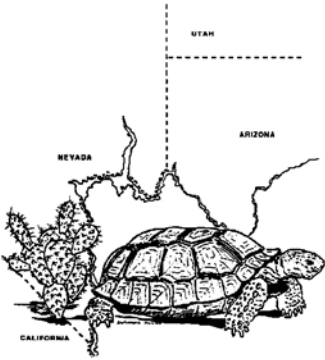


THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

Spring 2011-OUR 36th YEAR

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



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PAT VON HELF

Pat von Helf passed away on March 26 at the Health Center in Redlands, 15 days after collapsing unexpectedly. Pat has been active in the Desert Tortoise Council since the mid-1990s, when she began serving at the registration desk for the Desert Tortoise Council's symposia. Her skills at organization were a much-needed and a welcome addition to the annual symposia. In 2004 she received a Service Award from the Desert Tortoise Council for numerous years of service. In 2006, Pat became Corresponding Secretary, a position she held until her death. Pat's life was characterized by public service in education. After receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1956, she obtained a Master of Arts degree from California State University, Los Angeles. She taught the visually handicapped in San Bernardino and Riverside counties on a full-time basis until 1992, then part time until a year ago. She was the representative to management for the teachers union for many years. Pat will be sorely missed; as Corresponding Secretary, she measurably improved the incoming flow of mail. As a member of the Host Committee and a mainstay at the registration desk for the annual symposia, her dedication and experience were unparalleled. Pat will be buried at the National cemetery in Riverside; services are pending



Photo: Pat von Helf working the Registration table at the 2011 Symposium

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FROM THE EDITOR

Since most of the newsletters are being received electronically, we would like to invite everyone to send us your photos. Have really great pictures of tortoises or other wildlife? Send them to us and we will put a few of them in the newsletter each issue. Any other updates or news items are welcome as well.

Please make sure you update your mailing and email addresses.

In an effort to conserve time, money, and paper, we strongly encourage all of our members to receive the newsletter electronically rather than hardcopy.

Send your photos and any other updates to sdaly@burnsmcd.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Address Updates!!!

Please renew your addresses, including e-mail. Every time we e-mail newsletters, 10 to 20 percent of the e-mail addresses we have are bad.

TWENTIETH ANNUAL INTRODUCTION TO DESERT TORTOISE SURVEYING, MONITORING, AND HANDLING TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP

NOVEMBER 5 & 6, 2011

The 2011 handling workshop will be held in Ridgecrest Saturday & Sunday November 5-6. If you are interested in attending the workshop, please contact Maggie Fusari at tortoiseorg@gmail.com to be placed on the invitation list. You will also have an opportunity to sign up at the Symposium in February.

Invitations will be sent to the first 100 names on the list in July and subsequently to additional names until the workshop is full. The order for the invitations will be first come first served.

Please make your email subject header: 2011 Handling Workshop.

Give your full name, mailing address, business title and company or agency or military division if appropriate. If you are putting your name on for people other than yourself please indicate that clearly and tell us how many places you would like us to hold for you.

If there are enough people we might hold a second workshop on Monday & Tuesday November 7-8 but we cannot guarantee that will happen and so we advise planning on registration for the weekend workshop.

The DTC coordinates these workshops because we believe that well-trained, knowledgeable biologists and monitors for projects play essential roles in the conservation of tortoises and their habitats. We hope that you will be able to join us!

The Desert Tortoise Council Tortoise Handling Workshops are held once a year in the fall. The Desert Tortoise Council's 2-day workshops are structured to provide information on the handling, monitoring, surveying and biology of desert tortoises.

Instructors include: Desert Tortoise Council officers, public and private sector biologists, and personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG).

The Desert Tortoise Council Tortoise Handling Workshops are recognized by the USFWS and CDFG, BUT a certificate of attendance and participation does not guarantee a USFWS or CDFG permit. However, completion of the Workshop should help with the permitting process. If you have questions or comments about the workshop send them to me at tortoiseorg@gmail.com.

Maggie Fusari

THE 2010 DESERT TORTOISE TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP

In November 2010, the Desert Tortoise Council held two "Introduction to Desert Tortoise Surveying, Monitoring, and Handling Techniques Workshops" in Ridgecrest, CA. The two workshops were attended by 194 people; including 111 consultants, 14 federal, 4 state, 2 academic, 2 tortoise preserve, 1 military, and 60 unaffiliated attendees.

This brings the total 19-year enrollment to over 1894 attendees. The Council would like to thank the following speakers and instructors who donated their time toward making this workshop such a success. They are: Kristin Berry (USGS), Ray Bransfield (USFWS), Paul Frank, Rebecca Jones (CDFG), Alice Karl (Alice Karl & Associates), Larry LaPre (BLM), Sharaih Romero, Liz Smith, Rachel Woodard and Peter Woodman (Kiva Biological Consulting).

We are very grateful to the Indian Wells Valley Water District, who for the past 16 years has donated the use of their land so we could have a place for our outdoor sessions.

We would like to extend a "thank you" to the following volunteers who helped set-up the outdoor plots as well as assist as plot instructors. They include Courtney Bennett, Alain d'Eprenesnil, Paul Frank, Rosemary Jackson, Alex Mach, Colden McClurg, Corey Mitchell, Jake Mohlman, Bob Parker, Shariah Romero, Liz Smith, Tracy Taylor, Molly Thompson and Rachel Woodard. We appreciate all of you giving up your time to help us with these most important tasks.

Finally, we would like to extend special thanks to Tracy and Mike Bailey (Desert Tortoise Council) and Maggie Fusari (Desert Tortoise Council), who along with Peter Woodman organized the workshop; to Ed LaRue (Circle Mountain Biological Consulting) for his fantastic job emceeding the workshop and keeping it on schedule; Pat vonHelf (Desert Tortoise Council) who helped with registration; to David Carr (ECORP Consulting) who provided the audio/visual; to Bob Parker for providing his pet tortoises for the handling demonstration; to Mark Bratton (Edwards Air Force Base) for again providing the DVD "Desert Tortoise Awareness" to each attendee; to Sean Daly for getting the test together; to Jeremy Mack and Lucia Acosta for grading the tests; to Mike Connor for putting all the information on our website; and to the Springhill Suites Marriot staff who went above and beyond in accommodating us. We wouldn't be able to do this every year without your support!

2011 SYMPOSIUM RECAP

Presentations of the 36th Annual Symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council, held February 18-20, 2011 at Sam's Town in Las Vegas NV were, as usual, a mixture of new information and reports of achievements and frustrations; all by dedicated people. I can safely report that it was an excellent symposium with outstanding presentations that

informed and entertained us and made us think about our purpose; “to assure the continued survival of viable populations of the desert tortoise throughout its range”.

Dr Wayne Spencer, Independent Science Advisor for the CA Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and winner of the DTC Special Award gave a keynote address that focused on a continuing theme; what should be done to provide a sane and viable structure for renewable energy development in the desert without undermining conservation needs. Following Dr. Spencer, the session on renewable energy in the California deserts reported on the cumulative effects of the placements of solar developments without consideration of using already damaged lands without significant habitat value. Linda Belenky’s reference to “Death by a Thousand Cuts” seems very appropriate to the situation described by many, namely that projects are being fast-tracked to approval without an overall evaluation of the conservation impacts. Sidney Silliman gave a paper on the theme “The science is easy; it is the politics that are hard” as he compared the time of the original listing of the desert tortoise (1980) with today’s political climate that surrounds the deployment of solar and wind power sites in the desert. Lawrence LaPre reported on the lack of clear standards for translocation of tortoise removed from sites to be developed. He pointed out the need for oversight by trained tortoise biologists.

Dr. Linda Cayot, Science Advisor and Liaison for the Galapagos Conservancy gave both a presentation on restoring tortoise populations in the Galápagos Islands and the dinner talk with fabulous photos on the tortoises, the repatriation of Pinta, and up to date information on the Pinta tortoise genome and the pink iguana of northern Isabela. It seems that things work well when they are well planned and executed.

Dr. Scott Abella, University of Nevada Las Vegas and winner of the DTC Research Award chaired the session on recovery and restoration in the Mojave Desert in which presentations addressed the need to revegetate with native plant communities that can resist weed invasion and prevent the hazards of wild

fires. Once again we must realize that revegetation is a difficult, long term process.

In the agency session BLM California reported on efforts for mitigation of projects, especially the solar energy projects with all their complexity. BLM Nevada reported on efforts to manage conservation areas and mitigate public uses. USFWS spoke of the scope of work needed to address the recovery plan, manage consultations and permits, review habitat conservation plans, and respond to numerous proposals for development of renewable energy projects in tortoise habitat. Brian Henen reported on the many research projects supported by DOD and their application to tortoise conservation actions on and beyond the military bases. Cristina Jones spoke of Arizona’s efforts in occupancy sampling and monitoring, the tortoise adoption program, and importantly on efforts to complete the State Conservation Agreement for the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise. Rebecca Jones spoke on California’s efforts to assure a permitting process supportive of tortoise conservation and recovery and to address the many permit needs for renewable energy and other projects at the state level. Bob Sandberg of the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, Utah, recounted that with the status of a National Conservation Area they have dealt with translocation of tortoises removed from development areas, the possibility of an outbreak of URTDs, and serious problems with invasive vegetation. Fon Duke reported on the Mojave Max program. Gerald Hillier spoke of the scope of work of the QuadState Local Governments Authority in bringing technical expertise to the various local communities dealing with developments in tortoise habitat and mentioned the expected release of the revised recovery plan. The LGA operates in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts and will be active with both populations of the desert tortoise.

There was a second session on agencies and nonprofits. The Western Watersheds Project has been active in advocating for better project reviews of renewable energy projects and was active in supporting listing for the Sonoran tortoise in Arizona. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee reported on its actions for public outreach, habitat restoration, and a focus on education concerning off

road vehicles. From USFWS Roy Averill-Murray called for better access to data critical for analyses of tortoise recovery activities. Catherine Darst reported on development of a spatial decision support system with the potential to inform the activities of the Recovery Implementation Teams, soon to be appointed from a range of participating entities to advise on tortoise recovery. DTC Senior Co-Chair Bruce Palmer reported on activities of the council this past year and reminded us of our priorities for the future.

In the session on Demography, Ecology and Climate Change we heard about modeling efforts to understand the potential impacts of climate change and to more adequately designate habitat maps as well as field efforts to provide accurate estimates of density in a context of low encounter rates.

Translocation is an ever increasing mitigation strategy for development projects and as such needs to be well understood and conducted with clear and precise guidelines. Presentations in this session underscored the realistic concerns with disease transmission, changes in tortoise behavior especially with regard to movement patterns and most seriously, high levels of mortality. This is another very complicated issue that must be based on sound and detailed science and careful risk assessment.

The study on road impacts by Hughson & Darby underscores again that roads act as mortality sinks with populations depressed to at least 400 meters on either side of even lightly travelled roads, that signage is not sufficient to protect tortoise populations and that the recommendation for roadside fencing stands.

Papers on tortoise disease issues focused on efforts to understand the field demographics of *Mycoplasma* and the risks of disease from heavy metal pollution and from herpesvirus, a newly detected problem in the California desert. Following presentations we have heard over the years we need to advocate for more careful risk assessments of disease as a factor in translocations.

There was a session on the Sonoran tortoise following the decision by USFWS that listing under the ESA of the Sonoran tortoise is warranted but precluded. Jeff Servoss of USFWS gave a thorough and convincing presentation of the factors supporting a listing; Erin Zylstra reported ongoing studies on permanent plots to clarify the long term population status, especially in the context of increasing drought stress; David Grandmaison's studies underscore the need for thorough field studies that provide credible estimates of tortoise densities; Taylor Edwards reviewed the genetic studies that allow more precise definition of tortoise population units and the expectation that further study will increase our ability to understand the geographic distribution of the desert tortoise. Cecil Schwalbe gave us an overview as to how the Sonoran tortoise differs from the Mojave populations.

We were pleased to welcome a session about the Bolson Tortoise that focused on efforts to headstart the population in New Mexico with improved performance of captive breeding (82% survival) and understanding of the genetic composition of captives and the characteristics of their burrows.

We also enjoyed a session on rattlesnakes and their habitats, feeding preferences, movements and shelter site sharing with other species.

We thank all of the presenters for their work, their willingness to share their conclusions and concerns, and their dedication to the conservation of the desert tortoise in the wild. Apologies for not mentioning everyone by name but we appreciate all of you and hope to see you again next year.

As we learned again from the presentations at our symposium; revegetation and translocation are difficult undertakings requiring careful attention to the science and careful follow-up for many years. I hope the information from these studies reaches the developers who need to understand what is really involved as well as the agencies that need to require thorough investigation and planning before granting permits involving restoration and/or translocation as mitigation. Many people are contributing to the data essential to understand how tortoise

populations respond to various impacts and such work should be supported and increased along with continuation and increase in the activities that demand attention to conservation of the desert tortoise and its desert habitat.

I remind everyone that the PEIS process by BLM could use comments and the comment period has been extended until May 2, 2011. Consider making a comment calling for a thorough analysis of overall conservation impacts and a dedicated approach to avoiding them in advance of granting permits for needed renewable energy solutions. Conservation organizations need to stand up and call for a focus on the sensible and sustainable provision of renewable energy rather than on short sighted, ill conceived projects with short term profit as a primary motive.

To download the abstracts please go to: www.deserttortoise.org/symposium/index.html

Margaret H (Maggie) Fusari

2011 DTC AWARDS

David J. Morafka Memorial Research Award –
Taylor Edwards, University of Arizona, Tucson

Best Student Paper Award –
Taylor Edwards, University of Arizona, Tucson

Kristin H. Berry Annual Award –
Becky Jones, California Department of Fish and Game, Palmdale

Robert C. Stebbins Research Award –
Dr. Scott R. Abella, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Special Award –
Dr. Wayne D. Spencer, Conservation Biology Institute, San Diego

Glenn R. Stewart Service Awards –

Mike Bailey, China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, Ridgecrest, CA (DTC Treasurer)

Sean Daly, Burns and McDonnell Kansas City, MO (DTC Newsletter Editor)

Bruce Palmer, Logan Simpson Design, Tempe, AZ (DTC Immediate Past Co-Chairperson)

Peter Woodman, Kiva Biological Consulting, Inyokern, CA (DTC Board Member)

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL ECOSYSTEMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

On March 24, 2011, Judge John Vander Feer of the Superior Court of California signed a stipulated judgment for the Desert Tortoise Council lawsuit against the City of Twentynine Palms, marking a victory for the Mojave population of the desert tortoise. The Desert Tortoise Council and the Center for Biological Diversity filed suit in August 2010 after the city approved the expansion of Granite Construction's gravel mining operation into occupied desert tortoise habitat without requiring that tortoises be protected and without requiring the permits mandated by the California Endangered Species Act and the federal Endangered Species Act. In the original environmental review, the city recognized the need to comply with wildlife protection laws, yet later abandoned plans to require incidental "take" permits. The California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and tortoise experts informed the city that permits were needed before the mine expansion could go forward. The judgment stipulates that Granite Construction shall prepare a Desert Tortoise Mitigation Plan for the small portion of the expansion area where mining had begun and that Granite shall apply for and obtain a State Section 2081 incidental take permit and a Federal Section 10(a)(1)(B) incidental take permit for the largest segment of the expansion area.

WEST MOJAVE PLAN REMEDY REQUEST APPROVED

-Tom Egan, Products Manager, Desert Tortoise Council

The Desert Tortoise Council (DTC) has been closely involved with the West Mojave ("WEMO") Route Designation first approved by the Bureau of Land Management ("BLM") in 2003 and adopted as a California Desert Conservation Area ("CDCA") Plan amendment in 2006. DTC representatives worked extensively in providing recommendations leading up to the adoption of this vehicle use management plan-the largest of its kind in the nation. Unfortunately, many of these recommendations were not incorporated into BLM's final decision on the WEMO Plan. Numerous protests were submitted following BLM's adoption of this plan, which were summarily dismissed. A coalition of ten environmental organizations subsequently initiated litigation regarding BLM's route designation for the region, arguing that it did not comply with the National Environmental Policy Act ("NEPA"), the Federal Land Policy Management Act ("FLPMA") and the CDCA Plan.

In 2009, U.S. District Judge Susan Ilston ruled on the merits of this case. BLM's designation was found significantly "flawed because it did not contain a reasonable range of alternatives" to limit damage to native plant communities and sensitive habitat. BLM was also found to have inadequately analyzed the routes' impacts on air quality, soils, plant communities, riparian habitats, and sensitive species, pointing out that the desert and its resources are "extremely fragile, easily scarred, and slowly healed." BLM was found to have violated the NEPA and FLPMA as well as not followed its own CDCA Plan relative to vehicle route designation.

Following this success, the environmental coalition requested the court consider a series of injunctive remedies designed to specifically address the WEMO route designation inadequacies. The DTC and other environmental organizations in 2010 sponsored a photographic documentation effort of the WEMO route designation and current vehicle use on the ground, in support of the requested relief. This field work resulted in thirty two site records

being submitted to the court, along with recommendations on how to improve vehicle use management until such time as the WEMO route designation was revised to comply with the court's earlier ruling. A general lack of vehicle use management on the ground was a significant finding of this effort.

The long-awaited remedy request, supported by DTC-sponsored field work, was ruled on by Judge Ilston in January, 2011. The court has retained jurisdiction over this matter and BLM must now complete a revised WEMO route designation complying with all laws and regulations by March, 2014. Signs must now be placed on all off-road vehicle routes which are legal to use. A monitoring plan to determine if illegal vehicle use is occurring must also be initiated. Additional enforcement to prevent illegal use has also been ordered. The completion of detailed implementation plan for signing of routes for travel must be submitted to the court by March 29, 2011. Plans for informational kiosk installation, vehicle use compliance monitoring, and additional enforcement must also be submitted to the court by April 28, 2011. It's been a long and winding road, but our hopes are that vehicle use management in desert tortoise habitat within the western Mojave Desert will now improve.

NEWS

DESERT HIGH-SPEED TRAIN DRAWS DETRACTORS

With one month left before federal officials finalize plans for a high-speed train from Victorville to Las Vegas, opponents of the project worry it will take money from High Desert cities and potentially destroy pristine landscapes and sensitive wildlife.

The Federal Railroad Administration -- which must approve the \$6 billion Desert Xpress project -- unveiled the final environmental report last week and will open public comment today on the 185-mile route. Supporters and opponents have one

month to review the environmental report and respond.

Barstow and Baker, cities that rely heavily on travelers to stop for gas and food, are fretting that the train could divert a lot of their business. And skeptics worry that vital habitats for the desert tortoise, bighorn sheep and Gila monsters could be lost.

Proponents have spent more than six years planning for the trains, which would carry riders from Victorville to Las Vegas. They have secured key federal backing from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., and a recent endorsement from U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood.

But those years of planning and support from federal lawmakers have not resolved many of the concerns of High Desert businesses and environmentalists.

"I do think there is a need for high-speed rail," said David Lamfrom, California desert program manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. "But we have to carefully consider the cost and benefits. There is a benefit, but is it worth some of the costs?"

Once the environmental review is adopted by federal rail officials, the project can finish its final design. It would take four years to build, at a cost of around \$6 billion, according to the latest estimates from the company. Backers say the line will be paid for with private funds, though a federal loan might be needed to start construction.

Desert Xpress officials did not respond to requests for comment Tuesday and Thursday.

Tracks could be laid from Las Vegas to Victorville, mostly parallel to I-15, and electrical lines strung along the route. The all-electric trains could make the trip between the High Desert and Las Vegas in 85 minutes, a drive that takes three hours or more, depending on traffic.

To read the rest of the original article, see:

http://www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE_News_Local_D_xpress01.2290246.html

HUNDREDS OF SCIENTISTS DENOUNCE CONGRESS' ATTEMPT TO UNDERMINE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Nearly 1,300 scientists today urged senators to oppose efforts to undermine the scientific authority of the Endangered Species Act, which they fear would threaten the long-term survival of all species protected by the law.

The letter, signed by 1,293 scientists with expertise in biology, ecology and other relevant disciplines, urges senators to block any legislation that would compromise the scientific foundation of the law. The Senate is now considering its version of the House's Continuing Resolution for Fiscal Year 2011 (H.R. 1), which includes language that would take the gray wolf off the endangered species list. The lone rider on the Senate version contains similar language.

If Congress passed the continuing resolution with the gray wolf provision, it would be the first time a species was delisted without the benefit of scientific analysis, establishing a precedent for Congress to delist other species without scientific review.

"The consequences of this action would extend far beyond the survival of one particular species," said Franz Camenzind, a Wyoming-based wildlife ecologist who signed the letter. "If any one species is taken off the endangered species list by Congress, then all of the species on the list become vulnerable to future political attacks. This would send the implementation of the Endangered Species Act into chaos, creating uncertainty both for species and for the communities and businesses around them."

At the same time Congress is poised to delist the gray wolf; a federal judge in Montana is considering an agreement between the Department of Interior and several environmental groups to remove Endangered Species Act protections for the gray wolf in Idaho and Montana. The agreement would

grant those two states management authority over the wolf but retain federal protection for the animal in four other states.

The scientists' letter points out that Congress is flouting an Endangered Species Act stipulation that any determination to add or remove a species from the endangered species list be made solely on the best available science. After a species is added to the list, authorities can consider other factors when making decisions about how to best ensure a species' recovery. The law also includes a provision that allows the government to override species protections in special cases.

“Allowing Congress to remove or add protections for particular species would set a dangerous precedent, as the fate of every species on the endangered species list (or any candidate for that list) would then be subject to political interference,” the letter states. “To undermine the careful and thoughtful scientific process that determines whether a species is endangered or recovered would jeopardize not only the species in question and the continued success of the Endangered Species Act, but the very foundation of the ecosystems that sustain us all.”

See the entire original press release here:
http://www.ucusa.org/news/press_release/scientists-denounce-congress-endangered-esa-0526.html

SUPREME COURT REFUSES TO HEAR EAGLE MOUNTAIN LANDFILL CASE, HELPS PROTECT JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

BACKGROUND: Today, the Supreme Court announced that it will not hear an appeal from Kaiser Ventures LLC on a 2009 U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals decision, overturning the land exchange necessary for the development of what would be the world's largest garbage dump on the boundary of Joshua Tree National Park.

STATEMENT BY: David Lamfrom, California Desert Program Manager

STATEMENT: “The Supreme Court’s decision not to hear this appeal is great news for all of us who care about Joshua Tree National Park.”

“Joshua Tree, which is celebrating its 75th Anniversary this year, is an American icon. Local communities, regional economies, and more than 1 million visitors per year all benefit from the wildflower blooms, abundant wildlife, Joshua tree woodlands, and rock formations that have made this national park world-famous.”

“Putting the country’s largest landfill next to one of its most revered landscapes is contrary to America’s collective work and investment to protect this national park for our shared enjoyment and inspiration-and to ensure that those who follow us can do the same.”

“Depositing 20,000 tons of trash per day next to Joshua Tree National Park will hurt the air quality, water quality, scenery, and natural quiet of the park and its southern gateway communities. It would also increase the population of ravens -- a major predator of the federally threatened desert tortoise.”

“Courageous activists have worked for years to protect their communities from this project, and hundreds of thousands of park supporters have commented against the Eagle Mountain Landfill. The people have spoken, and they want Joshua Tree National Park to be protected.”

To see the original press release, see:
http://www.npca.org/media_center/press_releases/EagleMtn_32811.html

LOST STAR JOSH HOLLOWAY GETS DIRTY FOR THE DESERT TORTOISE

Lost's Josh Holloway (a self-proclaimed nature nut), is joining forces with the National Parks Conservation Association and sponsor Nature Valley to protect the U.S.'s 58 storied national parks. Press play above to hear more about Holloway's work to restore Joshua Tree in

California and protect desert tortoise habitats. As the star says, "To actually volunteer and get involved means a lot, and brings it home."

Click here to see the video:

http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/watch_with_kristin/b237177_lost_star_josh_holloway_gets_dirty.html

ENDANGERED TORTOISES SLOW PUSH FOR POWER

Feds halt project; plans to relocate animals in negotiation

The open deserts surrounding the Coachella Valley aren't only prime locations for large-scale solar development. They're also prime habitat for a number of threatened plants and animals, including the endangered desert tortoise, whose population has declined 90 percent since the 1980s.

The recent push by the federal and state governments to develop solar across tens of thousands of acres of public land is a grand experiment not only in the viability of solar as a major power source, but in whether it can be implemented in the desert without significant harm to the environment.

That's already proven problematic on one of the large solar projects furthest along in construction.

The U.S. Department of the Interior on April 15 issued an immediate, temporary suspension of many construction activities at the Ivanpah solar facility off Interstate 15 in eastern San Bernardino County after workers encountered far more tortoises than anticipated.

Project developer BrightSource Energy's contracted biologists found 25 adult and juvenile tortoises during surveys of the 4,073-acre project site back in 2007 and 2008, according to Amy Fesnock, chief California wildlife biologist for the federal Bureau of Land Management.

Biological opinions projected that another 32 adult tortoises would be found over Ivanpah's three- to five-year construction period.

But less than a half-year after breaking ground, workers grading the land for the solar arrays and installing perimeter fencing have encountered 59 adult and juvenile tortoises, Fesnock said.

Federal officials are reassessing projected numbers of the endangered tortoise on the site, and Fesnock declined to provide a new estimate. But BLM biologist Larry LaPre in late March said the belief now is there may be up to 140 tortoises on the property.

BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have now entered into a "reinitiation of consultation," a re-examination of the project in light of the new information. Options could include scaling back portions of the project to lessen tortoise encounters, or modified plans for relocating them, Fesnock said.

BrightSource Energy spokeswoman Kristin Hunter said the Ivanpah project site is "strategically located to avoid pristine land and minimize impact," noting it is directly adjacent to a 36-hole golf course, located next door to a casino and commercial outlet center in Primm, Nev., and across the highway from a natural gas plant.

BrightSource senior spokeswoman Keely Wachs said the company asked for new consultation with BLM over the tortoise issue.

Despite the temporary suspension of some fencing activities and the use of a road on a portion of the project, BrightSource officials "continue to anticipate that the power will come online in 2013," Wachs said.

Click here to read the entire article:

<http://www.mydesert.com/article/20110425/NEWS07/104250312/Endangered-tortoises-slow-push-power?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7Cfrontpage>

DR. JOE TRUETT

Dr. Joe Truett, a native of Jasper, Texas, passed away February 27, 2011 at his home in Glenwood, New Mexico after a long bout with cancer. He was a 1960 graduate of Jasper High School and a 1964 graduate of Texas A&M University. He earned a Ph.D in Wildlife Biology at the University of Arizona and worked as a wildlife biologist for most of his life.

Joe published extensively, including peer-reviewed journal articles and two books on east Texas, *Lands of Bears and Honey: A Natural History of East Texas*, and *Circling Back: Chronicle of a Texas River Valley*. He wrote a third book on grasslands, *Grass: In Search of Human Habitat*.

He is survived by his mother, Versie Truett Hammer of Plum Ridge, Texas; brother Jack Truett of Peachtree, Texas; wife Judy Truett of Glenwood, New Mexico; two sons, Sam Truett of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Jed Truett of Eugene, Oregon; two grandsons, Geronimo and Jericho Truett of Eugene, Oregon; niece Kathy Truett and two step-sons, Casey Landrum of Glenwood, New Mexico and Robyn Landrum of Santa Monica, California.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Sandy Truett, and father, Richard A. "Boose" Truett.

Dr. Truett began working with Ted Turner's landmark efforts to conserve native species in 1996 when he was contracted to restore black-tailed prairie dogs to the Armendaris and Ladder ranches. In 1998 he was hired as the first senior ecologist for the recently established Turner Endangered Species Fund, the world's first significant private effort to restore imperiled species. He worked in that capacity until his retirement in April 2010.

During his 13 years with the Fund he provided a steady and experienced presence on a daily basis. His intellectual, emotional, and practical contributions to the work were noteworthy. Throughout his career and especially during the Fund's fledging stage, Joe was admired and relied on for his unique capacity to synthesize large

amounts of sometimes disparate information to identify broad, unifying principles that give order to otherwise chaotic patterns. He was an ecologist of the finest kind and countless imperiled species are more secure because of his work.

Joe's intellectual curiosity was extensive and fueled insightful ecological studies that ranged from the tundra of Alaska and Canada to the desert grasslands of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.

Joe pioneered efforts to establish prairie dog colonies by translocations. Eventually he fine-tuned translocation techniques that are now widely accepted tools for increasing prairie dog populations to benefit the critically endangered black-footed ferret.

Joe's passion for grasslands was infectious and inspiring. Through study of published literature and diligent fieldwork he became an unsung hero of often overlooked and critically imperiled but biologically rich grassland ecosystems. He published seminal work on the history of grasslands – how they evolved, how grassland dependent species like bison and prairie dogs shaped them, and how humans domesticated them. His work made clear the importance of understanding the relationships between bison, prairie dogs, and grass and how to manage bison to restore the keystone role of prairie dogs in grassland ecosystems. Absent such understanding, recovery of the black-footed ferret would have remained unnecessarily unlikely.

Joe also pioneered a landmark effort to recover the critically imperiled Bolson tortoise. He spearheaded development of a comprehensive recovery program that included habitat acquisition, captive breeding and husbandry, and reintroductions to the Armendaris and Ladder ranches (and elsewhere) to restore self-sustaining populations. More generally, Joe's work with the Bolson tortoise provided new insight into a cardinal question of restoration ecology: Restore to what?

The Bolson tortoise was extirpated from the United States thousands of years ago. Consequently, some

claim that restoration there is uncalled for since historic conditions did not include the species. As was his style, Joe challenged conventional thinking and by doing so presented an alternative restoration paradigm with great potential to serve imperiled species well into the future. In an important article published in Restoration Ecology he wrote:

“What does that imply about the ability of the Bolson tortoise to live beyond its current range? With time, we will see. Many species do well outside historical ranges, as exemplified by the well-known phenomenon of exotics. But we are not advocating moving this or any other species about without careful study beforehand. We do suggest conservation biologists begin to think beyond the use of historic species assemblages and distributions as the sole reference points for ecological restoration.

Which gets preference in the bigger scheme of conservation biology, the species or the community? We suggest a differential focus on conserving imperiled species. These are the building blocks that can be recycled again and again as community compositions inevitably change in future human generations under the influences of climate shifts, ecological interactions, and accidents of dispersal. Diverse communities can assemble and reassemble as long as the building blocks persist. Species, once lost, will not be coming back.”

With that and other writings, Dr. Truett left a body of work that will continue to instruct, challenge, and inspire biologist for years to come.

A scholarship fund has been set up in his memory at the Texas Chapter of The Wildlife Society. Donations can be made out to TCTWS/Joe C. Truett Memorial and sent to the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society at P.O. Box 1400 Sinton, TX 78387.

Mike Phillips
Executive Director
Turner Endangered Species Fund

MEETINGS

Southwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (SW PARC) and
Current Research on Herpetofauna of the Sonoran Desert V (CRHSD V)

Where: Tucson, Arizona
When: 10-16 August 2011

Attend one or both meetings.

10-11 August: SW PARC. This meeting features two themes with invited speakers: "Conservation and Management of Arid-land Reptiles and Amphibians" and "Year of the Turtle." Of course, this is also a meeting for colleagues to network and discuss strategies for amphibian, reptile, and turtle conservation. Because there are invited speakers for the sessions, we encourage participants to submit posters to discuss at our poster social, and participants may want to give oral presentations at the CRHSD V meeting.

12-13 August: SW PARC Field Workshops. Southeastern Arizona is famous for its diverse and unique herpetofauna, including 35 species of lizards (the most in the US), 43 species of snakes, 15 amphibians, and 5 turtles. And August is the peak herpetofaunal season. Our workshops on Friday and Saturday will target some of the best herpetological collecting grounds, which will be the backdrop for learning about the conservation and management issues we heard about the previous two days. Participants will get hands-on instruction on techniques and identification of native herps. Field workshops will start in Tucson then head to venues in the Santa Catalina Mountains, Sonoran Desert, Pajarito Mountains, and Huachuca Mountains.

14 August: SunDay FunDay. This is the nexus between the two meetings, when participants of both can network in leisure. There will be a herpetological photography workshop, free behind-the-scenes tours of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, a free day at the museum (admission free with registration to either meeting), and an evening social for participants of both meetings (you only

need to be registered for at least one of the two meetings).

15-16 August: Current Research on Herpetofauna of the Sonoran Desert V. Every three years, CRHSD is held in Arizona. There is always a good turnout of famous herpetologists (many retire in Arizona) and fabulous presentations. Even though it makes for a long week, this meeting will surely stimulate your herpetological passions. We encourage PARCsters to attend and submit oral or poster presentations (if applicable to the greater Sonoran Desert).

Registration and information are available at the web site below.

<http://www.swparc.org/index.html>

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Masters Degree in Herpetology at the University of Arizona

Position Description: The School of Natural Resources & the Environment invites applications from highly motivated, highly qualified, bi-lingual students to conduct Masters Degree research in northwestern Mexico. The project will focus on chelonians, especially including status of and threats to the Desert Tortoise. This is a two-year funded research assistantship.

Duties will include:

- Development of thesis project with project leaders.
- Field work under rigorous desert and tropical conditions in remote locations.
- Development of detailed field and data management protocols.
- Coordination with collaborators, authorities, and ranchers in Sonora, Mexico.
- Recruitment and coordination of field assistants, including volunteers.
- Collection and importation of blood and health samples.
- Production assistance for project reports to sponsor and other agencies.

Minimum Required Qualifications: Bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences, Wildlife Management, Evolutionary Ecology, or related field AND fluency (or near-fluency) in both Spanish and English; candidate must successfully apply to the Graduate Program in the School of Natural Resources & the Environment (<http://snre.arizona.edu>); ability to work flexibly under difficult field conditions is required.

Additional Preferred Qualifications: Experience doing ecological fieldwork strongly preferred, especially with amphibians and reptiles; research experience in conservation biology and evolutionary ecology also preferred.

Application:

Contact:

Dr. Philip C. Rosen, Research Scientist
School of Natural Resources & Environment
University of Arizona, Tucson AZ 85721
(520)-404-2366, pcrosen@u.arizona.edu
(email acceptable)

Open: 04/22/2011 – 06/01/2011 or until **filled**.

Looking for a job?

Check out these websites for resources:

<http://parcplace.org/setup/job-listings.html>
(herpetology)

<http://wfsc.tamu.edu/jobboard/>
(wildlife and fisheries science)

<http://www.cnah.org/jobs.asp>
(herpetology)

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP
P.O. Box 1568
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Check one: _____ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL _____ CHANGE OF ADDRESS
DATE: _____ EMAIL ADDRESS: _____
NAME: _____ PHONE: _____
(Please Print) *(Include Area Code)*

ADDRESS: _____
CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

_____ Regular (**\$30.00** per year) _____ Organization (**\$125.00** per year)
_____ Contributing (**\$100.00** per year) _____ Lifetime (**\$300.00** or more)
_____ Student (**\$20.00** per year- Requires endorsement of student's advisor or Major Professor)

NEWSLETTER FORMAT:
_____ Pdf file via e-mail _____ E-mail notice for web page viewing _____ Hardcopy

Make check or money order payable to the Desert Tortoise Council
and **send** with this application
to: **Desert Tortoise Council,**
P.O. Box 1568
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

The Desert Tortoise Council does not release its membership list