

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

THE
DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

WINTER 2001

OUR 26TH YEAR

Our Goal: To assure the continued survival of viable populations of the desert tortoise throughout its range

2002 PALM SPRINGS SYMPOSIUM NEWS

The Desert Tortoise Council will hold its Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting and Symposium from March 21 to 24, 2002 at the Ramada Resorts Hotel in Palm Springs, California. This annual symposium will bring together researchers, managers and interested individuals to share the latest information available on the desert tortoise and its management.

Presentations include tortoise research and monitoring, tortoise management efforts, declines in desert tortoise populations, desert tortoise recovery efforts, research on tortoise health and disease, ecology, physiology and nutrition of tortoises, as well as international issues.

Saturday night there will be a banquet with a guest speaker, awards ceremony, and yearly raffle/auction. Each year we gather to celebrate those whose efforts have improved our understanding of tortoises and those who are working for tortoise recovery. The raffle and auction provides much needed funds to support DTC activities.

On Monday there will be a selection of field trips from which to choose. These trips are led by knowledgeable scientists and managers and provide attendees with excellent opportunities to visit sites and learn about issues and ongoing efforts.

This year we have planned a Special Session on Desert Tortoise Research at Fort Irwin, California. Mickey Quillman, biologist at Fort Irwin, is expected to Chair the session, with papers by Hal Avery, Justin Congdon, James Spotila, Kristin Berry, and Richard van Loben Sels.

Elliott Jacobson will present a paper "Potential Impacts of Captive Pet Tortoises on Wild Populations", and Jill Heaton will discuss desert tortoise research at the University of Redlands in the context of the Ft. Irwin proposed expansion and present the results of 2001 desert tortoise abundance studies in the Fort Irwin Expansion Area.

David Morafka is organizing a session on neonatal desert tortoises: Vulnerable Link in the Tortoise Life Cycle or Most Flexible Age-Class for Recovery Strategies? The session is expected to include papers by Morafka, Elliott Jacobsen, Shimansky and Nagy, David Rostal, Olaf Oftedal, and Harvey Pough. We hope to have a panel discussion at the end of this session devoted to the risks and opportunities presented by manipulations of neonate and juvenile tortoises in terms of hatchery-nurseries, subsidized forage and hypergrowth experiments, and with regard to translocations. We expect a full session to begin early Friday and go through most of Sunday.

The 27th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Symposium will be located at the Ramada Resort Inn & Conference Center, located just minutes from beautiful downtown Palm Springs. The courtyard resort is build around a magnificent garden and pool area. All 255 guest rooms and suites were completely renovated as of August, 2000. Every room has a private balcony or patio, many with spectacular views of the mountains or courtyard.

Resort amenities include:

- Complementary Parking
- Olympic-sized swimming pool, saunas, fitness center
- Mini-refrigerator, coffee maker, hair dryer, iron and ironing board in each room
- Two restaurants and room service
- Complementary shuttle from Palm Springs Regional Airport

Located at 1800 East Palm Canyon Drive (cross-street Sunrise Way), a map and driving directions available from the Ramada Inn website, or can be requested by contacting the host chair.

A block of rooms has been reserved. Standard rooms are available for \$90/night through this block. **MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS NOW, and mention the Desert Tortoise Council when making your reservation.** Non-smoking rooms and a limited number of two bedroom suites are also available. All major credit cards are accepted. Reservations can be made by calling the Ramada Resort Inn at (760) 323-1711 or through their website at: <http://www.psrामada.com>

REGISTER NOW!! Registration forms, as well as up-to-date symposium information, can be found in this edition of the newsletter or at the DTC Web Site at www.deserttortoise.org.

10TH ANNUAL DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP A SUCCESS

Held November 3 & 4 in Ridgecrest, the 2001 DTC Workshop was a huge success. Over 100 attendees, about twenty instructors/speakers, and eight gate-crashers packed the room.

Participants received State-of-the-art instruction in the science and art of managing projects in desert tortoise habitat.

Tortoises that live north or west of the Colorado River are listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened; elsewhere tortoises are protected by a variety of state laws. Federal law prohibits the collection and relocation of tortoises incidental to a project without a permit; permits are generally issued with the requirement that a qualified biologist monitor the activity. The workshop covers the essential information necessary to serve as a project monitor.

DTC coordinates these workshops because we believe that well-trained, knowledgeable project biologists and monitors are essential to implementing mitigation measures associated with permitted surface-disturbing activities in tortoise habitat.

Since they began, the DTC Workshops have brought together those working in the field to share information on the species.

This year the best and brightest managers and researchers came to Ridgecrest to support this important work.

The Desert Tortoise Council would like to extend its sincere thanks to the donors who supported the 10th Annual Desert Tortoise Council Techniques Workshop, which was held in Ridgecrest, California in early November 2001. Eight companies, corporations, and/or individuals contributed \$2,550 for the highly acclaimed event. The donors, listed alphabetically, included:

AMEC (Richard Montijo)
CH2M HILL (Tom Peters)
Chambers Group (Kathy Buescher, Mari Schroeder)
Charis Corporation (John Gifford)
Circle Mountain Biological Consultants (Ed LaRue)
Lilburn Corporation (Steve Lilburn)
Southwest Desert Environmental (Steve Gardner)
Tom Dodson & Associates (Lisa Kegarice)

We are further grateful to Arden Wallum and the Indian Wells Valley Water District, who has for the last eight symposia provided the outdoor facilities for training attendees in field survey techniques, burrow construction, and tortoise egg handling. A few more than 100 students attended this year, bringing the total 10-year enrollment to around 700 participants.

Photos of the workshop will soon be available at the DTC website : www.deserttortoise.org

Tanya Egan presented a paper and donated hundreds of pieces of scat for the survey plot exercise. Rachel Woodard, Paul Frank, Kiea Wright and Colin Spake helped with registration and logistics.

We appreciate the fine work of the Council's participating board members: Tracy Okamoto (DTC Senior Co-Chair and Workshop Coordinator), Peter Woodman (Field Coordinator), Ed LaRue (M.C.), Kristin Berry (Featured Speaker), and Becky Jones (Speaker).

Thanks also to the continued support of our many Participating Organizations:

California Department of Fish and Game (Becky Jones)
California State University, Dominguez Hills (Dave Morafka)
Computer Sciences Corporation
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. (Michael Connor)
Edwards Airforce Base (Mark Hagan)
EnviroPlus Consulting (Gilbert Goodlett)
Alice Karl and Associates (Alice Karl)
Kiva Biological Consulting (Pete Woodman)
Non-game Branch Arizona Game and Fish Department
(Roy Averill-Murray)
Romero Enterprises, Inc. (Ray and Sharon Romero)
Science Applications International Corporation
(Kurt Rautenstrauch)
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
(Tom & Tanya Egan, Bob Parker, Joyce Schlachter)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Ray Bransfield, Phil Medica)
U.S. Geological Survey (Kristin Berry)

The Saturday evening cookout at Gilbert Goodlett's house was well attended, tasty, and a great opportunity to socialize with other researchers, managers, and consultants. This party, along with Gilbert's presentation on project monitoring, are the highlights of each workshop.

The 11th Annual DTC Techniques Workshop is scheduled for November 2 - 3, 2002, at the Carriage Inn, Ridgecrest, CA. Expect that the cost will be \$125 for students and \$150 for non-students, with an offer of free membership to all attenders.

SPACE AT THE WORKSHOPS ARE LIMITED. In order to provide the highest quality experience, and to comply with things like fire codes, we must limit participation. This year some folks showed up at the workshop expecting to be admitted. Unfortunately, we also had a waiting list of folks who had tried to reserve space but were shut out.

DTC will no longer allow walk-ins at workshops. It is unfair to those on a waiting list, exceeds our capabilities, and makes for a crowded, cramped experience. Information on registration will soon be available at www.deserttortoise.org and in future newsletters.

GAO INITIATES AUDIT OF DESERT TORTOISE RECOVERY EFFORTS AT REQUEST OF CONGRESSMAN HANSEN AND SENATOR BENNETT

Below is the text of a letter from GAO to Secretary Rumsfeld.

November 26th, 2001

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
The Secretary of Defense

Attention: DOD Office of Inspector General

Technical Director for Audit Followup and GAO affairs

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The General Accounting Office is initiating a review of recovery efforts for the Mojave Desert Tortoise. Our objectives are to:

- 1) identify the costs of the Recovery program,
- 2) identify the information that has been used in developing and updating the tortoise recovery plan and making mitigation decisions, and
- 3) determine the results of recovery efforts to date.

This work will be performed . . . by staff in our Natural Resources and Environment Team in Washington D.C. and the Denver Field Office.

We will conduct our audit work at the office of Secretary for Defense, and if needed, field locations in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah located in tortoise habitat. This may include the U.S. Army and National Training Center, Ft. Irwin; U.S. Naval weapons Center, China Lake; Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms; Edward's Air Force Base; Chocolate Mountains Gunnery Range; and Nellis Air Force Base. Our primary purpose in meeting with you is to seek assistance in addressing our first and second objectives.

If you need additional information about this assignment, please contact Trish McClure, Assistant Director, on (202) 512-5318 or Jennifer Duncan, Analyst-in-Charge, on (303) 572-7361.

Sincerely yours,

Henry L. Hinton, Jr., Managing Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

CONGRESS AGAIN PROTECTS EXPIRING GRAZING PERMITS FROM NEPA

Section 114 of the Interior Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2002 (P.L. 107-63) provided that grazing permits on BLM land nationwide and in the Mojave National Preserve, expiring in FY 2002, be renewed even if BLM or the NPS had not processed the renewal under applicable laws, such as NEPA.

The Appropriations Act was signed into law on November 5, 2001. This is the third consecutive fiscal year in which Congress has protected expiring permits from legal challenge due to NEPA insufficiency. The first time was in the 2000 Interior Appropriations Act (section 123, P.L. 106-113).

On November 8, 1995 the NPS issued Special Use Permits authorizing livestock grazing on 11 allotments in the Mojave National Preserve under section 510 of the California Desert Protection Act. The NPS issued the permits for a five-year term beginning on October 31, 1994. Due to subsequent retirements, seven of the permits remain in use (Gold Valley, Valley Wells, Valley View, Colton Hills, Piute Valley, Round Valley, Clark Mountain and Crescent Peak.). The permits were to expire on October 31, 1999. Normally, the issuance, renewal or extension of these permits is a Federal agency action that requires NEPA analysis pursuant to *NRDC v. Morton*, 388 F.Supp. 829 (D.D.C. 1974), *aff'd* 527 F2d. 1386 (D.C. Cir. 1976). But Congress has effectively shielded the BLM and the Mojave National Preserve for another year, until September 30, 2002.

But there are two bright spots to the congressional enactments. First, Congress again made clear that, at the completion of the compliance processes, the Secretary of the Interior could then decide to cancel, suspend or modify the grazing leases, in whole or in part, in the Mojave National Preserve. In other words, grazing leases in the Preserve are not "sacred cows." Second, the terms and conditions specified in the original NPS permits continue to apply, including the forage utilization rates prescribed in the BLM Grazing Decisions of June 10, 1994 and adopted by the NPS by way of reference.

Congress fully expects that, at some point, the NPS must comply with NEPA for the expiring grazing permits. The Mojave General Management Plan and EIS, adopted on September 21, 2001, does not satisfy NEPA compliance for renewal of expiring permits. If it did, there would be no need to include Mojave in section 123 of the FY 2002 Appropriations Act. The GMP/EIS provides no NEPA basis for renewing the expiring permits since the plan's entire discussion of grazing permits and their conditions is minimal and lacks any site-specific information or analysis on the impacts of grazing on preserve resources. Notwithstanding that fact, the NPS is empowered to renew the seven permits in the Mojave National Preserve without NEPA compliance until September 30, 2002.

**ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING
BYLAWS REVISION TO BE CONSIDERED**

The Annual Desert Tortoise Council Business Meeting is scheduled to begin at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, March 22, 2002, at the Ramada Resort Hotel in Palm Springs, California. Proposed revisions to the Bylaws will be discussed and acted upon.

Members of the DTC are actively working in the field of tortoise management and research. A revision is proposed that would add wording that would allow members of the Board of Directors with conflicts of interest to recuse themselves on such matters.

Current DTC Bylaw requires the Annual Business Meeting to be held between March and May of each year.

Please see the complete proposed revisions in this newsletter.

This is inconvenient since that is also when we hold the annual symposium. We have often held Business Meetings at the symposium, but some members feel that this limits the amount of time and energy to focus on business matters. Others feel that we should hold the two events concurrently, but that we should not be constrained to any specific season.

The second proposed Bylaws revision would modify the Bylaws so they would not constrain us to having the Annual Business Meeting during a certain set of months.

Membership dues are specifically defined in the Bylaws. A third change has been proposed that would change the Bylaws so that they do not publish specific membership dues, but relegates that responsibility to the Board of Directors.

All members are invited to attend the Annual Business Meeting. Those unable to attend are encouraged to provide comments to any member of Board of Directors.

EXTRA FT IRWIN SCOPING MEETINGS JANUARY 17 IN RIVERSIDE AND JANUARY 19 IN PASADENA

The Department of the Army will hold two public scoping meetings to introduce the Proposed Land Expansion Project for Fort Irwin and the National Training Center. The meetings allow the public to participate in the environmental impact assessment process by providing input on the range of alternatives to be considered and the impacts and issues to be assessed in the DEIS. On 16 October 2001, the Department of the Army published in the Federal Register, the Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental DEIS. Oral and written comments will be accepted during this meeting. A land expansion briefing will be presented at the beginning of each meeting to explain the mission of the National Training Center (NTC) and to outline the needs and requirements for the expansion. An Open House format is scheduled for two hours prior to each afternoon meeting where NTC representatives will be available to provide additional information regarding NTC operations and programs.

The meetings are scheduled as follows:

Riverside County, Open House: 12:00 Noon - 2:00 PM
Scoping Meeting (Two Sessions): 2- 5 PM & 6 - 9 PM
17 January 2002
Riverside Convention Center
3443 Orange Street
Riverside, CA 92501

Los Angeles County, Open House: 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Scoping Meeting: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

19 January 2002
Pasadena Convention Center
300 East Green Street
Pasadena, CA 91101

Written comments must be submitted by 19 February 2002 to:
National Training Center
AFZJ-Strategic Plans Division
P.O. Box 10309 Fort Irwin, CA 92310

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Desert Tortoise Council is an all-volunteer, not-for-profit organization that depends on the efforts of many people. Members are encouraged to participate in Council activities, including events such as the Annual Symposium and Techniques Workshop. If you are interested in doing more please contact any member of the Board of the Directors or email info@deserttortoise.org

EXHIBITS AND VENDOR BOOTHS

Booths for exhibits and vendors at the DTC Symposium are available. Please contact Karen Kirtland @ 909 686 1141 or email @ kkirtland@aol.com for rules and to define your needs for space and equipment. Availability on a first-come, first-served basis. Register at least 30 days prior to the Symposium.

CORRECTION

In the *Call for Papers* in the last newsletter we incorrectly listed Ann McLuckie's email address. Authors wishing to present at the 2002 DTC Symposium should send one copy of the abstract on 8 x 11.5 inch paper or virus-free 3.5 inch disk (WordPerfect or Word for Windows) or via email (kristin_berry@usgs.gov) to Dr. Kristin Berry, Program Chair, and a second copy to Ann McLuckie who will be preparing the abstracts. All email transmissions must include all the information presented below, including author's address, phone, email address and fax numbers. Email transmissions must include the Abstract as an attachment in WordPerfect or Word, not in the body of the text.

EMAIL NEWSLETTER PROJECT

It is our intention to provide this newsletter electronically to those members who desire it in that format. We hope to save time and money and to reduce the use of paper and the mail.

This project has proven to be slightly more difficult than we originally expected. We continue to acquire the email addresses and newsletter format preference of members. We are developing a newsletter that does not take forever to download.

Please be patient with us. Soon those who wish will begin receiving the first electronic newsletters for testing. Eventually, we hope to provide the vast majority of newsletters in electronic form.

NEWSLETTER FORUM

Since the 1970's resource managers have been attempting to deal with the issues of tortoise recovery. The Beaver Dam Slope population was Federally listed in 1980, and the Mojave population was listed in 1989. In 1994 Critical Habitat was designated and a Recovery Plan produced.

There are Habitat Conservation Plans in Nevada and Utah, and the Department of Interior has completed some land use plans that address tortoise recovery, although some important land use plans remain to be completed.

And yet tortoises and the habitats upon which they depend continue to decline. Diseases plague several populations, and land use practices continue to threaten tortoises, their habitat, and the myriad of other species that are found in the desert.

Funding for tortoise research and management has been substantial when compared to other species, and yet many unanswered questions remain.

Each year the DTC provides two venues for the exchange of information on tortoises -the Symposium and the Workshop. We also wish to stimulate discussion on important tortoise management issues, as well as continue the exchange of information on tortoise ecology.

Therefore, the DTC newsletter will be accepting articles that speak to some of the issues that affect tortoises. Mojavean or Sonoran, California or Mexico will be considered. Tortoise research, management, or social implications are welcome. We want to hear your ideas on where we are in the process of recovery and where we should be going from here.

Please submit articles in electronic form (Word or WordPerfect) to our mail address in Wrightwood or to our email address info@deserttortoise.org

NEWSLETTER FORUM continued

We will not accept articles that contain personal attacks or other unnecessary vitriol. The DTC membership includes the real experts in the field, and we hope to attract well written, informative articles that will stimulate thought on this issue. We hope to provide opportunity for dialogue, with replies and other threads of comment.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF ISSUES THAT AFFECT DESERT TORTOISES THAT COULD BE DISCUSSED:

After 30 years, are we making sufficient progress that we can expect tortoises to recover, or are we losing the race? What has worked, and what efforts have failed? why have these efforts failed or succeeded?

Land use planning: status of incomplete plans, the efficacy of completed plans, costs to implement plans, plans written but never implemented, non-Federal land use planning

Disease: types of diseases, efforts to control these diseases (ELISA testing, segregation, etc.), role of captives in disease spread, potential anthropogenic causes

Socio-Economic Impacts: are captives important for developing support groups?, how much can we reasonably expect recovery to cost? Can we come up with the money necessary? Perceptions of groups and individuals that impact/are impacted by tortoises

Monitoring: are long-term study plots necessary? How much can we expect from distance sampling? What would a reasonable effort be? How much can we expect monitoring to cost?

What are the implications of the Ft. Irwin Expansion into the West Mojave? What about other projects?

Cooperation or litigation?

Where are the overlooked opportunities?

What will be the next issue?

What does the future hold?

This is your opportunity. Use it to increase the level of the discussion. Use it to help others think about tortoises and the issues that surround them.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Desert Tortoise Council
PO BOX 3141
Wrightwood CA 92397

Check one: MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL CHANGE OF ADDRESS

DATE: _____

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____
(Please Print) (Include Area Code)

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

- Regular (\$12.00 per year)
- Organization (\$55.00 per year)
- Contributing (\$50.00 per year)
- Lifetime (\$300 or more)
- Student (\$8.00 per year - Requires endorsement of student's advisor or Major Professor)

Make check or money order payable to the Desert Tortoise Council and send with this application
to: Desert Tortoise Council, P.O. Box 3141, Wrightwood, California 92397