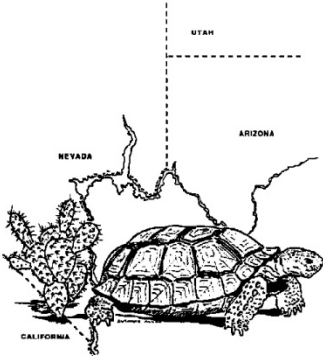


THE DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

Spring 2013-OUR 38th YEAR

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



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38TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM A SUCCESS!!!

Attendance at the 38th Annual Symposium topped 250 people, surpassing all previous years. Many participants enthusiastically emphasized that it was the best ever and when queried expressed the importance of the wide variety of topics, excellence of papers, applications to recovery, and the discussion associated with controversial subjects.

The meeting began with the Keynote by Taylor Edwards, winner of the Research Award. Taylor Edwards emphasized the importance of drawing on the vast database of scientific information about Agassiz's desert tortoise to take action, reduce threats to tortoises, and stem the population declines. The Session on subsidized predators (coyotes and ravens) followed with invited speaker Dr. Brian Cypher discussion foraging behavior of coyotes in the western, central, and eastern Mojave Desert. Pete Woodman summarized data from 2008 through 2012 on 36 adult tortoises attacked by Common Ravens in the central Mojave Desert. Most of the tortoises were killed. As part of this session, Tim Shields and Pete Bitar gave a display of the "dazzler," a visible light green laser that can repulse or deter Common Ravens, and discussed potential uses.



Annual Award for Best Student Paper winner Andy Bridges

The Friday afternoon session on Recovery Actions taken by State and Federal Agencies highlighted a few of the many projects underway to recover Agassiz's desert tortoise. Dr. Debra Hughson and Michael Vamstad, representing two national parks in California, spoke of their research and monitoring projects. Dr. Darst, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service described a decision-support system to assess threats, rank recovery actions, and prioritize recovery actions. Featured Speaker, Dr. Camila Ferrara for the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia, Brazil, described groundbreaking research on under water communications in aquatic turtles in Brazil. She reported that the turtles emit low frequency sounds during all phases of their life cycles and that the sounds are related to group movements to nesting beaches, to basking sites, and for synchronizing hatching of eggs.

The special session of six papers on Renewable Energy and the Draft Renewable Energy Conservation Plan for the California Deserts generated substantial interest and discussion. Dr. Schwarzbach, Director of the Western Ecological Research Center, opened the session by discussing results of the Independent Science Review. He was followed by three spectacular papers on species likely to be a risk by renewable energy developments: Dr. Jim Andre who spoke about the potential impacts and threats to the desert flora, including newly described and as yet undescribed rare species; Dr. Todd Katzner on Golden Eagles and wind turbines; and Dr. Wayne Spencer on several species of small mammals. Steve Ishii's paper on the status of corporations involved in the rush for federal funds available for renewable energy in the desert further stimulated the audience's interest. Steve offered a completely different look at the economics of renewable energy.

Several other sessions were equally stimulating and filled with excellent presentations: health and disease, translocation, augmentation and head-starting, the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center, demography and anthropogenic impacts, and the diverse topics covering Morafka's desert tortoise. The paper on Demography of Desert Tortoise Biologists by Dr. LaPre presented a humorous and

much-needed break from more serious topics. The Poster Session at the Friday and Saturday evening mixers were much appreciated too. Eric Goode from the Behler Chelonian Conservation Center was the highlight of the Saturday evening events with his videos about how he became interested in turtles and tortoises and what he has done to better conserve chelonian populations.

Thank you very much to all the volunteers and speakers who helped make the symposium a resounding success yet again. From running the lights/projector, to getting people checked-in at registration, it takes a ton of volunteers to keep the Symposium running smoothly. Thank you so much for your help.

A special "thank you" goes out to Mari Quillman and team for the amazing items in this year's auction and raffle. If you have something that you would like to donate, please let her know. Let's try to make next year's auction even BETTER!!!

The Desert Tortoise Council is pleased to announce the winner of our annual award for best student paper for the 2013 symposium. The awards committee; Becky Jones, Al Muth and Maggie Fusari; unanimously selected Andy Bridges and his paper:

Juvenile Sonoran Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*) Habitat Selection at a Long-term Study Site in Central Arizona, USA

Andy Bridges¹, Heather L. Bateman¹, Audrey K. Owens², and Cristina A. Jones²:

1 Arizona State University, Mesa, AZ, and

2 Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, AZ

A former Marine Corp officer Andy has just received his Masters degree in Applied Biological Science from Arizona State University. He worked as an intern for the Arizona Department of Fish and Game and recently as a wildlife technician for the National Park Service. He is about to begin work

for the US Fish and Wildlife Service surveying seabirds on the northwestern Hawaiian Islands of Midway and especially Laysan,.

We congratulate Andy on his work and wish him the very best for the future.

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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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.

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.

THE 2013 FALL TORTOISE WORKSHOP

When: Session I - Sat-Sun November 2-3 2013
Session II - Mon-Tues November 4-5 2013

Where: Springhill Suites Ridgecrest CA

What: (THIS IS A DRAFT TITLE AND COURSE DESCRIPTION)

Introduction to Desert Tortoises and Field Techniques: a two-day workshop and basic course for beginners. Includes important information on ecology, habitat preferences, life history, health, physiology, and threats; applicable state and federal laws and required permits; and field sessions on surveys and identification of tortoises and tortoise sign. This two-day session is a comprehensive introduction to Agassiz's or the Mojave desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*), designed for wildlife biologists, zoologists, natural resource specialists, wildlife managers, land managers, recreation specialists, persons dealing with the public, teachers, and the general public.

This course is especially recommended for entry-level tortoise monitors looking to prepare themselves for the job of locating tortoises and sign in the field and for understanding enough about the desert tortoise to do a good job.

How to register: We intend that open, on-line registration will begin July 8, 2013. You will register directly from the DTC website and will be expected to pay right away.

Details are posted at:
<http://www.deserttortoise.org/workshop.html>

More details will be posted prior to July 8 so keep watching the site.

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 DTC members that did not catch the presentation at the DTPC's banquet or at the DTC'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 DTC newsletter to help promote the great work being done!

NEWS

NEVADA EAGLE MINE ACQUISITION FOR LAKE MEAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA GETS SUPPORT

The Nevada Eagle Mining claims acquisition proposal has received major support during the public comment period. Located within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, acquisition will help protect and preserve the local environmentally sensitive ecosystem.

The Nevada Eagle Mine acquisition proposal has received strong support during the public comment period that extends through Wednesday, June 19, 2013. The Nevada Eagle Mining claims are located within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and could be acquired using Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) funds in Round 14.

The acquisition will help protect and preserve the local environmentally sensitive ecosystem in a myriad of ways. The many supporters of the project include Center for Biological Diversity, Nevada Conservative League, Outside Las Vegas Foundation, Protectors of Tule Springs, Scenic Nevada, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Nevada Conservation League, the Nevada Field Office of National Parks Conservation Association and the Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

“The Lake Mead National Recreation Area Land Protection Plan identified the Eagle Mining Claims as in-holdings within the park and assigned a high priority for acquisition. This is also an area designated under the Clark County Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan as an “Intensively Managed Area” because of the habitat values present, including habitat for the Desert Tortoise. The MSHCP calls for no new mining within Lake Mead NRA,” said John Hiatt, Issues Chair, Friends of Nevada Wilderness.

The area encompasses excellent Mojave Desert habitat and in addition to being the home of the threatened desert tortoise it also supports the rosy two-tone beardtongue among many other desert creatures and plants.

The Eagle Mining Claims are located in an area where a paved road provides access to Lake Mohave; consequently, the area is highly accessible to a variety of visitors. Because the claims are in private ownership there is always a threat to develop the lands for uses that may not be compatible with the management objectives of the National Park Service. Private development of these parcels is identified as “unacceptable” in the Lake Mead Land Protection Plan. Acquisition will avoid habitat fragmentation if the property was developed privately for residential development or for mining.

The proposal also includes provisions to mitigate any existing disturbances, including the sealing or gating of existing mine shafts.

“Converting the Eagle Mine to park land is critical to maintaining the serenity and recreation value of Lake Mead. Utilizing available SNPLMA funds for the government purchase of the Nevada Eagle Mining claims and converting it to park land should be a number one priority for the community,” say Pauline van Betten, Acquisition Project Manager.

Click here for the original article:

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/Nevada-Eagle-Mine-Lake-Mead-Recreation/prweb10730300.htm>

UNWANTED PET DESERT TORTOISES SPUR NEW RULE IN NEVADA

An increase in unwanted pet desert tortoises in Nevada is prompting a new state regulation.

Residents seeking to acquire Nevada’s official state reptile as a pet will be restricted to having just one beginning Wednesday.

The new regulation comes after an annual average of 1,000 unwanted pet desert tortoises has been picked up in southern Nevada in recent years due to various factors, including the economy and over-breeding at homes, Nevada Department of Wildlife officials said.

Officials most recently relied on a San Diego Zoo pick-up service to deal with them, but it’s no longer available due to budget cuts and sheer unwanted tortoise numbers. The reptiles were taken to the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center near Las Vegas, and healthy ones could be released back into the wild.

“The funding isn’t there to care for all these animals,” said Cris Tomlinson, diversity biologist for NDOW. “We’re trying to manage them to reduce the unwanted numbers coming in.”

The new rule, approved by state wildlife commissioners, only affects Nevadans who seek to acquire a desert tortoise after Wednesday.

Nevada’s desert tortoise has been a threatened species since 1989, and it’s illegal to touch, disturb or remove wild tortoises. But it has been legal to acquire the reptiles through a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-approved adoption program such as southern Nevada’s Tortoise Group.

Wildlife officials are urging Nevadans who acquired pet desert tortoises after Aug. 4, 1989, to register them online as soon as possible through Tortoise Group (www.tortoisegroup.org/adoption.php).

The group’s website features information on the care of pet tortoises, including their need for burrows.

While most of Nevada’s pet desert tortoises are located in southern Nevada, others are scattered in Reno and elsewhere across northern Nevada, Tomlinson said. The species is native to the Mojave and Sonoran deserts in the Southwest, including southern Nevada.

Wildlife officials strongly urge Nevadans not to release desert tortoises back into the wild. Not only may pet tortoises die in the wild, but they can transmit diseases that threaten wild populations. Nevadans also are urged to separate pet tortoises to avoid over-breeding.

NDOW spokesman Chris Healy, whose family adopted two desert tortoises in 1991, said they make great pets. Healy's Geeze, 25, and Louise, 27, are low maintenance as they spend most of their lives in hibernation. Desert tortoises can live as long as humans.

“When they hibernate, they're in a file box with shredded newspaper in a closet in a garage where it's pretty cool,” Healy said. “They hang out in our backyard the rest of the time. We really enjoy them.”

Click here for the rest of the original article:

<http://www.rgj.com/viewart/20130428/NEWS07/130428007/Unwanted-pet-desert-tortoises-spur-new-rule-Nevada>

AMODEI PUSHES BILL TO SPEED PUBLIC LAND TRANSFERS

U.S. Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., today announced the re-introduction of his “Small Lands Tracts Conveyance Act” (H.R. 1633) to accelerate the process for transferring small parcels of federal land to local communities.

In western states, straightforward, non-controversial public land sales to decrease the vast federal inventory and promote local control can take more than a decade to complete. While Amodei believes there should be scrutiny for any sale, he cites the bureaucratic regulatory maze and slow legislative process as the main culprits in dragging out the transfers.

“Why should it take more than 10 years for the Bureau of Land Management or the U.S. Forest Service to transfer the lands they do not need or want to local stakeholders who do?” said Amodei. “What's needed is an efficient process that promotes community-directed uses and reasonable economic development. In Nevada, where the federal government controls more than 85 percent of the land, these administrative and legislative delays are a wet blanket on our economy and our conservation efforts.”

The bill defines a “small tract” as 160 acres or less and would limit the transfer process for such lands to 18 months by establishing firm deadlines for the BLM and USFS to meet. It would exclude lands with established federal protection for cultural, biological, or endangered species issues.

Revenue collected from sales would be equally distributed to states where the federal government owns more than 33 percent of total land ownership, which is currently 13 states. The state where a transaction takes place would receive 50 percent of the proceeds, and states meeting the aforementioned condition would receive an equal distribution of the remaining 50 percent.

State governments would only be permitted to use funds to purchase additional federal lands consistent with land use management under Federal Land Policy and Management Act or to comply with mandates under the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and National Environmental Policy Act. For instance, in Nevada, this additional funding could be used for sage hen or desert tortoise mitigation.

“This bill is a win-win-win. It would save the taxpayers, BLM and the USFS the expense of managing an excessive portfolio of federal lands. It would generate revenue for local government. And most importantly, it would give states like Nevada the freedom to determine how best to use our own lands, whether it's for economic development, agriculture, recreation, or conservation,” said Amodei.

Click here to see the original article:

http://elkodaily.com/news/amodei-pushes-bill-to-speed-public-land-transfers/article_57c42f16-acfe-11e2-ad6a-001a4bcf887a.html?comment_form=true

NO FINE IF WIND FARM KILLS ENDANGERED CONDORS — FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Should industrial wind facilities have to pay a \$100,000 fine – as oil and gas companies do – if they kill an endangered species? Many environmental activists think so. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) does not.

In a reversal of its official opinion, the FWS recently announced “it will not penalize the operator of a Southern California wind operator if its turbines kill or injure one California condor,” reports environmental journalist Chris Clarke in ReWire.

With fewer than 250 birds in the wild, the condor is one of the world’s most critically endangered animals, and industrial wind is encroaching on the bird’s range in the Tehachapi Mountains. From the article:

FWS biologist Ray Bransfield told ReWire that FWS has completed its Biological Opinion (BiOp) on condors for Google and Citicorp’s Alta East project, which would be built and operated by wind developer Terra-Gen. Occupying 2,592 acres, mostly on public lands, near the intersection of state routes 14 and 58 in Kern County, Alta East would generate a maximum of 318 megawatts of electrical power with 106 wind turbines, each with 190-foot-long blades.

FWS’s BiOp for Alta East includes an “incidental take statement” that in effect allows one “lethal take” of a California condor. “Incidental take” of a protected species is a term of art covering any kind of injury, harassment or disturbance, or even habitat damage that a project causes inadvertently. “Lethal take” is when the species in question dies.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has yet to approve the project. If it does, and a single condor is killed during the 30-year operating life of the facility, the FWS would have to undertake a “formal review” of the project’s impact on condors. Recent history suggests this safeguard is unlikely to be worth much, Clarke argues:

Endangered species advocates were hoping for a “jeopardy” finding when solar developer BrightSource started finding hundreds more

federally threatened desert tortoises on the site of its Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System than were forecast in that project’s BiOp. The original BiOp and take permit allowed BrightSource to kill, harm, harass, or disturb no more than 40 tortoises. Once it was clear there were a lot more tortoises than that onsite, BLM estimated as many as 2,862 tortoises (including eggs) could be harmed by the project. Despite the 70-fold increase in potential “takes,” FWS merely required a few changes to the project’s tortoise relocation plan and issued a revised BiOp that allowed construction to proceed.

The Alta East project may “take” many more than one condor in 30 years. Condors, notes Clarke, “fly slowly, their 9-foot wingspans making them somewhat slow to maneuver. They tend to soar while watching the ground, searching for activity of other scavengers. This habit makes them vulnerable to injury from blade tips approaching from above, often at speeds exceeding 150 miles per hour.”

Click here to see the rest of the original article (and some neat photos):

<http://www.globalwarming.org/2013/05/17/no-fine-if-wind-farm-kills-endangered-condors-fish-and-wildlife-service/>

HABITAT CONSERVATION AREA LANDOWNER SEEKS SAND MOUNTAIN LAND SWAP; OHV COMMUNITY CONCERNED

The Mojave desert tortoise has long been a source of contention in Washington County, at least insofar as it has taken preeminence over landowner’s rights. One landowner in particular has been waiting 17 years for a viable exchange of his property that was appropriated to the interest of the tortoise – and now, he faces possible opposition from yet another species territorial to the property he is considering for acquisition: the off-road vehicle community.

Native to the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico, tortoise populations have significantly declined since the 1980s due to natural predators and human threats; they are currently

listed as a vulnerable species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List.

Conservation efforts in Arizona, Nevada and Utah gained significant traction in the early 1990s. In response, Washington County and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began working together to protect the local tortoise population. The Washington County Habitat Conservation Plan, designating 62,000 acres of land expressly reserved for that purpose, was created in 1996.

Once the HCP was put in place, all land identified as tortoise habitat was fenced and closed to any use, public or private. The majority of that land was owned by the Bureau of Land Management but some belonged to private entities, whose plans to develop were brought to an abrupt and irreversible halt. In the years since the creation of the HCP, those entities have exchanged their land for other property without environmental risk factors, either in Washington County or other parts of Utah, all except one.

Land developer Bob Brennan owns 821 acres just west of Green Spring Golf Course in Washington City. Once prime residential property (its value is currently estimated around \$55 million), it also has more sensitive tortoise habitat than any other area in the HCP. Brennan's land has been effectively trapped for the last 17 years; he cannot sell, trade or develop, but has still been obligated to pay property taxes.

Since September 2010, Brennan has been arranging a deal in cooperation with the Washington County Commission and the BLM to acquire a parcel of BLM-owned land. The deal would exchange Brennan's land within the HCP for property equal in value – not size – that he could develop, most likely into a residential project.

“This is a very tough situation and we're all working together to get it resolved,” Brennan said. “I just want to move forward. This has gone on way too long.”

“(This deal) is something that needs to happen,” Washington County Commissioner Alan Gardner

said. “The rest of the community has benefited from the HCP, but landowners within the HCP have paid the price. It's not fair, and they need to be compensated.”

Brennan has identified six parcels in Washington County that he is interested in owning. Because the trade will be made based on the value of the land, he could acquire any number of them. It depends on the results of appraisals of each parcel, which are currently in progress.

One possibility is an approximately 1,100-acre parcel of land located on the west end of the Sand Mountain Open OHV Area in Hurricane, a popular recreation spot for off-road enthusiasts. The parcel constitutes about five percent of the OHV area but does not encroach on any of the popular trails or accesses, Brennan said.

Click here to read the original article:
<http://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2013/04/30/morgan-habitat-conservation-area-landowner-seeks-sand-mountain-land-swap-ohv-community-concerned/>

SAVING PRIVATE YERTLE

In their desert warfare training, U.S. Marines sometimes encounter shells of a different nature — the desert tortoise. It's one of the species protected under the Department of Defense's conservation program.

Click here to see the video:
<http://live.wsj.com/video/savingprivateyertle/C6882305-D39D-4C0C-9B58-068849EBC95C.html>

MEETINGS

BLM Desert Advisory Council to Meet in Ridgecrest

The next meeting of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) California Desert Advisory Council (DAC) will be held Saturday, June 8 from 8

a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Ridgecrest, Calif. at a location to be announced later.

There also will be a DAC Business Meeting on Friday, June 7, from noon to 4:30 p.m. at the Jawbone Station Visitors Center, California Highway 14 and Jawbone Canyon Rd., Cantil, Calif. Details will be posted on the web page, <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/rac/dac.html>, when finalized. There will be no field trip.

Agenda topics for the Saturday meeting will include a focus on the West Mojave Plan, as well as updates by council members, the BLM California Desert District manager, five field office managers, and council subgroups. Final agenda items will be posted on the DAC web page listed above.

All DAC meetings, including Friday's business meeting, are open to the public. The public will be invited to comment at the beginning of the meeting Saturday morning, during the presentations at the discretion of the DAC chair, and at the end of the meeting. While the meeting is tentatively scheduled to conclude at 4:30 p.m., it could wrap up earlier should the council conclude its presentations and discussions.

Written comments may be filed in advance of the meeting and should be addressed to the Desert Advisory Council, c/o Bureau of Land Management, External Affairs, 22835 Calle San Juan de Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, CA 92553. Written comments also are accepted at the time of the meeting and, if copies are provided to the recorder, will be incorporated into the minutes.

For more information regarding the DAC meeting, contact David Briery, BLM California Desert District External Affairs at (951) 697-5220 or dbriery@blm.gov.

Original BLM notice can be found at: <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/newsroom/2013/may/dacmtg-ridgecrest.html>

2013 Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists'

July 10-15, 2013

We extend our warmest invitation to the 2013 Joint Meeting of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (JMIH) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The meeting will take place at the Albuquerque Convention Center in downtown Albuquerque, July 10 – 15. The 2013 JMIH includes the 29th annual meeting of the American Elasmobranch Society, the 56th annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, the 71st annual meeting of the Herpetologists' League, and the 93rd annual meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. It also coincides with the 100th anniversary of Copeia.

Meeting Location:
Albuquerque Convention Center
401 2nd Street NW
Albuquerque, NM 87102

Registration information can be found at: <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/jointmeeting/registration>

More information: <http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/jointmeeting/>

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)

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

Check one: _____ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL _____ CHANGE OF ADDRESS
DATE: _____ EMAIL ADDRESS: _____
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_____ 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)

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