



# THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2003  
OUR 28<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

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

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## 12TH ANNUAL HANDLING WORKSHOP

The Council's 2003 Tortoise Handling Workshop is now **FULL**. There is a waiting list to fill cancellations at this year's workshop and to make reservations for next year's workshop. To get on the list send an e-mail to: [bailey0714@earthlink.net](mailto:bailey0714@earthlink.net). Once we receive your e-mail, we will let you know where you are on the waiting list.

NOTE: Anyone not registered for the Workshop will be turned away. For those of you on the list to attend, notification of registration will be sent to your e-mail address in August. Registration information will be available at our website [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org) at this time.

**THERE WILL BE ABSOLUTELY NO WALK-INS AT REGISTRATION.** You need to be registered before you make the trip to Ridgecrest. Remember, we are a nonprofit organization that is trying to make the registration process fair and easy for everyone involved.

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## CONSERVATION NEWS

### **BLM Approves Western Mojave Desert Routes of Travel Designations**

BLM California State Director Mike Pool signed the decision record approving the Western Mojave Desert Off Road Vehicle Routes of Travel Designations, an amendment to the 1980 California Desert Conservation Area plan.

The route designations pertain to about three million acres of public lands within the nine-million-acre West Mojave planning area covering parts of San Bernardino, Kern, Los Angeles, and Inyo Counties. A draft plan amendment and environmental assessment were published for public comment in May 2003. Changes have been made in the proposed decision record to reflect public input.

Copies of the decision record are being mailed to those who received a copy of the proposed plan and final environmental impact statement or submitted a letter protesting the plan. The decision record is available on line at <http://www.ca.blm.gov/cdd/wemo.html>.

These approved vehicle route designations are included in the draft West Mojave Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that was published jointly by BLM, the County of San Bernardino, and the City of Barstow in June 2003. The draft includes a joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement, and provides the public further opportunity for comment on the route designations. The 90-day public comment period ends September 12, 2003.

The West Mojave Plan is the largest HCP in the United States, and will provide a comprehensive strategy to conserve and protect more than 100 listed or sensitive wildlife species and their habitats, including the desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel. The plan will also provide a streamlined program for complying with requirements of the state and federal Endangered Species Acts.

For further information contact BLM Project Lead Bill Haigh at (760) 252-6080.

**-BLM-**

*California Desert District Office  
22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos  
Moreno Valley, California 92553  
(909) 697-5220*

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**West Mojave Draft Plan  
Amendment/Habitat Conservation Plan  
Released for Public Comment**

Based on years of local collaborative efforts, the West Mojave Plan, the largest habitat conservation plan (HCP) ever developed in the U.S., covering 9.3 million acres in San Bernardino, Kern, Los Angeles, and Inyo Counties, is now available for public comment. If local county and city governments ultimately adopt the plan, it will affect nearly three million acres of private land.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, the County of San Bernardino, and the City of Barstow are jointly releasing the draft plan/HCP. Other agencies are also cooperating in the planning effort. In addition to being a joint agency HCP, it is also an amendment to the

California Desert Plan and includes a draft environmental impact statement (EIS)/environmental impact report (EIR).

The focus of the planning effort is a comprehensive strategy to conserve and protect more than 100 listed or sensitive wildlife species and their habitats, including the desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel. The draft plan/HCP also provides a streamlined program for public agencies and private parties to comply with requirements of the state and federal Endangered Species Acts. A wide range of land use proposals is presented, including designation of routes of travel throughout the region. An earlier BLM route of travel designation proposal, still in the decision-making process, is also included (with some changes) in the draft plan/HCP, providing the public additional opportunities to comment on this important planning aspect.

BLM Desert District Manager Linda Hansen encourages the public to comment and participate. "Even though hundreds of community and interest group leaders have been working with us on this plan for years, now is the time for all affected or interested members of the public to attend a meeting or comment on this important plan."

County of San Bernardino Land Use Services Director Michael Hays and Barstow Community Development Director and Deputy City Manager Scott Priester both view the plan as an unprecedented comprehensive approach to protecting environmental resources while accommodating development of private land over the next 30 years and as superior to the current "piece-meal" process. Since the plan has and continues to involve local, state and federal agencies as well as hundreds of private stakeholders, it is important that everyone's input be heard and considered. This environmental process will allow that to occur.

A 90-day public comment period began with the document's listing of availability in the Federal Register on June 13, 2003 ([http://www.ca.blm.gov/news/2003/06/fr/wemo\\_draft\\_plan.html](http://www.ca.blm.gov/news/2003/06/fr/wemo_draft_plan.html)). The comment period will end

September 12, 2003, and written and email comments will be accepted at the addresses below. A series of public meetings to accept oral comments will be scheduled throughout the plan area and will be announced.

An executive summary of the draft plan/HCP and draft EIS/EIR is currently online at [http://www.ca.blm.gov/pdfs/cdd\\_pdfs/wemo\\_pdfs/ExSum.fnForWeb.4.26.pdf](http://www.ca.blm.gov/pdfs/cdd_pdfs/wemo_pdfs/ExSum.fnForWeb.4.26.pdf) (this is a PDF document, about 133 kilobytes) and the full document will be available online at the same web address in the future. Printed copies are being mailed to interested parties and will also be made available to all participating jurisdictions for public review. These copies are typically made available at public libraries, as well as city, county, and BLM offices.

Comments should be sent by mail to "West Mojave Plan," 22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, Calif., 92553 or by email to [wmojave@ca.blm.gov](mailto:wmojave@ca.blm.gov).

For further information, contact BLM Project Lead Bill Haigh at (760) 252-6080, San Bernardino County representative Randy Scott or Matthew Whinery at (909) 387-4147, or City of Barstow representative Scott Priester at (760) 256-3531.

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### CHANGE OF ADDRESS

If you change your mailing address or e-mail address, please notify us. We use addresses for sending the newsletter, reminders of expired memberships, and last minute notices for the symposium. The membership database is only used for Council business and is never shared. Send address changes to DTC, P.O. Box 3141, Wrightwood, CA 92397-3141, or e-mail them to Doug Duncan at [fdhcky@earthlink.net](mailto:fdhcky@earthlink.net).

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### The Current Board of Directors of the Desert Tortoise Council

Senior Co-Chair	Becky Jones
Junior Co-Chair	Bob Turner
Co-chairperson-elect	vacant
Treasurer	Mike Coffeen
Recording & Corresponding Secretary	Ed LaRue
Board Member	Tracy Bailey
Board Member	Kristin Berry
Board Member	Doug Duncan
Board Member	Tom Egan
Board Member	Marc Graff
Board Member	Kristen Murphy
Board Member	Glenn Stewart
Board Member	Pete Woodman
Newsletter Editor	Doug Duncan
Products Manager	Pete Woodman
Webmaster	<u>Michael Connor</u>

### BOARD OF DIRECTOR DUTIES

The first article in a series to spell out the duties of the different board members. The first positions examined will be the two co-chairpersons. The excerpt is from the DTC bylaws, available on the web page.

Co-chairpersons. There shall be two Co-chairpersons and they shall give general direction to the Council. They, together or singly, shall preside at meetings of the Board of Directors and Desert Tortoise Council. They, with the assistance of the Co-chairperson-elect, shall appoint Chairpersons of all standing and ad hoc committees and are ex-officio members of all committees.

Each Co-chairperson shall serve two years such that each year the Senior Co-chairperson will retire and be replaced by the presiding Junior Co-chairperson.

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## 2002/2003 SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

The Editorial Committee of the Desert Tortoise Council is getting ready to produce the Proceedings for the 2002 and 2003 Symposia. If you presented a paper at one of the Symposia, please consider submitting a paper. The Proceedings are more useful to a wide variety of users when full papers are published. So, we invite you to submit a full paper (5-10 published pages) if you presented a paper, or an extended abstract for poster papers (2-3 published pages). The deadline for submission for papers was published in previous newsletters and is on the webpage. We hope to publish the proceedings in time for the next Symposium. If a paper is not received, the version of the abstract we have will be published. The Editorial Committee will do as much as we can to help you submit a manuscript for publication in the Symposium Proceedings. Do not hesitate to contact us. Doug Duncan is chair of the Publishing and Editing Committee.

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### THE DESERT TORTOISE

An excerpt from the DTC publication, Answering Questions about Desert Tortoises: a Guide for People Who Work with the Public, by Kristin H. Berry and Timothy Duck

#### Why the Desert Tortoise Is in Trouble

Tortoise populations have been declining in many areas for decades because of collecting, vandalism, loss of habitat, and disease. Government agencies have recognized the problems facing this species for many years. For example, in 1939, 1961, 1972, and 1973 the California Fish and Game Commission developed special laws to protect wild tortoises from collecting, harassment, and shooting. In June of 1989 the California Fish and Game Commission listed the tortoise as a **threatened** species under the California Endangered Species Act, 50 years after the first protective legislation.

Many people ask why desert tortoise populations have declined. There is no single or primary

cause. The situation is highly complex and varies from site to site and region to region. In most cases, there are many causes for declines. The following is a general list of typical problems:

- > illegal collecting
  - > wildfire
  - > vandalism
  - > domestic and feral livestock grazing
  - > disease
  - > railroads, roads, highways, and freeways
  - > persistent drought
  - > recreation, including off-highway vehicles
  - > release of captive tortoises
  - > utility lines and corridors
  - > attacks by domestic or feral dogs
  - > military activities
  - > predation by ravens
  - > invasions of alien plants
  - > agricultural development
  - > urban growth
  - > mineral exploration and development
  - > landfills and illegal dumps
  - > exploration and development of geothermal, oil, and gas resources
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### LIFE MEMBERS

The following list contains the persons that are life members of the Desert Tortoise Council. The Council would like to thank all life members for their commitment to the Council and especially to the desert tortoise.

Those life members in **bold** are members that we have lost contact with. So, if you can contact them or let us know how to contact them so they can receive newsletters, please do so.

Raymond Butler, James R. Buskirk, Ariel Appleton, Elizabeth Beaver, Michael Coffeen, Kristin Berry, **William Berlat**, Elinor S. Benes, Betty Burge, Gary Burchett, Linda & Marc Colen, John Brode, **Anthony Krzysik**, Tracy Bailey, K.A. Booth, Bruce Bury, Cliff Webb, Bob Hall, Ms. Barbara Kermeen, Ted Cordery, George P. Sheppard, **Dorothy Russo**, Dr. Marc

D. Graff, Stephen M. Juarez, **Dorothy Ricketts**, Rebecca Peck, **Art Tuberman**, **Fred Turner**, John Nichols, Allan V. Naydol, **Eugene I. Majerowicz**, Randall Wilson, Arnold Valencia Jr., Mercy Vaughan, Philippe Vergne, Mike Walker, Dr. Brian Henen, Madeline Dexter, John F. Wear, Marc P. Hayes, Page Hayden, **James Harmon**, Genny Smith, Karen Kirtland, Donald Seibert, Lovey Scully, Robert C. Furtek, David A. Kavanagh, Dr. C. Kenneth Dodd Jr., Peter Woodman, Gary Fellers, Diane Drobka, Tim & Candace Duck.

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## PROCEEDINGS REVIEW

1976

Though it was probably not considered so at the time, the most significant paper at the Desert Tortoise Council's first symposium in the bicentennial year of 1976 may have been Dr. Murray Fowler's paper on Respiratory Disease in Captive Tortoises. Other issues may have seemed more important then: population estimates, impacts from energy development, and the status of the Beaver Dam slope population in Utah.

Reviewing the history and research of the last 27 years shows us how important disease considerations are now in desert tortoise populations, especially in the Mojave population. The concerns for the tortoise in the 1970s and first part of the 1980s read like a laundry list of factors affecting most imperiled species: habitat loss and degradation, fragmentation, and nonindigenous species. These threats are still a concern in desert tortoise conservation and management, but our expanding knowledge on tortoise health and disease illustrates how interrelated all these threats are.

Dr. Fowler's research project focused on being able to identify sick animals, identify the organisms involved, and recommend prevention and treatment. The research focused on captive animals, because that was where the disease had been observed. He believed the disease was not

contagious and was related to nutrition. Little did Dr. Fowler and everyone else know what an issue disease would become for wild tortoises. The research may not have been ground-breaking, but it was certainly a portent of things to come.

*This is the first in what I hope will be a series to review important papers of past proceedings. If you would like to review a year of the proceedings, please let me know. I prefer to edit the newsletter rather than write it! Ed.*

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## DESERT TORTOISE WEBLINKS

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee  
<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org/>

Desert USA.com  
[http://www.desertusa.com/june96/du\\_tort.html](http://www.desertusa.com/june96/du_tort.html)

EnchantedLearning.com  
<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/turtle/Desortprintout.shtml>

California Turtle & Tortoise Club  
<http://www.tortoise.org/>

USGS Desert Tortoise Ecology  
<http://geochange.er.usgs.gov/sw/impacts/biology/tortoise1/>

About Las Vegas.com  
[http://lasvegas.about.com/cs/natureenvironment/a/Desert\\_Tortoise.htm#b](http://lasvegas.about.com/cs/natureenvironment/a/Desert_Tortoise.htm#b)

Desert Tortoise Hub  
<http://www.projectlinks.org/dtortoise/>

NPS Mojave National Preserve  
<http://www.nps.gov/moja/planning/tort.htm>

University of Michigan Museum of Zoology  
Animal Diversity Web  
[http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/gopherus/g.\\_agassizii\\$ narrative.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/gopherus/g._agassizii$ narrative.html)

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Desert Tortoise Council  
c/o Doug Duncan  
P.O. Box 331  
Tucson, AZ 85702

Check one: MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL \_\_\_ CHANGE OF ADDRESS \_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please Print)* *(Include Area Code)*  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Regular (**\$15.00** per year)                      \_\_\_ Organization (\$55.00 per year)  
\_\_\_ Contributing (\$50.00 per year)                      \_\_\_ Lifetime (\$300 or more)  
\_\_\_ Student (**\$10.00** per year - Requires endorsement of student's advisor or Major Professor)

NEWSLETTER FORMAT:

\_\_\_ Mailed paper copy      \_\_\_ Pdf file via e-mail      \_\_\_ E-mail notice for web page viewing  
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**

*The Desert Tortoise Council does not release its membership list*