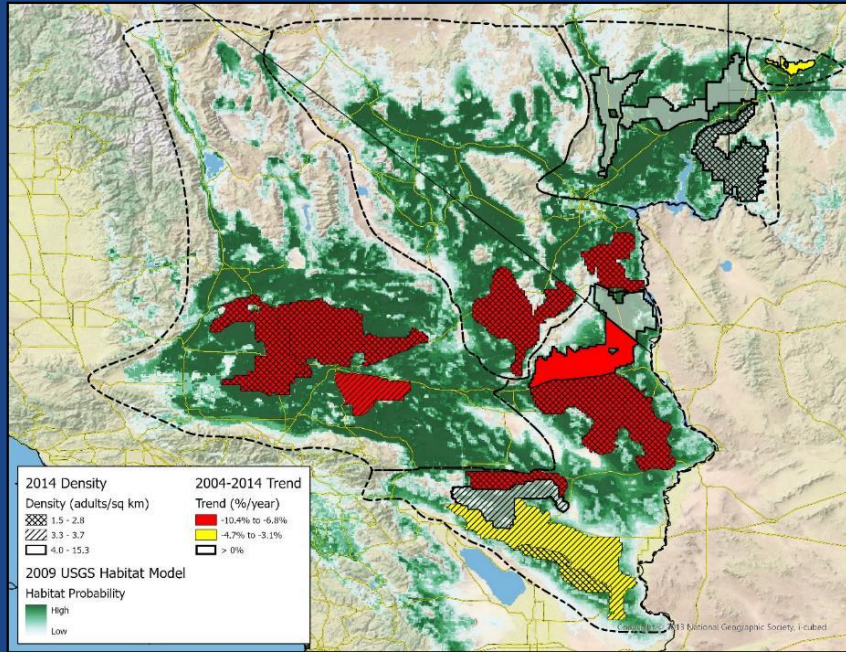
Recovery and Sustainment Partnership

- Focal areas for targeted, comprehensive recovery implementation
- 5-year implementation plan with specified monitoring metrics



Roy's presentation at previous MOG meeting

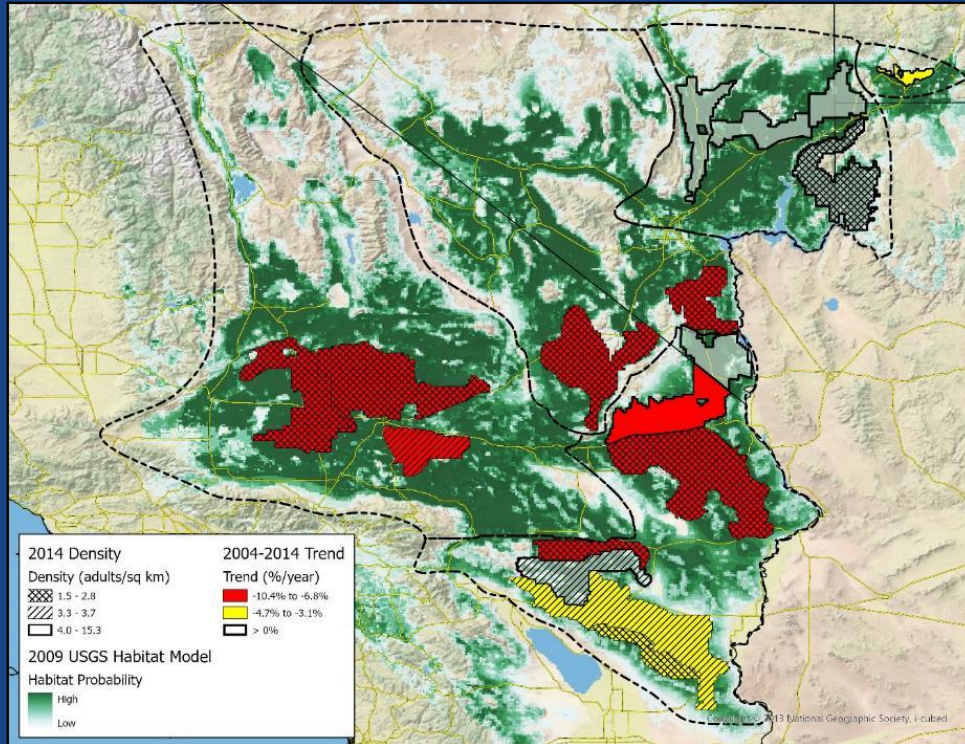
What do Recovery Focal Areas really mean?



Delineated areas believed to be important to the long-term persistence of the MDT across its range within which

- a) recovery resources can be concentrated such that threats can be meaningfully reduced or eliminated within 5-10 years so that
- b) local tortoise populations can be stabilized or augmented, thereby creating strongholds from which longer-term, range-wide recovery criteria can be approached.

Where might we identify focal areas within your Field Office?



- Clusters of tortoises
- Good habitat potential
- Management control/potential
- Known management needs
- Route density
- Other special-status species
- Partners

Roy's presentation at previous MOG meeting

Points to consider about ‘focal areas’: BLM perspective

- Need to be careful not to de-emphasize areas outside of focal areas
- Needs to complement existing land use designations and regulations
 - *BLM does not want a new designation requiring new lines on maps*
- Desire to describe priorities consistently with clear justifications via standardized criteria (e.g., evaluate and balance biological criteria, habitat quality criteria, threats)
- Can identify where work is happening, how it is prioritized at state and rangewide scales, and roll up priorities from FOs to rangewide
- Allow for re-evaluation of priorities to be sure investments are sound and effective
- Generate a portfolio approach that allows flexibility and reflects realities
- ***How to recognize different types and status of lands, and inclusive of different management opportunities?***

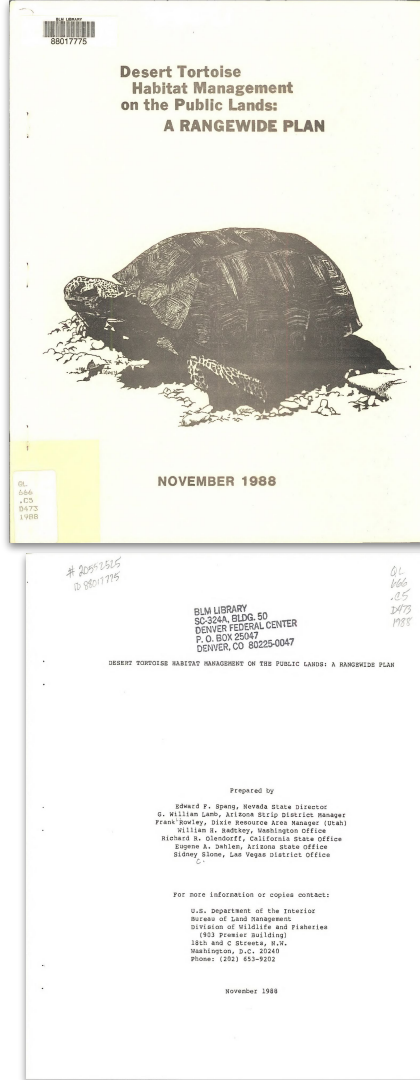
What already exists?

- 2011 Recovery Plan
- MOG, RIT priorities
- Existing BLM rangewide MDT management plan (1988)
- Existing land use plans
- Existing land use designations
 - TCAs, CHUs, ACECs, et al.

BLM rangewide desert tortoise management plan (1988)

Table 1. Goals and criteria for three Categories of desert tortoise Habitat Areas. The criteria are ranked by importance to the categorization process, with Criterion 1 being the most important.

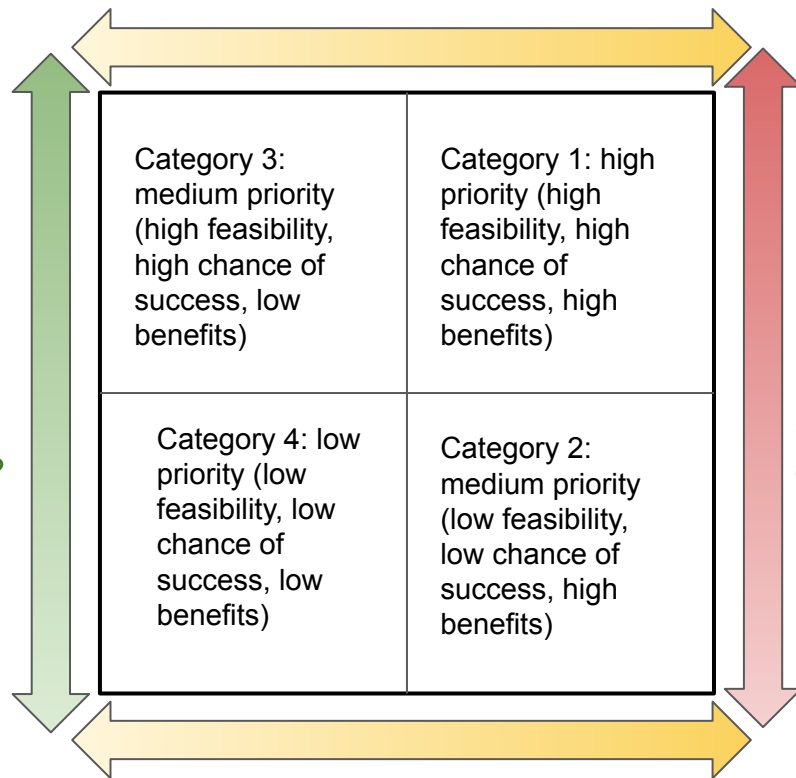
Items	Category I Habitat Areas	Category II Habitat Areas	Category III Habitat Areas
Category Goals	Maintain stable, viable populations and protect existing tortoise habitat values; increase populations, where possible.	Maintain stable, viable populations and halt further declines in tortoise habitat values.	Limit tortoise habitat and population declines to the extent possible by mitigating impacts.
Criterion 1	Habitat Area essential to maintenance of large, viable populations.	Habitat Area may be essential to maintenance of viable populations.	Habitat Area not essential to maintenance of viable populations.
Criterion 2	Conflicts resolvable.	Most conflicts resolvable.	Most conflicts not resolvable.
Criterion 3	Medium to high density or low density contiguous with medium or high density.	Medium to high density or low density contiguous with medium or high density.	Low to medium density not contiguous with medium or high density.
Criterion 4	Increasing, stable, or decreasing population.	Stable or decreasing population.	Stable or decreasing population.



Habitat categories?

- Focal area concept (as currently defined) tries to specify a single category
- Could exclude other areas, some of which already designated, work already occurring
- Categories that apply across the range, in a similar way, would allow flexibility in management actions and how they are prioritized
- Values for each axis could be linked to recovery plan or other framework/guidance
- Different management actions for each category

What is
current
habitat
condition?



How
resolvable are
conflicts with
other uses?

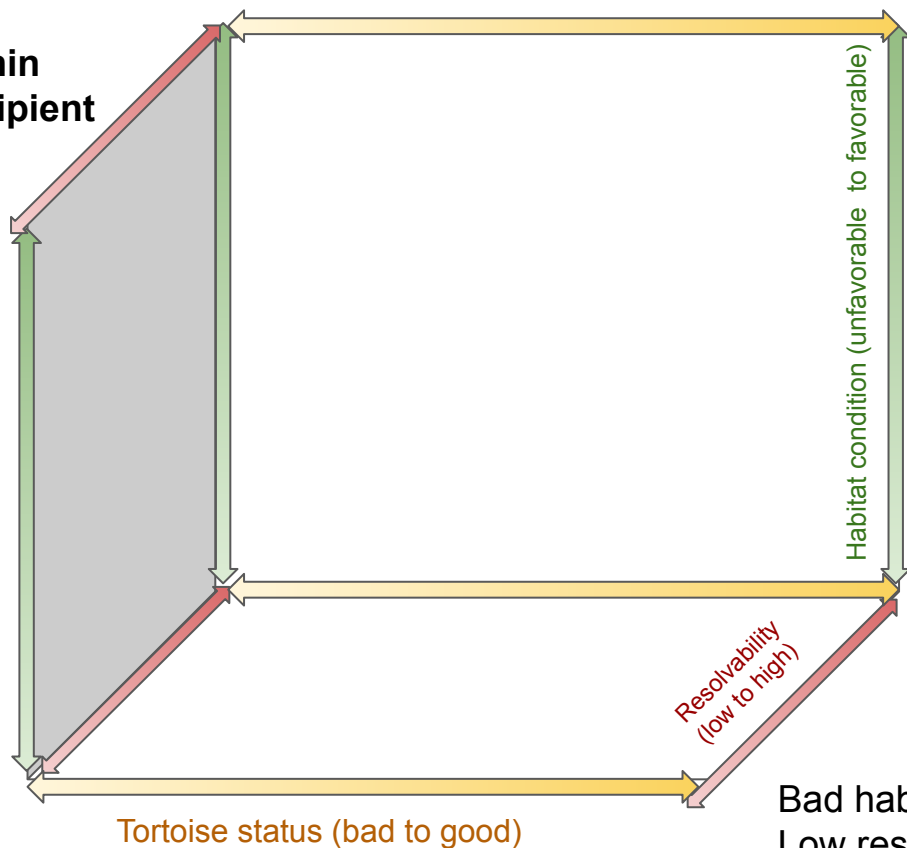
What is status of tortoises?

Good habitat + Few tortoises +
High resolvability
= **focal areas within
translocation recipient
areas?**

Good habitat + Some
tortoises +
High resolvability
= **focal areas within
ACECs?**

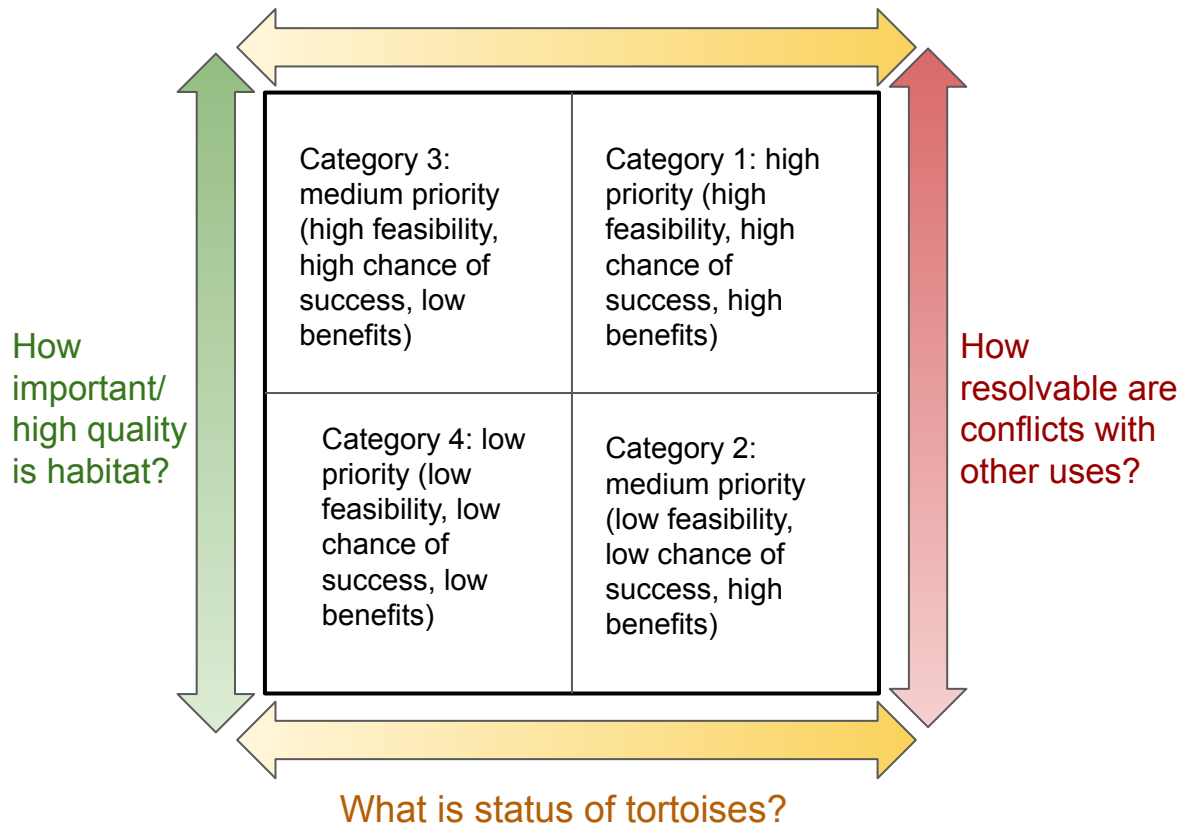
Bad habitat + Few
tortoises +
Low resolvability
= **mine sites :(**

Bad habitat + Some tortoises +
Low resolvability
= **focal areas within OHV areas?**



Habitat categories?

- We learned from BLM workshop that people gravitate to existing areas and activities
- Define 'desired state' for each axis and each category
- Categorize existing land designation areas
- Further categorize smaller areas within larger areas as the 'focal areas'?
- Define current and desired states for each area, and activities needed (including changes to plans, etc.)
- Creates inclusive portfolio approach of all areas within FOs

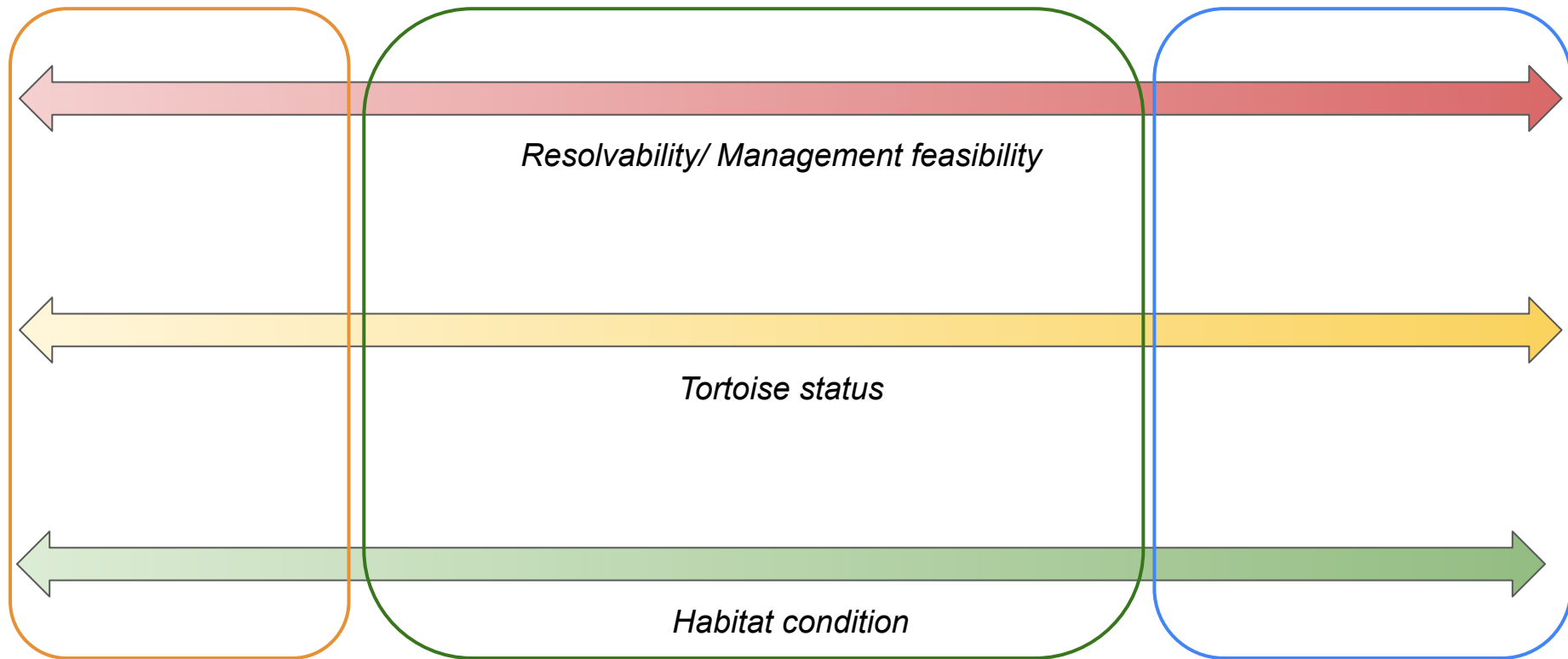


Habitat categories?: Possible criteria to evaluate

- **Habitat condition (Favorable to Unfavorable)**
 - Habitat suitability, connectivity, occupancy
 - Ongoing/previous restoration efforts
 - Raven density, documented tortoise mortality
 - Invasive cover, climate change?
 - Minimum size, if nested within existing designation
 - Size relative to minimum tortoise densities, number of tortoises that could be supported
- **Tortoise status (High to Low)**
 - density, occupancy, trends, demographic rates
- **Resolvability of conflicts with other uses, existing pressures (High to Low)**
 - 1988 Mgmt Plan: “Whether actions required are within BLM’s discretion and comport with overarching regulatory frameworks” (e.g., FLPMA, land use plans)
 - Degree to which habitat area already has existing, competing uses:
 - e.g., OHV intensity (esp. unauthorized routes), renewable energy sources, grazing
 - Ongoing actions? New actions required? New regulations required? Changes to existing LUPs

Criteria to evaluate to categorize habitat types:

Quantitative thresholds? Index of several factors?





Various relevant factors to evaluate for each criterion

Relationship of habitat area to other areas on landscape; i.e., connectivity, size

Road density

Raven density

Invasives cover

Habitat suitability estimates

Probability of MDT Occupancy (and/or extinction and/or colonization); Values, trends



Habitat condition



Various relevant factors to evaluate for each criterion

Other tortoise data?

Demographic plot data

Density estimates (for TCA within Recovery Unit or Field Office)

Probability of MDT Occupancy (and/or extinction and/or colonization); Values, trends

Movement connectivity values

Relationship to recovery objectives



Tortoise status



Various relevant factors to evaluate for each criterion

Available resources

Existence and efficacy of partners

Existence and extent of regulatory framework to deal with certain uses

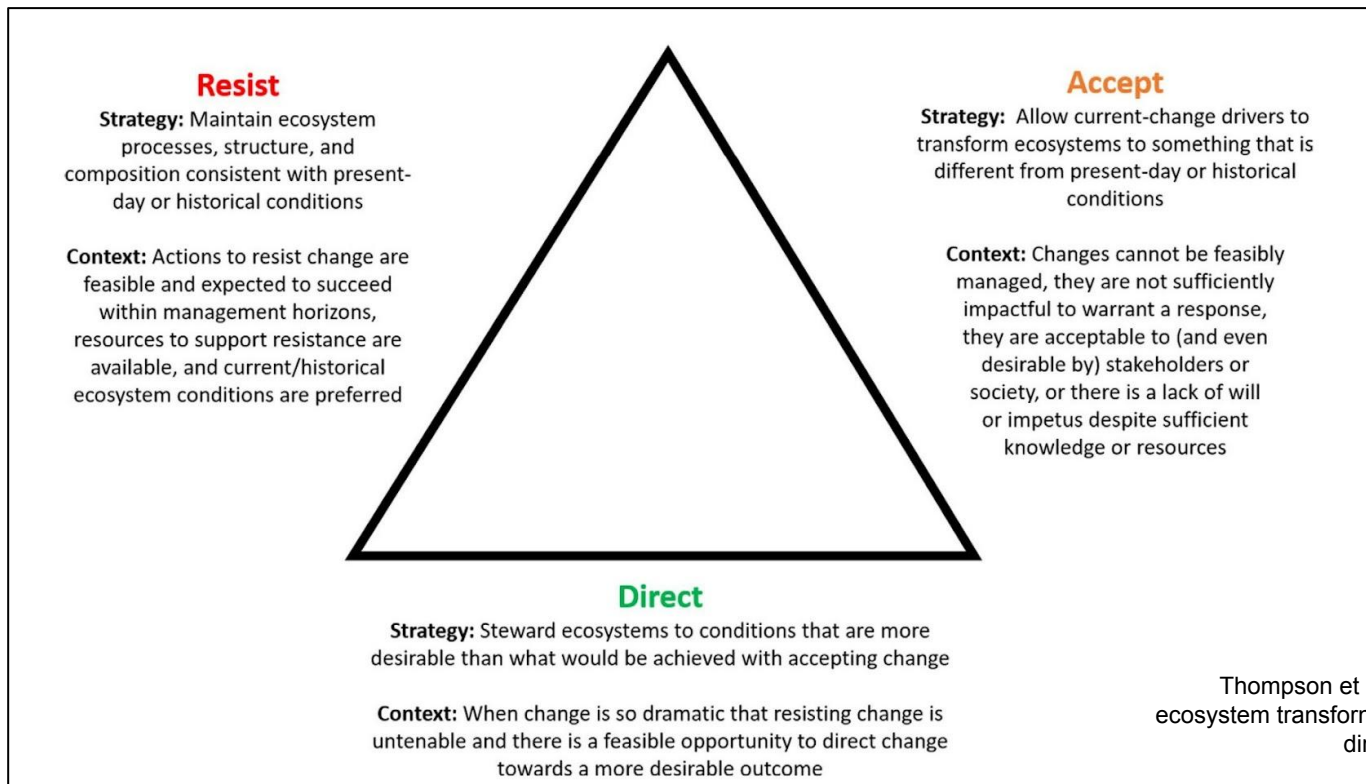
Management needs to address uses; ongoing or new activities needed

Types and extent of conflicting uses



Resolvability/ Management feasibility

Eventually need to factor in climate-change considerations

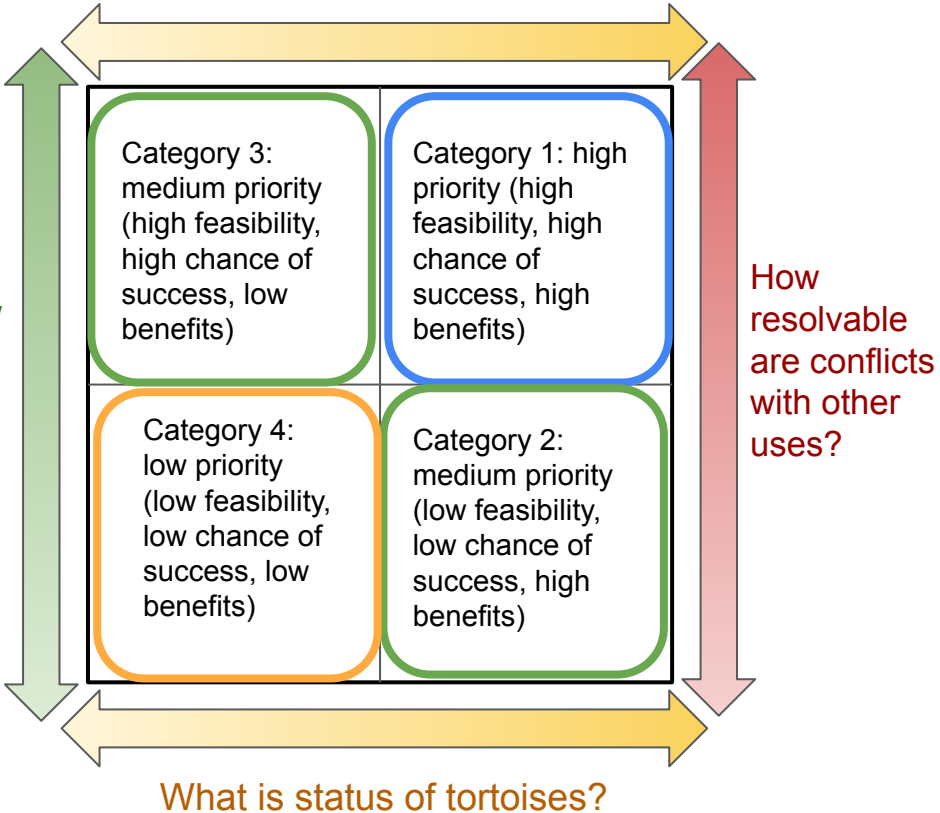
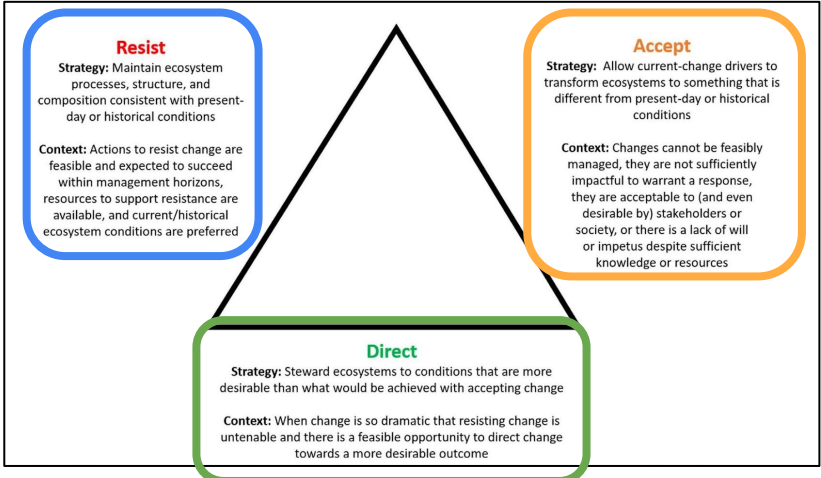


Thompson et al. 2021. Responding to ecosystem transformation: resist, accept, or direct? Fisheries 46:8–21.

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How important/
high
quality is
habitat?

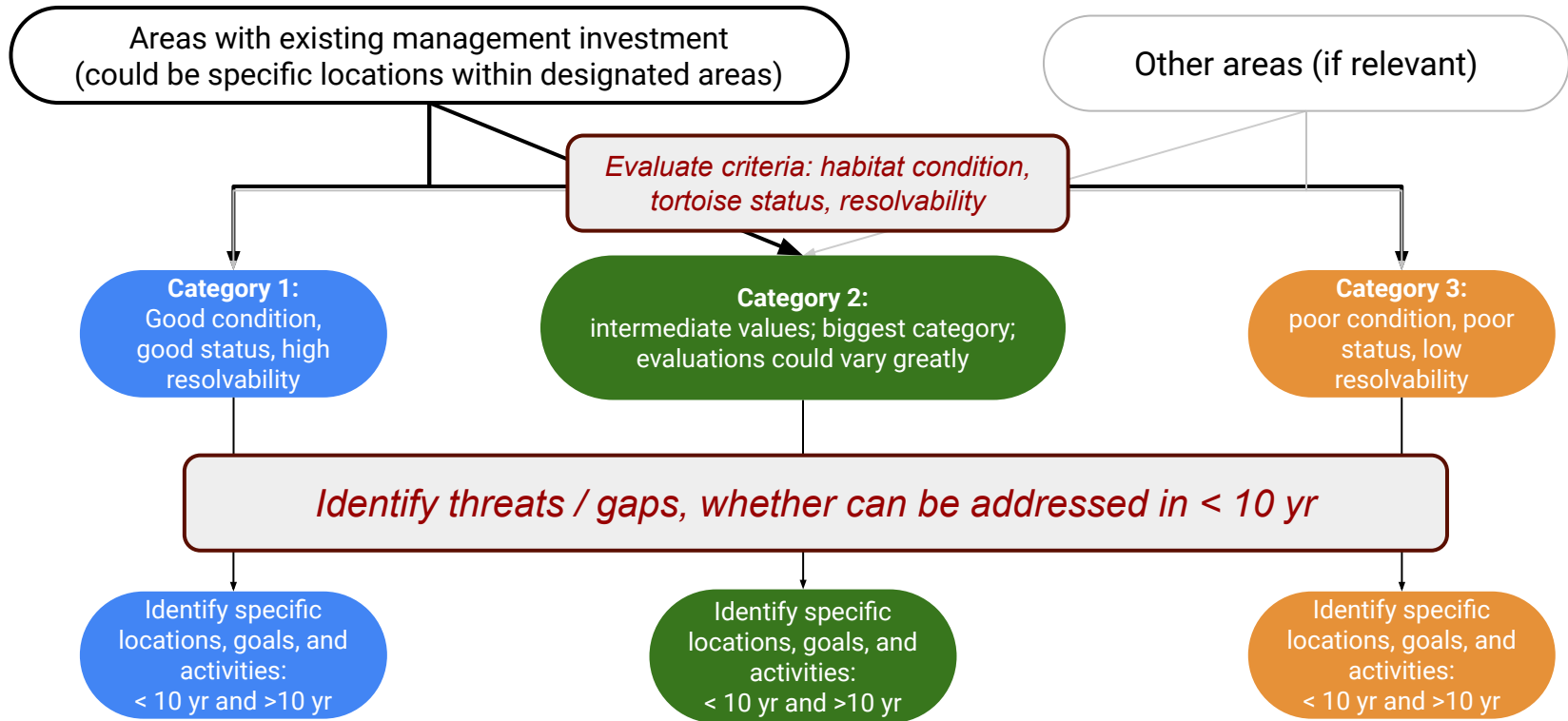


Potential Process

1. Start with existing areas and priorities (Start over process for other areas)
2. Evaluate habitat condition, tortoise status, management resolvability criteria to categorize areas into habitat categories
3. Identify threats, whether goals can be achieved in < 10 yr
4. Refine smaller target areas (within TCAs, conservation areas, etc.): i.e., “focal areas” or “project areas” across habitat categories

THEN, in an Action Plan

5. Identify priority actions for next 5 to 10 years
6. Evaluate potential ‘bang for the buck’ for tortoise recovery at rangewide scale to organize and
7. Compile rangewide portfolio of recovery actions by location



Resist

Strategy: Maintain ecosystem processes, structure, and composition consistent with present-day or historical conditions

Context: actions to resist change are feasible and expected to succeed within management horizons, resources to support resistance are available, and current/historical ecosystem conditions are preferred

Direct

Strategy: Steward ecosystems to conditions that are more desirable than what would be achieved with accepting change

Context: When change is so dramatic that resisting change is untenable and there is a feasible opportunity to direct change toward a more desirable outcome

Accept

Strategy: Allow current change drivers to transform ecosystems to something that is different from present-day or historical conditions

Context: Changes cannot be feasibly managed, they are not sufficiently impactful to warrant a response, they are acceptable to (and even desirable by) stakeholders or society, or there is a lack of will or impetus despite sufficient knowledge or resources



Questions* for discussion re: “focal areas”

1. ***Minimum size of a focal area*** to ensure protection of an adequate number of tortoises or size of habitat area?
2. How to continue prioritizing and implementing recovery actions in **areas outside of or between focal areas, while investing focused effort within them? Additional resources needed** to implement focal areas?
3. How will '**success**' in **focal areas** be measured? How to ensure we can measure responses to our recovery efforts in focal areas?
4. How should the concept and approach be **communicated to avoid confusion** about whether it will benefit tortoise recovery?
5. ***How to recognize different types and status of lands, and inclusive of different management opportunities?***

**Most come from BLM workshop discussions and CSP deliberations, but some of these issues were raised in public comments to the 2011 recovery plan (e.g., focusing on certain areas ignores others, challenges of recovery in multi-use areas)*

