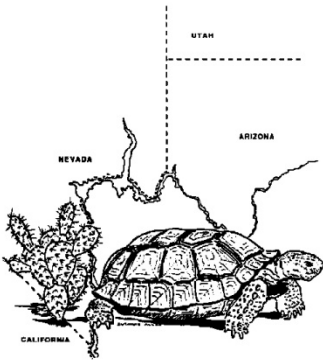


# THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

Spring 2012-OUR 37<sup>th</sup> YEAR

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



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## 37<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

Two hundred forty four people attended the 37th Annual Symposium of the Desert Tortoise Council was held at Sam's Town in Las Vegas Nevada on February 17-19, 2012. Once again thanks to Kristin Berry we had an excellent set of presentations and thanks to Tracy and Mike Bailey and many volunteers everything went smoothly as usual.

At the annual business meeting Thursday morning (Feb. 17) we passed an updated set of by laws (see DTC website for details). Our goal statement has been revised to reflect that we now cover the 2 species once known solely as *Gopherus agassizii*. It now reads:

“The goal of the Desert Tortoise Council (Council) is to assure the perpetual survival of viable populations of the desert tortoise represented throughout its historical range. Desert tortoise, for the purposes of the Council, includes the tortoise species complex that occurs in the southwestern United States and in Mexico, currently referred to as *Gopherus agassizii* and *Gopherus morafkai*.”

Our symposium began with a Keynote Address by Bob Murphy of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada concerning the work clarifying the identity of our 2 desert tortoise species. Tortoise researchers have known for a long time that there is a genetic difference across the Colorado River and that there are also morphological, behavioral and habitat preference distinctions that make it



See “From the Editor” for the story of these torts...

important to work on each species separately to devise appropriate conservation plans. It is clear that *Gopherus agassizii*, as a species, now occupies only 30% of the range previously attributed to it and that the species, *Gopherus morafkai* cannot be considered a genetic reservoir for the threatened *G. agassizii*. It is an open question, pointed out by Roy Averill Murray of the USGS Desert Tortoise Recovery Office, as to how the significance of having the two species affects our efforts to recover the threatened Mojave populations and protect all our tortoises under the specifics of the law.

Taylor Edwards spoke as to how our genetic knowledge allows determination of just who, exactly captive tortoise are while a later paper by Chris Mullen made it clear that there are many tortoises held as pets and over 2,000 each year turned over to adoption centers, all with a very uncertain future. It is very clear that understanding the genetics of tortoises will be important in making sound management decisions on many pressing issues.

The first special session honored Elliott Jacobson for his many years of work not only for helping us understand the disease that has devastated the desert tortoise but also for his overall efforts enlisting colleagues in the work. His colleagues continue to demonstrate that there is much to learn about wildlife diseases and how to deal with them in conservation planning. Their vigilance has helped us identify and begin to cope with new problems in desert tortoise health including herpesvirus, chlamydia, shell disease, etc. We owe them all a debt.

Another special session, organized by Wade Sherbrooke, was a delightful insight into the nature of horned lizards. We learned about the current taxonomy of *Phrynosoma*, how changes in available ant species has a profound impact on horned lizard feeding success, how horned lizards in the Coachella Valley of California and in Tucson Arizona are hanging on in a context of intense development. We saw their defense capabilities including how effectively a blood squirting horned lizard can deter a determined bobcat (poor kitty).

They have problems but they certainly are not helpless.

Papers addressed old and new issues including current research on the Bolson tortoise, predicted climate and habitat changes, the advance of tortoise genetics, seasonal activity patterns, reproductive output, survey data and their uses, population viability analysis, translocation issues, recovery and restoration of desert plant communities, off road vehicle use, the past and present challenges of conservation work in the context of renewable energy developments and other challenges to tortoise sustainability by government agencies and non-profit organizations.

We heard papers on cattle grazing, headstarting, road impacts, conservation plans, declining populations, biogeography, genetic tools, diseases, and methods for getting more precise data on tortoise location and distribution. Perhaps the most pressing and timely issue of this year is the issue of the development of solar and wind energy projects in tortoise habitat. This year we heard a follow-up to Sid Silliman's paper of 2011 on a social-political-economic perspective on the issues that face tortoise conservation. Given that conservation successes are linked to people working together we plan to expand on that topic next year with a special session.

We heard about the accomplishments of different government agencies and non-profit organizations in support of tortoises in the wild. We learned that Mojave Max is now Mojave Maxine. We heard about specific issues in each of the four states. The data revealing vulnerability of the southern Utah populations of tortoises, especially of the Beaver Dam Wash and the Red Cliffs, were supplemented later by presentations on the genetics of different populations and how difficult it will be to maintain connections between them. We heard about how the newly restructured Tortoise Conservation Center in Nevada, operated now in cooperation with the San Diego Zoo, is assisting tortoise recovery activities. We also heard a bit about the history of some of the tortoises previously at the center that had to be euthanized due to a lack of care until researchers and agency personnel brought attention to the

problem so that it could be resolved. From Arizona we heard about research on the specific demographic and other characteristics of *Gopherus morafkai* including some long-term data collection by local landowners, condition decline with increasing buffelgrass, analysis of ranching practices and work on juvenile tortoises and shelter site selection. Papers from California predominated and a lot of that work was centered on the development of renewable energy projects and their impacts.

The Desert Tortoise Recovery Office of USFWS has considered the genetic identity of regional populations and the need for range-wide protection and connection to produce models that can guide recovery projects. Protection and recovery of tortoise populations continues to challenge and frustrate all of the agencies and groups. Overall it was clear that protection of areas where tortoises now thrive and development of sound conservation planning based on good science are needed to assure the future of the tortoise.

Fridays sessions ended with tributes to two people we lost this past year and who each contributed to the DTC mission in her own special way.

Pat von Helf, our Corresponding Secretary, whom many will remember meeting at the registration desks of the symposium and the handling workshops, was always there when the DTC needed her support. She was remembered fondly by council members and friends who knew her well and understood what a good friend and supporter she had been.

Betty Burge, whom many of us remember for her many years of excellent tortoise fieldwork giving us detailed knowledge of tortoise geography and demographics, was presented to us in all the many phases of her long career. We were treated to her singing *Un bel di, vedremo* from *Madame Butterfly*. A song of hope, to which both of these special women contributed.

Friday evening we enjoyed not only a mixer with buffet dinner but also a poster session with 8 excellent posters (use of seedballs and mulches,

geographic serology, occupancy sampling, winter activity patterns, seedling performance, ORV use, non-native grass impacts, and GPS use in locating tortoises). Let us hope next year there will be many more. We enjoyed them and learned from them and from conversations with the authors.

Saturday evening we held our banquet, awards ceremony and the raffle/auction. We owe special thanks to Joe Probst as auctioneer and to his assistants Mari and Mickey Quillman for a fine auction.

We owe overall thanks to Kristin Berry for a fine program and to Tracy and Michael Bailey for making it all happen. In addition we had volunteer help from students recruited by Glenn Stewart as well as some other folks and we appreciate all of them.

We thank all the individuals and groups who are working so hard in support of conservation of the tortoise, the deserts, and our world. We also thank the researchers who continue to add to the scientific base on which we can recommend better ways to protect the tortoise and the desert habitats. At the same time it is frustrating that advocates for tortoise and desert conservation have been tagged as “obstructionist” while the politics of sustainable energy development seem not to prioritize sound conservation planning and clear standards for protection of natural resources and species. It is always uplifting to attend these symposia and hear how many agencies and non-profit groups are standing up for conservation and how much scientific information we can bring to bear on supporting the DTC mission.

#### SUGGESTIONS:

- Download and read the abstracts for more detail (<http://www.deserttortoise.org/abstracts.html>). The file is searchable in Adobe Reader for your favorite subjects and authors.
- Get involved in DTC activities; help us out with operations, web site development, registration activities for symposium and workshops, other projects.

- Consider a poster for next year.
- Remember that a glass can be seen as half-empty or half-full. I ask is that we all think twice before blaming, turn any criticism into a positive critique insofar as feasible, and support each other in our efforts to protect the tortoises in the wild. As Pogo said: "We have met the enemy and it is us."

Maggie Fusari, Past Chairperson, DTC Board

Thank you very much to Southern California Edison (SCE) and ECORP Consulting, Inc. for their generous donations to the Desert Tortoise Council. These donations were earmarked to support our 2012 Annual Symposia. The support from Southern California Edison and ECOPR Consulting, Inc. helped to provide a high-quality program that benefited many individuals and sectors of the public, including wildlife biologists and land-use managers, academics, students, private corporations, utility companies, captive husbandry experts and rehabilitators, and government agencies.



Horned Lizard Speakers (L to R): Kevin Young, Wade Sherbrook (in back with bolo of horned lizard), Phil Rosen, Cameron Barrows, Andrew Suarez, and Adam Leaché

Photo courtesy of Cameron Barrows

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Officers

Senior Co-Chair:	Dan Pearson
Junior Co-Chair:	Bruce Palmer
Past Co-Chair:	Maggie Fusari
Recording Secretary:	Ed LaRue
Corresponding Secretary:	Tracy Bailey
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Board Member:	Kristin Berry
Board Member:	Rebecca Jones
Board Member:	Joe Probst
Board Member:	Sidney Silliman
Board Member:	Glenn Stewart
Board Member:	Peter Woodman

Newsletter:	Sean Daly
Website:	Michael Connor

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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 wild life? 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](mailto:sdaly@burnsmcd.com).

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## PHOTO FROM THE FRONT PAGE

The picture was sent to me from Sylvia Morafka with the note below:

"Dr. David Morafka would bond with his doctors by giving them a reptile (you won't believe how many were receptive because they had small children). David gave his endocrinologist, Dr. Anne Peters, Director, USC Clinical Diabetes Programs, Los Angeles, CA, two neonates. When I e-mailed Anne about a tortoise being named after David, she was very proud. Anne sent me a picture of the two neonates Dave had given her. Anne wrote that she always thinks about Dave, especially when she has questions about her tortoises. Anne turned out to be a wonderful tortoise mommy. By the way, David would always take a reptile in a pillow case to share with his doctors. His doctors loved him and, upon his passing, they were some of the first people to call with their condolences."

Additionally, the note below comes from Dr. Anne Peters:

"You can definitely share our tortoise photos...they have done amazingly well. Occasionally we have taken them to the vet for the rare illness, but overall they are healthy and hardy. Mark [her husband] built a tortoise habitat for them in the yard, with a thermostat-controlled heat lamp and they love roaming around. And they have such personalities! Very sociable. And sweet. They hibernate in boxes each winter. Of course I always wish I had David to ask for help, but they keep me forever connected to that wonderful spirit of his...please always let me know if there are new developments in the David tortoise world...and I love those *Gopherus morafkai*...Anne"

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ADDRESS UPDATES!!!

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

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## ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE NOVEMBER 3-4 AND 4-5 TORTOISE HANDLING WORKSHOP:

The Desert Tortoise Council Introduction to Desert Tortoise Surveying, Monitoring, and Handling Workshop for 2012 will be held in 2 sessions; Saturday-Sunday November 3-4 and Monday-Tuesday November 5-6, 2012 in Ridgecrest California. These identical 2-day workshops are structured to provide information on the handling, monitoring, surveying and biology of desert tortoises. First invitations to register will be sent in late July. For more information see: <http://www.deserttortoise.org/workshop.html>

To be added to the waiting list please email: [tortoiseorg@gmail.com](mailto:tortoiseorg@gmail.com) with the header: 2012 workshop. We currently have over 300 names on the list so get your request in soon.

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## VALUABLE VIDEOS

From Steve Ishii (DTPC Board Member)

I set up a Vimeo video hosting account for the DTPC. So far, we have two videos that may be of interest to you for your newsletter.

<https://vimeo.com/38397291>

This is a video of the presentation of the new *Gopherus morafkai*, given by Dr. Kristin Berry at the DTPC's Annual Banquet. This would probably be of great interest to those DTPC members that did not catch the presentation at the DTPC's banquet or at the DTPC's Annual Symposium.

<https://vimeo.com/38641198>

This is a video of the presentation of the Mohave Ground Squirrel Observations at the DTPC last spring at/nearby the DTRNA, given by Mary Kotschwar and Freya Reder at the DTPC's banquet.

There are other DTPC videos out on Vimeo.com, I have tagged them all with "DTPC" so you can find them by searching. I just started populating the account, and will continue to add videos as they are captured/produced. I am hoping you can include the links above in the DTPC newsletter to help promote the great work being done!

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## NEWS

### **LAWSUIT INITIATED OVER GOVERNMENT FAILURE TO STOP ILLEGAL GRAZING ON DESERT TORTOISE HABITAT IN NEVADA**

The Center for Biological Diversity today filed a formal notice of intent to sue the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Clark County, Nev., for not taking required steps to protect the desert tortoise, a threatened species, from grazing in southern Nevada. Specifically, the notice targets the agencies' failure to carry out the mandatory terms and conditions of the Clark County Multiple Species Conservation Plan, Permit and Agreements. These plans, permits, and agreements have allowed the county and the cities to destroy up to 145,000 acres of desert tortoise habitat in exchange for promised conservation actions, mostly on federal public lands.

For years, the federal agencies and Clark County have allowed prolonged and extensive grazing by trespassing cattle in tortoise critical habitat in the Gold Butte area, south of Mesquite. The tortoise is protected as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act; grazing is a major threat to its survival.

"Enough is enough," said Rob Mrowka, a Nevada-based Center ecologist. "As of December 2011, more than 80,600 acres of desert tortoise habitat have been destroyed in Clark County under the pretense that the agreed-upon steps were being taken to help tortoises in protected areas. But since 1998, grazing that was supposed to be eliminated at Gold

Butte has gone on, despite two federal courts saying it should stop."

In 1994 the Fish and Wildlife Service identified areas critical to the long-term survival of the desert tortoise; one was Gold Butte. In 1998 the BLM released its current "resource management plan," which clearly indicates that grazing allotments in tortoise critical habitat would be closed. Also in 1998 Clark County bought all valid existing grazing permits for Gold Butte, paying \$375,000 to retire them for the benefit of the tortoise.

"While the federal agencies and county superficially attempted to meet the requirements, the reality is that because of their willful neglect, critical habitat has been steadily degraded by the trespass grazing," said Mrowka. Recent surveys by the BLM have found 700 to 1,000 or more cattle in the Gold Butte area — an amount 10 times above what was legally permitted even before the tortoise's protection. Grazing reduces vegetation the tortoises need to live and spreads noxious weeds by disturbing the soil with hooves and fur that carry invasive seed.

Last month, the local office of the Bureau of Land Management had planned a roundup of the trespass cattle, but the operation was canceled at the last minute by higher-ranking agency officials.

"We've tried to work with the BLM and county constructively to achieve a good resolution to this problem, but with the recent cancellation of a roundup of the trespass cattle, our only option for helping these tortoises is to take them to court," said Mrowka.

Click here for the original article:  
<http://www.ewnews.com/latest-news/science-environmental/33064-lawsuit-initiated-over-government-failure-to-stop-illegal-grazing-on-desert-tortoise-habitat-in-nevada.html>

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### **QUESTIONS SURROUND SECRET TALKS ON DESERT WATER PROJECT**

Questions are being raised over whether public officials at several Southern California water districts, including Orange County's second largest, broke the law by meeting — and in some cases voting — in secret on a controversial project to extract water from the Mojave Desert.

The private Cadiz Valley Water Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project attracts both ardent supporters, who say it will provide a safe and reliable water supply in times of drought, and fierce detractors, who worry it will destroy a crucial desert aquifer that provides water for local residents and wildlife.

But while that debate now plays out on a public stage, many of the initial discussions by public agencies on this highly controversial project were behind closed doors away from public scrutiny, records show. And according to a leading open-government expert, the legal justification used to hold those talks in secret doesn't appear to hold water.

Records indicate that eight Southern California water boards have discussed Cadiz in closed session at least 30 times since 2009, including two votes to authorize negotiations on the project. All were held under the real estate exemption to the state open-meetings law known as the Ralph M. Brown Act.

That exemption only allows discussion of price and payment terms regarding a change in ownership or possession of land or structures, according to Terry Francke, general counsel to the open-government advocacy group Californians Aware. He's considered a top expert on the Brown Act.

But after requests, neither the Cadiz company nor Santa Margarita Water District, the most active district in the project, have pointed to any specific real estate that would change hands.

The district appears to be obtaining an option "to get a commodity in the future from somebody else," said Francke. "So I don't believe that qualifies" for discussion under the real estate exemption.

Santa Margarita, meanwhile, insists that the closed sessions were legal.

"We did not do anything that was unlawful," said Michele Miller, a spokeswoman for the South Orange County district.

"Water rights constitute real property which allows a public agency to enter into closed session," she added later in a prepared statement.

Francke disagrees, reiterating that the exemption covers only land and buildings.

Regardless of whether the closed meetings were legal, the Cadiz project is expected to have far-reaching ramifications.

Using wells on 70 square miles of land it owns in San Bernardino County, Cadiz Inc. plans to pump up 16 billion gallons of water every year for 50 years and sell it to Southern California water agencies. Santa Margarita, Three Valleys Municipal Water District in Los Angeles County and Jurupa Community Services District in Riverside County are now "project participants."

Cadiz presents its venture as a safe and reliable source of water that will also spur thousands of jobs and millions in tax revenue during four years of construction. A group of residents in the area around the project, however, are concerned about potential harm to the region's aquifer, which serves as their water supply. Environmentalists have also expressed worries over impacts to desert animals like bighorn sheep and the desert tortoise.

Cadiz CEO Keith Brackpool is a politically well-connected British businessman who first proposed a version of the current project in the 1990s. Southern California's main water agency came close to approving it in 2002 but scrapped its plans after an outcry from environmentalists and opposition from U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

The project lay dormant until Cadiz announced in June 2009 that smaller water agencies had formally shown interest in becoming involved. It now has three public and three private "confirmed"

participating water providers” and is undergoing a review of environmental effects.

Records indicate that since early 2009, closed-door discussions on Cadiz have been held by directors of the Cucamonga Valley, Santa Margarita, Eastern Municipal, Three Valley’s Municipal and Monte Vista water districts, as well as the San Diego County Water Authority, San Geronio Pass Water Agency and Inland Empire Utilities Agency.

The Brown Act requires that nearly all discussions and decisions by water district boards take place before the public during an open meeting. Only narrow, specific exemptions like personnel and legal issues may be discussed behind closed doors.

Click here for the rest of the original article:

[http://voiceofoc.org/countywide/county\\_government/article\\_0f70683e-a5c9-11e1-881a-001a4bcf887a.html](http://voiceofoc.org/countywide/county_government/article_0f70683e-a5c9-11e1-881a-001a4bcf887a.html)

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## **FIRST SOLAR PROJECT ON U.S. PUBLIC LANDS STARTS GENERATING**

The first utility-scale solar energy facility on U.S. public lands started delivering power on Monday with the flip of a switch by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

Located 40 miles south of Las Vegas, the Enbridge Silver State North solar project is a 50-megawatt plant that will use thin film photovoltaic technology to generate enough power for about 9,000 Nevada homes.

Owned by Enbridge, a Canadian energy company based in Calgary, Alberta, the project employed some 380 construction workers during peak construction and 650 people over the course of the project.

First Solar developed and constructed the facility using its advanced thin film photovoltaic modules, and will operate and maintain the project for Enbridge, which acquired Silver State North in March.

NV Energy has a power purchase agreement to sell the solar project's electricity to the Nevada market.

"This is a landmark day for solar energy and for the nation," Salazar said at the dedication ceremony with state and company officials. "Silver State North was the first solar project we approved on public lands and 18 months later the first of our priority projects to provide clean energy to the power grid."

"Today is about making believers out of skeptics," said Salazar. "As the first solar project on U.S. public lands completed and ready to deliver energy to thousands of homes across Nevada, the Silver State North Solar Project is really at the forefront of our nation's clean energy economy."

By harnessing the area's abundant sunshine, the Silver State North facility generates electricity with no air emissions, no waste production, and no water use.

The plant, using technology with the smallest carbon footprint of any photovoltaic solar system, displaces about 42,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide annually - the equivalent of taking 8,000 cars off the road.

Frank De Rosa, First Solar senior vice president for business development, the Americas, said, "This is a project built by Nevadans that will use a Nevada natural resource, plentiful desert sun, to generate clean, renewable energy."

The project site is located near a major transmission hub. Constructed on 618 acres of public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the solar project underwent full environmental analysis and public review.

The Bureau of Land Management worked with federal, state and local partners, members of the environmental and conservation community, and stakeholders to protect wildlife at the project site.



First Solar and the BLM worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a relocation plan for desert tortoises found on the site.

The desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, is the official reptile in the states of California and Nevada. Listed as a threatened species by the state and federal governments, the number of desert tortoises has decreased by 90 percent since the 1950s. An estimated 100,000 tortoises remain in the Mojave and Sonoran deserts.

The BLM also required a natural color palette for painted structures and controlled night lighting, designed to reduce visual impacts on the local community.

Click here to see the rest of the original article:  
<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/may2012/2012-05-08-01.html>

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## **DESERT RESIDENTS FIGHT TO SAVE BALD EAGLES FROM INDUSTRIAL WIND ENERGY**

The Homestead Valley Community Council is the latest organization in the desert to voice their opposition to recent U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service decisions allowing the "take" of eagles by industrial-scale wind energy projects.

Fish & Wildlife has been directed by the Department of the Interior to review its eagle "take" policy, and is considering extending golden and bald eagle take permits to a record period of 30 years. This policy change would allow large wind energy projects to kill, injure, and displace these formerly protected raptors.

“We’ve worked hard with our partners to protect eagle populations nationwide, and will make sure they continue to thrive. These proposed changes will help facilitate the responsible development of renewable energy and other projects, while conserving bald and golden eagles by requiring key conservation and monitoring measures to be implemented,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. “We are committed to

monitoring the impact of projects on eagle populations over the life of the permits to ensure these measures are effective.”

The proposed changes would amend regulations under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act specifically in response to industrial scale wind energy projects. Tens of thousands of acres of industrial wind energy development currently threaten Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, as well as Joshua Tree National Park, while industrial solar development is rapidly destroying desert tortoise, fox, and burrowing owl habitat, while damaging and destroying Native American cultural resources and sacred sites across the desert.

According to Fish & Wildlife, "The proposed changes, if approved, would amend permit regulations finalized on September 11, 2009 under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act for the take of eagles that may occur as the unintended result of various activities. The regulations provide for both standard permits and programmatic permits. Standard permits cover individual instances of take that cannot practically be avoided, while programmatic permits are necessary to authorize projects where recurring, unavoidable take occurs over the long term, such as with wind energy projects, electric utilities, and timber operations. Most take authorized by these permits has been in the form of disturbance to eagles and their habitat; however, permits may authorize lethal take that is incidental to an otherwise lawful activity."

For more information about the proposed rule changes that could lead to more "take" of bald and golden eagles by industrial scale wind energy projects, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/>.

Click here to read the original article:  
<http://thesunrunner.com/2012/05/22/desert-residents-fight-to-save-bald-eagles-from-industrial-wind-energy>

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**NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES JOIN ENVIRONMENTAL, RECREATION AND**

## **HUNTING ORGANIZATIONS TO CALL FOR A MORATORIUM ON “FAST-TRACKING” MASSIVE ENERGY PROJECTS ON PUBLIC LANDS**

An unprecedented coalition of environmental leaders, tribal representatives, off-road vehicle users, writers/artists, hunters, outdoor enthusiasts, community residents and legal spokespersons are calling for a national moratorium on “fast tracking” massive energy projects on federal public lands.

“This industrial wind project is symbolic of what’s wrong with the current federal fast-tracking process,” Terry Weiner, Imperial County Projects Coordinator for the Desert Protective Council, said of the Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility (OWEF), the first big energy project in our region poised for destruction of public lands. “We are the canaries in the coal mine. If this is not stopped here, destruction of millions of acres of public lands across the southwest will likely soon follow.”

Imperial County’s Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors approved construction of the massive Ocotillo Wind Energy Facility (OWEF) by San Francisco-based Pattern Energy on 12,500 acres of desert surrounding the rural community of Ocotillo - despite compelling testimony and pleas by tribal members, residents and environmentalists to deny it.

Similar projects are in the pipeline on San Diego County’s scenic and cherished public lands, and others.

Industrialization of the 20 square miles of desert for the OWEF will cause irreparable impacts to fragile natural and Native American cultural resources, to the adjacent Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, to Ocotillo’s community character, quality of life and public health. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is poised to make the decision to grant the developer, Pattern Energy, a right of way on previously protected land. Bulldozers could begin rolling as early as this week.

The federal renewable energy policy, authorized under the George W. Bush administration and now

being implemented under the Barack Obama administration, for the first time, allows formerly protected national forests and recreation areas to be opened up for development as energy corridors. Additional remote solar and wind energy developments and long-distance transmission lines are in various stages of approval across America, including San Diego’s East County and Imperial County.

A new federal fast-track process intended to speed approvals of renewable energy projects has instead proved disastrous, shutting out parties with critical information and stifling voices of dissent.

“We believe that the Department of the Interior (DOI) is poised to violate the law and our rights to religious freedom and our cultural identities guaranteed by DOI’s own policies, the United States Constitution, and international declarations. We need your help,” Anthony Pico, Chairman of the Viejas band of Kumeyaay Indians, wrote in a letter to President Obama on February 22.

“This project will have devastating environmental consequences and cause irreparable harm to sensitive desert habitat, further endangering Peninsular Bighorn sheep, golden eagles and other wildlife,” said Ralph Singer, President of the Anza-Borrego Foundation. “Imagine 112 massive turbines, each 450 ft. tall -skyscraper height- with blades as large as a commercial jetliner wingspan. Yet impacts on Anza-Borrego Desert Park, which shares a 5-mile border with this project, were largely left out of the EIR.”

Click here to see the rest of the original article:  
<http://thesunrunner.com/2012/05/15/native-american-tribes-join-environmental-recreation-and-hunting-organizations-to-call-for-a-moratorium-on-fast-tracking-massive-energy-projects-on-public-lands>

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## **MEETINGS**

**CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY OF TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES**

The 10th Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles will be held 16-19 August 2012 in Tucson, Arizona. The meeting is co-hosted by the Turtle Survival Alliance and the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG).

The meeting, which has hosted an average of more than 200 attendees over the past six years, represents the largest gathering of non-marine turtle biologists in the world and provides an unmatched opportunity for networking and strategizing turtle conservation. Last year's conference was filled with presentations by biologists and conservationists from 13 countries covering 50+ species.

Visit <http://www.turtlesurvival.org> for more information.

ONLINE REGISTRATION OPENS 12 MARCH 2012.

Contact Heather Lowe at [hlowe@turtlesurvival.org](mailto:hlowe@turtlesurvival.org) for more information.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT FROM MAGGIE FUSARI

The Society for Conservation Biology is holding a North American Congress in Oakland CA July 15-18, 2012 and the title is: Bridging the Gap: Connecting People, Nature, & Climate. My colleagues and I (including DTC Board member Sidney Silliman, Western Watersheds Project CA Director Mike Connor, NRS Sweeney Granite Mountain Reserve Director Jim Andre, and others) have a symposium: Conservation vs. Sacrifice: Weighing the consequences of utility-scale renewable energy development in the California Deserts.

We understand there will be other papers on this general topic. We also noted, when we submitted abstracts that the Ecosystem pull-down menu did not include the choice "desert". We hope some of you can join us at this meeting. The link for further information is: <http://www.scncongress.org/>

[www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org)

The deadline for early registration has passed but we would love to see you there.

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES

### 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)



Photo courtesy of Sean Daly (taken in Palmdale CA)

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

Check one: \_\_\_\_\_ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL \_\_\_\_\_ CHANGE OF ADDRESS  
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\_\_\_\_\_ Contributing (**\$100.00** per year) \_\_\_\_\_ Lifetime (**\$300.00** or more)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Student (**\$20.00** per year- Requires endorsement of student's advisor or Major Professor)

Starting in 2012, the newsletter will only be distributed via electronic link to website.

Make check or money order payable to the Desert Tortoise Council  
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*The Desert Tortoise Council does not release its membership list*

[www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org)