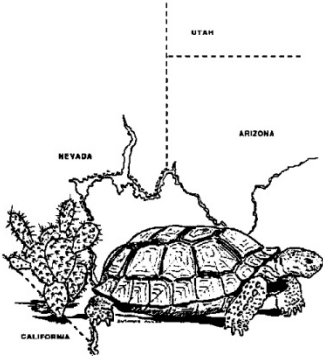


# THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

*Fall 2013-OUR 38<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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## SYMPOSIUM TO HONOR STEBBINS

This year’s 39th Annual Meeting and Symposium will honor Dr. Robert C. Stebbins, a famous herpetologist in western North America and author of a Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians, Field Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of California (California Natural History Guides), Connecting with Nature: A Naturalist’s Perspective, A Natural History of Amphibians, The Lives of Animals in Joshua Tree National Monument, and many other books and scientific and educational papers. Dr. Stebbins passed away two months ago at the age of 98. He was a frequent guest at Desert Tortoise Council symposia and a very popular author and artist. When he autographed his field guide and prints, many people waited in very long lines for his autograph and to talk to him. He generously contributed prints and cards of his artwork for the Council to sell and auction.

We have several very special speakers and sessions scheduled for the 39th Annual Meeting and Symposium. Some highlights are presented below and more are to come. We are honored to announce Dr. Barry Sinervo as the Keynote Speaker. Dr. Sinervo, a Professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, will give a paper titled, “Prospects for



That’s right...we are continuing to embrace the digital age! Check us out @DTCouncil

Gopherus: Demographic and Physiological Models of Climate Change from 65 Million Years Ago to the Future.” A much published author on reptiles in such prestigious journals as Science and Nature, Dr. Sinervo will discuss new models of anthropogenic climate change and their role in generating extinctions of reptiles in this century. He has applied the new models to predict extinctions of Gopherus in present and future timeframes. He will discuss the effects of large-scale deployment of solar panels and how they generate a powerful Urban Heat Island Effect in adjacent desert habitat.

Phil Medica, winner of the Robert C. Stebbins Research Award for his lifetime of accomplishments, will summarize a life well spent in research on tortoises and other reptiles, culminating in his publication last year on the Rock Valley tortoises.

Laura Cunningham will be our featured author with her book, A State of Change: Forgotten Landscapes of California, which was published in 2010. Using historical records, archeological data and paleontological reports, artist Laura Cunningham created a view of California landscapes prior to the arrival of settlers in the 1700s. Her beautiful book and artwork provide a compelling compilation of what landscapes and the associated fauna may have looked like in the recent past. She will talk about her work and will be available afterward to autograph copies of her book. The Desert Tortoise Council will have copies for sale.

Roger Repp will be the Saturday night speaker. Roger works for the National Optical Astronomy Observatory in Tucson and by avocation is a rabid Field Herpetologist who, since 1989, has averaged 900 hours per year studying the herpetofauna of the Sonoran Desert and areas beyond. His methods involve radio-telemetry (five different species of venomous reptiles since 2001), mark and recapture, and some good old-fashioned hands-off observation. Whether he has an antenna in hand or not, he has faithfully documented every herp encounter. In 2012, Roger gave a presentation at the Desert Tortoise Council titled, “Burrow Buddies—Or Not?” In his dinner address, he will expand on this theme about his tortoise buddies and

the lairs of his many old friends. While tortoises will still command center stage in this presentation, more than casual mention will be made of close neighbors. Another added bonus for Council attendees will be a children’s book featuring Roger, the scientist, and a rattlesnake named Katie. This book for children 6 through 12 is in both English and Spanish, and is titled Katie the Rattlesnake. It makes a wonderful gift for children and is a great read.

The Saturday morning session will focus on Golden Eagles. Dr. Todd Katzner, who has studied raptors, including Golden Eagles, critically endangered Asian vultures, birds of prey in central Appalachian Mountains, red-footed falcons in central Asia, and New World vultures, will tell us about the latest research on Golden Eagles in the California deserts. He has assembled several experts on the topic for a series of presentations that will cover subjects ranging from determinants of flight behavior of desert eagles, connectivity of California raptors to multiple ecosystems (from banding data), demography and movement of eagles at the Altamont wind farm, and long-term trends in Golden Eagle populations.

#### CALL FOR PAPERS AND POSTERS

Because of the government furlough, the Call for Papers and Posters had been extended to December 2. We hope for a robust Poster session in 2014. The Posters will be available throughout the Symposium, until noon on Sunday. The authors should plan to be at their posters during the MIXER and prior to the BUFFET on both Friday and Saturday evenings. In previous years, posters have been very popular, and we expect a similar result in 2014. If you are thinking of presenting a paper or poster and are uncertain, please provide a note on your Call for Papers submission. You will be able to change the title and submit an abstract by January 10, 2014 and should be coordinated with the Program Chair (Kristin Berry).

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Officers

Chairperson:	Bruce Palmer
Chairperson Elect:	Vacant
Past Chairperson:	Dan Pearson
Recording Secretary:	Ed LaRue
Corresponding Secretary:	Tracy Bailey
Treasurer:	Mike Bailey
Membership Coordinator:	Mari Quillman

### Board Members at Large

Board Member:	Kristin Berry
Board Member:	Rebecca Jones
Board Member:	Heidi McMaster
Board Member:	Joe Probst
Board Member:	Glenn Stewart
Board Member:	Peter Woodman
Board Member:	Maggie Fusari
Board Member:	Chris Noddings
Board Member:	Ken MacDonald

Newsletter:	Sean Daly
Website:	Mary Cohen

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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](mailto:sdaly@burnsmcd.com).

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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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### FOLLOW US ON TWITTER!

The Desert Tortoise Council is now on twitter. Follow us [@DTCouncil](https://twitter.com/DTCouncil) to stay updated on everything desert tortoise related!

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### DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL ARCHIVES 1975 TO 2013

The Desert Tortoise Council is pleased to announce that we are gathering and organizing historical information to produce an archival resource of almost 40 years of Council history! As of October 2013, we have catalogued more than 12,300 pages associated with approximately 2,100 items. Some of the 40 categories for these materials include:

- 2,475 pages of environmental comment letters between 1978 and 2012;
- 250 pages endorsing the 1980 federal listing of the Beaver Dam Slope Population;
- 50 pages on the 1984 Status Report providing primary data supporting federal listing;
- 270 pages endorsing the 1990 listing of the Mojave Population of the tortoise; and
- 150 pages supporting the 1994 milestones of critical habitat and the recovery plan.

There are also abstracts, minutes, membership and board member lists, bylaws, formal policies and resolutions, symposia and workshop correspondences, awards, newsletters, unique photographs, and much more!

We are very interested in gathering all available hard copy materials that will help us accurately

represent the rich history of the Desert Tortoise Council. We are particularly interested in hearing from past board members and officers, and respectfully seek folders and boxes full of archival materials.

If you think you have hard copy materials that will help us (at this time we're not collecting email correspondence and other electronic media), please contact our Recording Secretary who will facilitate the transfer of materials from you to this important effort. Once complete, materials will be scanned and made available to the general public as an important resource documenting the history of the Council.

Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary  
P.O. Box 3197  
Wrightwood, CA 92397  
Work (760) 249-4948, Home (760) 249-4821, Cell (760) 964-0012  
Email: [ed.larue@verizon.net](mailto:ed.larue@verizon.net)

Thank You for Helping Us Document 38 Years of Desert Tortoise Conservation!

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## **DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM**

**February 21-23, 2014 Ontario, California**

### **Photo Contest**

**PHOTO CONTEST:** The Council sponsors the annual Photo Contest to honor and encourage our members to participate in educating the public through photography. Joe Probst is managing the 2014 Photo Contest.

**FORMAT:** For 2014 the format is mounted print and digital photographs either in black and white or color (no slides). All prints/photos must be matted, **NO GLASS FRAMES** please.

All prints/photos must be labeled with the following information placed on the back of the **PRINT/PHOTO:**

- common and scientific name of subject;
- location;
- date photo was taken;
- contestant's name, addresses, and phone number; and
- entry category.

No names on the front, please, but titles and date are OK.

This year, the Council encourages contest entrants to also submit electronic copies (in .jpg format) of their entries so that they can be posted on the website before the Symposium and we can show the winners at the Banquet. Please also indicate whether or not you would like to have your entries included at the Auction, with proceeds going to the DTC.

**AWARDS:** Qualified winners will be awarded first, second, and third place in each of the eight categories.

- First Place awards will be \$75.
- Second Place will be \$50.
- Third Place will be \$25.
- The ninth category, Best of Show will receive \$150.

### **CATEGORIES:**

1. WILD DESERT TORTOISES
2. CAPTIVE (PET) DESERT TORTOISES
3. OTHER DESERT REPTILES
4. DESERT MAMMALS
5. OTHER DESERT WILDLIFE
6. WILD DESERT PLANTS
7. DESERT SCENES
8. TORTOISE CONSERVATION: This category covers a range of subjects, but must depict activities or subject matter important to the perpetuation of the species. Examples are research, impacts (i.e., raven predation), improvements (i.e., fencing), and environmental education.

## 9. BEST OF SHOW

**OTHER RULES:** The contestant must be a registered attendee of the 2014 Symposium. With the exception of Captive (Pet) Tortoises, all PRINTS/PHOTOS must be taken of WILD (i.e., unrestrained and photographed in its natural habitat) subjects occurring within the geographic range of the desert tortoise. Each contestant may submit a maximum of two PRINTS/PHOTOS per category. Photos must have been taken by the contestant.

**SUBMISSION OF PRINTS/PHOTOS:** PRINTS/PHOTOS must be available for viewing no later than 1:30 p.m. on Friday afternoon, February 21, 2014. You may either bring your photo and provide them to Joe Probst at the Symposium early on Friday or mail them to Joe Probst at: 36431 41st Street East, Palmdale, CA. 93552.

PRINTS/PHOTOS must arrive at this address by Friday, February 14, 2014. To ensure that your entries are posted on the website before the Symposium, submit electronic copies (in .jpg format) to the DTC webmaster.

**JUDGING:** Photos will be judged at the Symposium by the attendees. Attendees will have a photo ballot in their registration packet. Each attendee may only vote once. Voting will be on Saturday until 3:00 p.m. Winners will be announced at the Banquet on Saturday night.

PRINTS/PHOTOS: will not be returned, except upon advance request, and will become the property of the Desert Tortoise Council. The Council shall have the right to use these photographs in its publications and educational programs, as well as to assign such permission to others, with full credit given to the photographer.

### **EXCITING NEWS ABOUT THE RAFFLE AND AUCTION!**

First, we want to thank all of you who donated items for the auction and raffle at the 2013 Symposium! The Council appreciates any and all donations. If we have a lot of donations for the 2014 Symposium, then we will be raffling items

during the breaks, lunches, and the evening program on Friday night as well as at the auction/raffle on Saturday night. **Great news for 2014!!!** The very generous donor who donated a week-long stay at a condo in Big Sky, Montana and the 2-day snowboarding/skiing or golf package at the Big Sky Resort has offered to donate the same package again! He was so impressed when he met last year's winner, Stefanie Pappas, that he would like to continue his donations to the Council. Thank you Stephanie!! Other exciting items include signed and framed photographs, jewelry, field gear, books, and etc. So, get ready to win or bid on lots of great stuff! The monies collected from the raffle/auction help to offset the costs of putting on the Symposium.

### **SYMPOSIUM SPONSORSHIPS**

Support the 2014 Desert Tortoise Council Symposium by becoming a sponsor! Different levels of sponsorship opportunities are available for individuals, companies, agencies, and/or groups that would like to support the efforts of the Desert Tortoise Council. Sponsorships are greatly appreciated because they help to offset the cost of putting on the symposium. All sponsors will be acknowledged for their generosity at the Symposium and in the newsletter following the Symposium. The Sponsor Information can be found on the Council's website at: <http://www.deserttortoise.org/symposium/index.html>

### **SYMPOSIUM VENDORS**

Do you own or work at a company that sells items (hiking equipment, research equipment, art, books, etc.) that desert- or tortoise-loving people might be interested in? Well then, become a Symposium vendor and sell your wares at the symposium! Our annual symposiums are usually attended by 200-250 people, offering excellent exposure for you and your merchandise. We will also include your contact information in the Symposium's program so attendees can reach you after everyone returns home.



To become an official Symposium vendor, please provide an item (or items) totaling at least \$50 in value to be auctioned or raffled by the Council. Vendors are also expected to register for the meeting in order to participate in the full benefits of the symposium, including the banquet and refreshments. Please contact Chris Noddings at [chrisnoddings@gmail.com](mailto:chrisnoddings@gmail.com) for more information and to register as a vendor!

## HOTEL REGISTRATION

We are encouraging our members to make their reservations at this DoubleTree Hotel (where the Symposium is being held). In order for the DTC to receive a special event rate for the conference room, we need to fulfill our sleeping room contractual obligations. To reserve your room at the DoubleTree, call **1-800-222-TREE (8733)**. Be sure to mention Booking # **DTC** to get the discounted rate. Room rates are \$99.00, subject to room tax. The cut-off date for reservations is **Sunday, January 19, 2014**. The guestrooms feature two queen beds, non-smoking, as well as the following amenities: hair dryer, free basic Internet access with higher speeds available for \$11/day, coffeemaker, iron, and complimentary shuttle to Ontario Mills Mall. Our check-in time is 3:00 PM, check-out time is 12:00 PM.

## SYMPOSIUM REGISTRATION

The [Symposium registration form](#) is available on our website [www.deserttortoise.org](http://www.deserttortoise.org). Please take advantage of early-bird registration rates. If your registration is postmarked, or processed online, after January 18, 2014, rates are higher.

The registration fee includes

- 2 continental breakfasts (Saturday and Sunday)
- 2 refreshment breaks
- Friday evening mixer that includes heavy hors d'oeuvres and a no-host bar
- Saturday evening dinner buffet and no-host bar banquet
- *Please remember to renew your membership at this time to be eligible to receive the member registration rate.*

## NOTICE OF PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE BYLAWS OF THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

Several revisions to the Council's Bylaws are being proposed by the Board of Directors. These are posted for review by the membership in accordance with the amendment process established in the Bylaws. A two-thirds majority vote of the active members present at the Annual Meeting is required for accepting any revisions to the Bylaws. The Council's Bylaws are available on our website.

Click the link below to view the proposed revisions: [http://www.deserttortoise.org/dtc/draft\\_Amendments\\_for\\_DTC\\_Bylaws.pdf](http://www.deserttortoise.org/dtc/draft_Amendments_for_DTC_Bylaws.pdf)

## ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

The Annual Business Meeting of the Corporation will be held on Friday, February 21, 2014 from 8:00 to 9:00 am. All Desert Tortoise Council members are invited to attend. The Symposium will begin promptly at 9:30 am on Friday morning and continue through 4:30 pm on Sunday, February 23.

## FRANCESCO ORIGGI WINS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

Dr. Francesco Origi, a frequent presenter at the Desert Tortoise Council's Annual Symposium, received the Annual Award given by the American College of Veterinary Pathology on November 18 in Montreal. The award was for his article titled "Emergence of Canine Distemper Virus Strains with Modified Molecular Signature and Enhanced Neuronal Tropism Leading to High Mortality in Wild Carnivores." This article was judged best in content, significance and illustration in the 2012 issues of *Veterinary Pathology*. Dr. Origi conducts research on viruses, including chelonian herpesviruses.

## 2013 WORKSHOP

We are happy to report that the 22nd annual workshop, Introduction to Desert Tortoises and Field Techniques was a resounding success. Two sessions were held on November 2-3 and 4-5 in Ridgecrest California with 70 attendees each. Although the numbers served were lower than last year, the room was less crowded, the students got more attention in the field, and everyone was far less stressed. Many attendees commented on how pleased they were as they left on the final afternoon with the beautiful certificates hand lettered by Ed LaRue.

Once again our class instructors (Kristin Berry, Ray Bransfield, Becky Jones, Alice Karl, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, and Peter Woodman) outdid themselves with excellent presentations on tortoise biology and ecology, sign recognition, government authorizations, and principals of field techniques. In addition and thanks to their putting in extra time we were able to post the .pdf files of their presentations prior to the start of the workshop so that attendees could access them while listening to the lectures and so they could get the most out of the information presented.

Under Pete Woodman's leadership our field instructors (Paul Frank, T.G. Jackson, Rachel Woodard, and Alice Karl) are credited for leading two afternoons of field exercises covering artificial burrow construction, burrow excavation, fence demonstration, tortoise sign demonstration, basic tortoise handling, and surveying along transects for tortoises, burrows, and sign. Together they created a new design for the transects this year and they and the workshop attendees were very happy with the results.

David Carr and Jerry Aguirre set up and ran the projector. Susan Moore, Joe Probst, and Mari Quillman took care of signing in the attendees. Sean Daly prepared and posted the on line test. Mary Cohen kept the website up and running. Tracy and Michael Bailey took care of all of the on-site arrangements.

The Desert Tortoise Council is proud not only to be training more people to do good work in the field

but also to make those people aware of the complexities of desert tortoise and desert conservation.

Many thanks to everyone, including all of the attendees who are now members of the Desert Tortoise Council.

Maggie Fusari  
Desert Tortoise Workshop Coordinator

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## GRANT REQUEST POLICY

On behalf of the Desert Tortoise Council, the Board of Directors recently approved a "Grant Request Policy" that provides direction to the Board for consistent evaluation of proposals for project funding. With approval of this Policy, the Board will now begin accepting grant requests for appropriate projects benefiting the conservation of the desert tortoise.

Please refer to the Policy (click Grant Request Policy on the website [http://www.deserttortoise.org/awards/policy\\_grant\\_request\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.deserttortoise.org/awards/policy_grant_request_FINAL.pdf)) for application procedures and required content for the grant request. The Board will evaluate all suitable proposals but is particularly interested in proposals that address current management issues including:

1. Methods to address corvid and/or canid predation on juvenile tortoises;
2. Sterilization techniques and implementation on captive tortoises;
3. Analysis of range-wide population data; and
4. Analysis of survivorship at the long-term tortoise translocation site, or other translocation sites where at least 5 years of post-release data are available.

Details can be found at:  
<http://www.deserttortoise.org/awards/grants.html>

## NEWS

### CLARK COUNTY OFFICIALS LAMENT SPENDING \$15.7 MILLION ON DESERT TORTOISES

The desert tortoise isn't slow in going through money.

Clark County has spent at least \$15.7 million since 2001 on efforts to protect the tortoise, which is listed as a threatened species by the federal government. Those efforts run the gamut from fencing to habitat restoration to sampling efforts to gauge the population.

County officials don't have anything personal against the tortoise. But they also point to estimates that show some 50,000 desert tortoises are kept as pets in Clark County alone and openly question if the creature is as threatened as the federal government maintains.

"We've got people that are starving and such massive needs that we can't keep pouring money into this," commission Chairman Steve Sisolak said. The broader issue of spending on the desert tortoise arose last week at the commission meeting during a routine approval of a \$125,250 contract amendment with NewFields Companies for work in sampling the tortoise population at Boulder City Conservation Easement, an 86,423-acre area south of Boulder City.

Commissioners made it clear that they want to take a closer look in the near future at its multi-species habitat conservation plan, which was put in place in 2000. Under that plan, some \$95 million has been spent on 78 species of protected plants and animals, including the tortoise. That figure includes the money spent on the tortoise.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys of 11,200 square miles of tortoise habitat across the four-state range provide an estimate of 95,000 adult tortoises.

By using that figure as a basis for estimating the desert tortoise population of all the range's habitat,

the result is fewer than 295,000 adult tortoises across 25,900 square miles.

In Nevada, as many as 91,000 adult tortoises are estimated to be living in some 8,100 square miles of habitat, according to federal figures.

The desert tortoise was listed as threatened in 1989, forcing the county to come up with a way to allow future development while complying with federal requirements to protect the species.

In 2000, the county adopted a multi-species habitat conservation plan, which it administers for all local municipalities. That plan carries out measures to compensate for the loss of habitat, such as restoration and monitoring of species, including the tortoise.

Under the plan, developers pay a \$550 per acre fee, which goes to the county's Desert Conservation Program, said Marci Henson, assistant director of comprehensive planning for the county.

Henson said the plan has helped streamline the environmental permitting process for private property owners, saving an estimated \$300 million since the program began.

Tortoises live in blackbrush and Mojave desert shrub. They have brown shells that can grow longer than 14 inches long. They spend much of their time in burrows, venturing out to eat wildflowers and other plants.

They also live a long time — more than 50 years in some cases.

So the federal government will be spending years watching the current generation of tortoises across southeastern California, Southern Nevada and parts of Utah and Arizona.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began its monitoring efforts in 2001. It will take 25 years, until 2026, to gain enough data from a generation of tortoises to see the full scope of changes brought about by efforts to aid the animal's population.



As a result, officials will have to wait years to see the results.

“They have to survive 20 years before they even start producing babies,” said Roy Averill-Murray, desert tortoise recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “They’re not like rabbits.”

That effort includes looking at the overall long-term patterns and changes in the tortoise population, not just the current raw numbers.

Federal officials also say that pet tortoises aren’t part of the equation for classifying wild tortoises as threatened, as the pets can introduce diseases and genetic impurities if set loose.

The work on the deal approved last week involves sending teams out to look for tortoises and accompanying signs of the creatures and where they live. That entails looking for scat, bone fragments and burrows, said Ken MacDonald, a partner and senior environmental manager at Newfields.

Commissioner Susan Brager said at the meeting that there are more important things to spend much-needed funding on, such as helping young people succeed.

“We spend millions on certain animals and our youth do not get all the help they need,” Brager said.

In the end, it would be nice to spend the money on other things, Sisolak said.

As for the tortoises, they’ll still be counted in Clark County.

“They’ve survived on their own for centuries,” Sisolak said.

Contact reporter Ben Botkin at [bbotkin@reviewjournal.com](mailto:bbotkin@reviewjournal.com) or 702-405-9781. Follow @BenBotkin1 on Twitter.

Click here for the original article:

<http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/clark-county-officials-lament-spending-157-million-desert-tortoises>

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## **GROUP THREATENS LAWSUIT OVER LAST BEST MOJAVE TORTOISE HABITAT**

Two proposed large solar projects in the Ivanpah Valley in California and Nevada will do serious damage to desert tortoise habitat, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management may violate the Endangered Species Act (ESA) if the agencies allow the projects to proceed. That's the message in a sternly worded legal notice delivered to USFWS, BLM, and the U.S. Department of the Interior last week by attorneys for the national environmental group Defenders of Wildlife.

In the letter, formally called a [Notice of Intent](#), Defenders' attorneys say that USFWS issued a Biological Opinion (BiOp) greenlighting the Stateline and Silver State South solar projects near the Mojave National Preserve despite the fact that Silver State South would essentially close off a crucial genetic connectivity corridor through the Ivanpah Valley. The BiOp also approves a controversial plan to move tortoises away from the project site, which practice many tortoise biologists say harms tortoises more than helping them. And the BiOp doesn't account for the cumulative impact to tortoise habitat of the explosion of similar solar projects across the desert.

As a result, say Defenders' attorneys, if the Department of the Interior approves the projects without reexamining their effect on desert tortoises, that'll violate the ESA -- and Defenders is prepared to take the government to court to protect some of the last best remaining tortoise habitat in the Mojave Desert.

The desert tortoise, *Gopherus agassizii*, is protected as a Threatened species under ESA. That makes it illegal to kill, harm, harass, or capture the tortoise without permission from USFWS, and "harm" is

usually construed to include hurting the habitat the tortoise needs to survive as well.

As KCET reported in October, more than 2,000 tortoises may occupy the footprints of the two projects, which First Solar wants to build not far from BrightSource's Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System.

Work on the BrightSource plant was famously halted in 2011 when workers started finding hundreds of desert tortoises on the site. The USFWS had anticipated that project would turn up about 37 tortoises, but was forced to amend BrightSource's BiOp to add another 1,100 tortoises to the project's allowable take.

In its amendment of BrightSource's BiOp back in 2011 to account for those hundreds of unexpected tortoises, USFWS stuck to its original assessment that BrightSource's project wouldn't impair the species' chances of survival. Why not? Because a wide genetic connectivity corridor still existed in the eastern half of the valley between the Silver State North solar project, then in the planning stages, and the Lucy Gray Mountains north of Nipton. As a Nevada representative of USFWS said in a 2012 letter to the BLM,

Click here for entire original article:

<http://www.kcet.org/news/define/rewild/reptiles/group-may-sue-over-solar-project-threat-to-tortoises.html>

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## **DWP SOLAR PROJECT COMMENT DEADLINE EXTENDED**

Once again, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has extended the comment period on the Draft EIR of the Southern Owens Valley Solar Ranch Project.

Originally, DWP made their Draft EIR available August 30th with a deadline for comments on October 18th. For whatever reason, DWP has extended that deadline a few times. Now, it sits at December 20th.

DWP asks for comments as soon as possible but no later than 5pm on December 20th. The solar array designed for six miles southeast of Independence would include one million solar panels on 1200 acres that would generate 200 megawatts of power.

Inyo County has sent in comments objecting to aspects of the project. Those comments point to visual impacts on the viewshed from the valley floor and the Inyo Mountains. The County objected to DWP's failure to consider the Water Agreement with installation of two new groundwater pumps. The County also has concerns about housing impacts.

Some citizens have come forward to object to a huge industrial development in the Valley. The Manzanar Committee has strongly opposed the project which would sit directly across from the Manzanar Historic Site. A meeting held at DWP headquarters in Los Angeles drew some 75 people, including former internees at Manzanar and their families.

Send comments to:

Ms. Nadia Parker  
Environmental Planning and Assessment  
Los Angeles Department of Water and Power  
111 North Hope Street, Room 1044  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Or email to [Nadia.Parker@ladwp.com](mailto:Nadia.Parker@ladwp.com) or [Charles.Holloway@ladwp.com](mailto:Charles.Holloway@ladwp.com)

Click here to see the original article:

<http://www.sierrawave.net/27606/comment-deadline-extended/>

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## **PROTECT JOSHUA TREE FROM THE NEXT BAD IDEA**

My career as a public servant has spanned nearly 40 years in the National Park Service: from the temperate rainforests of Olympic National Park to the rocky mountain ranges in North Cascades National Park to my most recent position as

superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park, from 2003 to 2010.

During my tenure at Joshua Tree, we lived under the cloud of the proposed Eagle Mountain Landfill. We understood that the landfill would severely harm park resources, and the quality of life in our gateway communities in the High Desert and the Coachella Valley.

After a 15-year fight, the Los Angeles County Sanitation Department recently announced it would not develop the 4,000-acre landfill. But unfortunately, the Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Project has emerged in literally the same location and poses many of the same harmful impacts. Now retired, I call on the Department of the Interior to set a new conservation vision for the Eagle Mountain region and end the madness of ill-advised proposals. This will safeguard Joshua Tree, the economic engine of our communities, and remove a major impediment to the administration being able to responsibly develop suitable renewable energy projects in the region.

The 2,500-acre project would pump water from the fragile Chuckwalla Aquifer into two abandoned Kaiser Steel mining pits, creating two reservoirs. During periods of low energy use, water would be pumped from the lower reservoir uphill to the upper reservoir. During peak energy hours, when energy demand is high, water will be allowed to flow downhill to the lower reservoir to turn generators and create electricity. But this so-called “green energy” project actually consumes more energy than it produces, using 1,600 megawatts per day to pump water uphill while only generating 1,300 megawatts. This project fails to meet the most basic standard of sustainability in energy production.

Both National Park Service scientists and independent biologists have pointed out that creating two large sources of water in the desert would cause an increase in the populations of ravens and other predators that eat desert tortoises. Ravens, for example, would scour a large portion of Joshua Tree National Park, far from Eagle Crest’s reservoirs, looking for a quick tortoise meal. According to recent scientific modeling conducted by Joshua Tree National Park, the Eagle Crest project would negatively affect 178,000 acres or 75

percent of the critical desert tortoise habitat in the park, and 152,000 acres of critical habitat outside the park.

Joshua Tree National Park’s desert tortoise habitat is some of the finest in the entire California desert because it has not been fragmented by development and the administration has spent millions to protect this species in the California Desert. The project’s harm to tortoise habitat adds significantly to cumulative impacts in the region and stands to jeopardize the administration’s regional goal to responsibly develop renewable energy.

Additionally, project proponents and the State Water Resources Control Board have grossly overestimated the amount of recharge for the project area. A recent U.S. Geological Survey report states that there has actually been no recharge in the Chuckwalla Basin in modern history.

More than a million people from around the globe visited Joshua Tree National Park in 2011, infusing our economy with more than \$50 million in spending and supporting nearly 700 jobs. Our park is also a treasured resource for the Coachella Valley and the Morongo Basin residents.

Click here to see the rest of the original article:  
<http://www.mydesert.com/article/20131116/OPINI-ON04/311160030/>

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**AWC TORTOISE HABITAT TRIPLING IN SIZE**

Thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the desert tortoise shelter at Arizona Western College will not only get remodeled and improved, but it is expected to almost triple in size.

Science Club students from AWC and Northern Arizona University met Friday and Saturday with staff and members of the community to begin work on the shelter, which is part of a Habitat Improvement Project for the Science, Technology, and Engineering Reptiles Shelter (HISPTERS).

Located at the gravel courtyard between the AS (Agriculture and Science) building and the SR (NAU Research and Education) building at AWC, 2020 S. Avenue 8E, the project is hoped to be completed by spring, said Kevin Young, professor of science.

The existing male and female pens on campus hold a total of five tortoises and there is also another “sick pen” that currently has one tortoise in it near the CTE (Center for Teaching Effectiveness) building. Young said that they work with Arizona Game and Fish to hold tortoises, which have a lifespan of about 70 to 80 years, who are awaiting adoption.

Young explained that the walls of the enclosure will be built using the unique “super adobe” method which is not only sustainable, but more economically feasible. They will use layers of long tubes filled with a mixture of compacted sand and clay for the walls that will be plastered over to create curvy walls. He said that he got the idea when reading about the methods of architect Nader Khalili who originally presented the concept to NASA for building habitats on the moon and Mars.

“I wanted to highlight this building technique because it’s being used as a building technique for homes and larger structures, mostly in Third World countries, but it has a very low environmental impact, low cost of materials, and it’s earthquake resistant and tornado resistant and fire resistant – you end up with a very strong structure.”

When the project is completed, Young explained that they hope to have also included a shaded space, a water feature, walkways and educational displays for visitors. There are also plans to have tortoise-friendly plants and flowers in the pens while surrounding the shelter with native plants that will attract a wide variety of birds, insects and other wildlife.

“It’s meant to be a community place,” he said. “We’re trying to build something that will be lasting and aesthetically pleasing.”

While college students from environmental and biology classes will be involved in the planning and implementation of the project and taking care of it during holidays and breaks, Young said that they plan to have involvement from other areas of the campus as well. He said that they will be allowing art students to use the 150-foot long walls of the enclosure as a canvas and also asking English students to help them with writing educational displays. In all, he said he’s hoping to have at least 50 students involved in the project along with staff and community volunteers.

Young can be contacted directly for those interested in volunteering to help with the project or donate cuttings or seeds of native plants.

“Anything native to the Sonoran Desert or really Arizona in general, we’d be happy to incorporate it,” he said.

Young can be contacted at [Kevin.Young@AZWestern.edu](mailto:Kevin.Young@AZWestern.edu) or 317-6087.

Sarah Womer can be reached at [swomer@yumasun.com](mailto:swomer@yumasun.com) or 539-6858. Find her on Facebook at Facebook.com/YSSarahWomer or on Twitter at @YSSarahWomer.

Click here to read the original article: <http://www.yumasun.com/articles/science-90679-arizona-shelter.html#ixzz2mYS8AwgL>

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## NEW DESERT PROTECTION ACT COMING

Commentary by Sen. Dianne Feinstein

As America’s environmental innovator, California demonstrates that conserving natural resources and developing clean energy sources can coexist.

That is the reason California set the goal of generating 33 percent of its electricity by 2020 from renewable resources such as wind and solar energy. It is also the reason Los Angeles committed to phasing out coal-fired electrical power over the next 12 years.

That kind of forward thinking should extend into other areas, including how we use California's deserts for energy development.

There is strong support in California to protect pristine desert areas. There is also strong support for the responsible development of renewable energy projects.

I believe those two goals can exist side-by-side by focusing energy development on suitable sites such as military bases and disturbed private land while protecting unspoiled desert landscapes.

The Mojave Desert is home to majestic mountains and spectacular valleys, towering sand dunes and stunning oases, all of which provide habitat for diverse plants and wildlife.

These beautiful vistas are home to remarkable archaeology, beauty and wildlife. One can find some of the last remaining dinosaur tracks, Native American petroglyphs, abundant spring wildflowers and threatened species including the bighorn sheep and the desert tortoise, which can live to be 100 years old.

But the western edge of the Mojave — 100 miles northeast of Los Angeles — is also home to Edwards Air Force Base and other developed lands.

In 2009, I learned the Bureau of Land Management was accepting applications to build solar and wind projects on federal land throughout the Mojave Desert, including pristine lands donated for conservation purposes in the East Mojave. I acted quickly to prevent this type of development, introducing legislation to establish the Mojave Trails National Monument in the eastern Mojave.

But I also obtained federal funding to study the feasibility of generating renewable energy on military installations in California's deserts in a manner consistent with both environmental protection and the military mission.

The study, conducted by the Department of Defense and released in January 2012, concluded: "Over

7,000 megawatts of solar energy development is technically feasible and financially viable at several Department of Defense installations in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts of California."

The report found that "Edwards Air Force Base had the highest solar potential of the military installations studied." Of the 7,164 megawatts of potential solar capacity at military installations in the California deserts, the base accounts for 3,488 megawatts (49 percent) of the total. Of 125,507 economically viable acres for solar photovoltaic ground development, the base contains 92,009 acres (73 percent of the total).

Click here to see the rest of the original article:  
<http://scvnews.com/2013/11/12/new-desert-protection-act-coming-commentary-by-sen-dianne-feinstein/>

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## **STATE COULD PAY \$2 MILLION TO MOVE TORTOISES FOR ROAD PROJECTS**

CARSON CITY — It could cost up to \$2 million to protect the endangered desert tortoise during road construction projects in Southern Nevada.

The state Board of Transportation today approved contracts of up to \$1 million each to Biological and Environmental Consulting and HDR Engineering to make sure construction projects in Clark, Nye and Lincoln counties don't overrun the habitat of the threatened tortoises.

The firms have biologists who will locate the tortoises and move them.

Department of Transportation Director Rudy Malfabon said the agency could face federal fines if tortoises are killed as the result of construction.

He said the firms will be paid only for time spent finding and relocating the tortoises. The contracts are for two years.

Click here to see the original article:



<http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2013/nov/13/state-could-pay-2-million-move-tortoises-road-proj/>

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## **SIZING UP SALLY JEWELL**

The new Interior Secretary has an impressive résumé. Oil geologist, banker, president of REI. But today's Washington is a landscape without maps, and in this age of climate change and keystone, the major battles are taking place over at the EPA and State. Is greatness still possible at Interior?

THE INTERIOR SECRETARY recognized the jacket and boots I wore to her office. Four months earlier she'd been selling them.

"They let you in here wearing that?" Sally Jewell said, giving the once-over to my North Face soft shell and Zamberlan hiking boots.

Jewell, the former REI chief executive who is now in charge of one-fifth of the U.S. landmass, 700 million acres of subsurface mineral estate, 1.7 billion acres of offshore territory, 401 national parks, 561 national wildlife refuges, 476 bureau of reclamation dams, 2,055 endangered or threatened species, and the maintenance of good relations with 566 American Indian tribes, smiled and led me into her working quarters.

"Holy shit," I couldn't help but blurt out.

The office of the Secretary of the Interior has long been one of the most formidable redoubts in the federal government. In scope the corner suite rivals the state of Montana—if Big Sky Country were carpeted in royal blue.

"I know," Jewell said. "I'm still getting used to the size of it."

The same could be said of Jewell's new job, which the sinewy, silver-haired, 57-year-old executive took over in early April. In the 164-year history of the Interior Department, no incoming secretary has faced such a steep learning curve. Last December, she had nothing more pressing on her mind than the holiday sales figures at Recreational Equipment

Incorporated, the outdoor-gear cooperative she'd run for the past eight years. Then came a phone call from President Barack Obama, who offered an upgrade she couldn't refuse.

"This is the one job I would have left REI for," she told me. "I'm not sure there's another one out there."

If the offer was a surprise to Jewell, it was equally unexpected to members of the capital's chattering class, none of whom had Jewell on the list of likely successors to Ken Salazar, Obama's first-term Interior boss. With zero political experience and an eclectic three-phase career (petroleum engineer, banker, outdoor retailer), Jewell gave everyone something to love—and to worry about. The American Petroleum Institute liked her oil-field experience. The Natural Resources Defense Council saw (it hoped) a nominee with "the heart of an environmentalist and the know-how of a business woman."

For the outdoor industry, her appointment brought long-sought recognition of recreation's place on public lands. Here was a cabinet secretary whose adventure résumé rivaled her executive CV. She's climbed Antarctica's Vinson Massif, and she summited Mount Rainier the first of seven times at age 16. "This is a paradigm change, not just for our industry but for America," says Black Diamond CEO Peter Metcalf, who once shared a rope with Jewell on Liberty Bell, a classic climb in the North Cascades. "Secretary of the interior is traditionally a job given with a nod to industries like oil and gas or ranching. Today, much of the GNP on public lands comes from non-extractive industries like recreation, tourism, and ecological services." Now, Metcalf says, "politics have finally caught up with reality."

Click here to see rest of the original article:

<http://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/nature/Its-a-Wilderness-Out-There.html>

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## 2013 DTC WORKSHOP





