

## **Peer Review Plan: Listing Decision for the Sonoran desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*)**

### **About the Document**

**Title:** The Service will remove the Sonoran desert tortoise from the candidate list, which means we will either propose it for listing as threatened or endangered or prepare a not warranted finding. A listing determination will result in proposed critical habitat, if prudent and determinable.

### **About the Peer Review Process**

**Estimated Peer Review Timeline:** March 2015 – September 2015

#### **Peer review process:**

- We, the Service, will choose three or more independent peer reviewers and invite comment letters from the peer reviewers.
- Peer reviewers will not be asked to provide recommendations on the listing determination or designation of critical habitat. Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of any information and analyses used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; ensure that scientific uncertainties are clearly identified and characterized, and that potential implications of uncertainties for the technical conclusions drawn are clear; and provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the document.
- Peer reviewers will be requested to review the *Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Sonoran Desert Tortoise* that supports our listing determination or not warranted finding.
- If we proposed to list the species, the scientific peer review may be held concurrently with the public review process of the proposal. Therefore, no public comments will be available or provided to the peer reviewers.

Peer reviewers will be selected based on the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** Reviewers will be experts in ecology of desert tortoises or a related field.
- **Independence:** Reviewers will not be employed by the Service. Academic and consulting scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service, if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** Reviewers will be recognized by their peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. The reviewers should be comfortable sharing their knowledge and identifying their knowledge gaps.
- **Advocacy:** Reviewers will not be known or recognized for an affiliation with an advocacy position regarding the protection of this species.
- **Conflict of Interest:** Reviewers will not have any financial or other interest that

conflicts with or that could impair their objectivity.

### **About public participation**

Our listing decision document will be made available to the public through news releases, direct mailings, and posting on Service websites (with solicitations for public comment if we prepare a proposed rule to list the species as threatened or endangered). If appropriate, the Service will implement an outreach plan to provide ample opportunity for public involvement in the review process. If appropriate, the Service will publish a final listing and designation of critical habitat following consideration of all comments received from the public and peer reviewers.

This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review.

### **Contact**

For more information, contact Steve Spangle, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Ecological Services Office, at 602-242-0210. Also see species profiles for this tortoise via the Service's Endangered Species website, at:

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=C07G>

A copy of the determination will be posted on this website upon completion.