



DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

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Via email only

2 April 2018

Sixto J. Fernandez, Grants Manager
Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program
California State Parks, Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division
1725 23rd Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95816
ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov

RE: Letter of Support for the Preliminary Grant Application by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for Western Expansion Area Restoration

Dear Mr. Fernandez:

The Desert Tortoise Council (Council) is a non-profit organization comprised of hundreds of professionals and laypersons who share a common concern for wild desert tortoises and a commitment to advancing the public's understanding of these species. Established in 1975 to promote conservation of tortoise species in the deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico, the Council routinely provides information to individuals, organizations, and regulatory agencies on matters potentially affecting desert tortoises within their geographic ranges.

This is a Letter of Support to fund the Preliminary Grant Application submitted by the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. (DTPC) for Western Expansion Area Restoration under the Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program – 2017-2018. Funding this request would enable the DTPC to complete fencing of the Western Expansion Area and restore approximately 300 acres of habitat for the desert tortoise in this DTPC-owned area. It would implement measures to prevent future unauthorized OHV activities that result in long-term damage to desert environments and public resources including the Agassiz's desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and its habitat.

Below are our reasons why we strongly request that you fund this grant application.

1. The grant application fulfills the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Commission's (Commission) requirements for grant proposals. Specifically, the DTPC's grant application fulfills the

requirements for projects with ground-disturbing activities by providing a Habitat Management Plan that includes:

- identifying special status species that could be at risk from OHV recreation and monitor for potential impacts;
- listing management objectives and actions to address the risk;
- providing success criteria to gauge the effectiveness of each management action; and
- implementing adaptive management (i.e., triggers for management change) to achieve management objectives.

2. The Preliminary Grant Application for Western Area Expansion Restoration describes a project methodology that enables the DTPC to quantify whether the management goals and objectives will be met. It includes the submittal of detailed reports documenting the actions taken (e.g., quantity of fencing, signs, and vertical and horizontal mulching installed, the amount of trash collected) and modifications made to achieve the stated goals and objectives along with their effectiveness from monitoring throughout the project period. This approach will provide the Commission with documentation of the success of achieving the stated goals. Thus, the Commission will have information on whether the methods implemented by the DTPC are successful, which will help the Commission determine the value of funding similar grant proposals in the future.

3. The DTPC has a history of accomplishing project goals and objectives with funds from grant sources. In the past, the DTPC has demonstrated that when awarded funds from the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation's Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program, the DTPC spent these funds effectively and contributed to improving desert tortoise habitat, which benefits other species.

4. By our tally, this is one of only five applications for habitat restoration in the southern California deserts. Most of the 29+ applications by entities in the southern California deserts are for operations or law enforcement. The other four restoration applications include one for \$782,000 for Pierson's milk-vetch (BLM), one for \$606,400 for 8 to 12 acres near Ridgecrest and parts north in wilderness (BLM), one for \$492,000 for 116 acres near Ridgecrest near a wilderness area (FIELD), and one for \$901,000 for more than 10 acres in the Jawbone El Paso area (Friends of Jawbone).

5. The DTPC has a history of accomplishing project goals and objectives efficiently. The amount of funding requested is small when compared to the projected results (Please see #4 above). In addition, this project will prevent future damage to desert habitats and the desert tortoise (plus at least three other special status wildlife species) and assist in the restoration of native flora. With the DTPC requesting less than \$17,200 for restoring 300 acres, this is less than \$58 an acre.

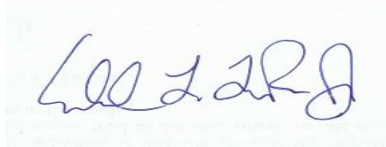
6. The Western Expansion Area is part of an Area of Critical Environmental Concern and the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit for Agassiz's desert tortoise. Thus, restoration activities will link to other areas designated for the long-term conservation of the federally and state-threatened tortoise and other species including Mohave ground squirrel, burrowing owl, and American badger.

7. Implementation of the restoration activities in the DTPC's Preliminary Grant Application is important to the long-term management and conservation of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area.

8. The Preliminary Grant Application for Western Expansion Area Restoration has scored high for the evaluation criteria. From our calculations, it scored 73 points. (We recalculated the Natural and Cultural Resources section).

For these reasons, we believe that the Preliminary Grant Application by Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for Western Expansion Area Restoration should be fully funded.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. LaRue, Jr.", is centered on a light blue rectangular background.

Edward L. LaRue, Jr., M.S.
Desert Tortoise Council, Ecosystems Advisory Committee, Chairperson

cc: Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. dtpc@pacbell.net