

Final Final Final

**Desert Tortoise Council  
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting**

**6 June 2015  
400 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Las Vegas, NV**

The meeting was called to order by Ken MacDonald at 10:20 a.m. **Action items are in blue, with responsible parties in red. Motions made, seconded, and approved (or not) are shown in bold red font.**

**Attendees:** Kristin Berry, Glenn Stewart, Ken MacDonald, Cristina Jones, Maggie Fusari, Mari Quillman, Bruce Palmer, Becky Jones, Joe Probst, Michael Tuma, Chris Noddings, and Ed LaRue. **Absent:** Pete Woodman, Jason Jones, and Scott Abella. **Guests:** Mike Senn, Roy Averill-Murray, and Darleen Stoner.

**A. Introductions:** Roy Averill-Murray and Mike Senn from the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office attended today as guests. Darleen Stoner attended as a guest of Glenn Stewart.

**B. Review Agenda:** New issues were incorporated as needed.

**C. Meeting Minutes of 25 April 2015:** Ed LaRue prepared draft minutes at the last Board meeting in Ontario, California, which were distributed, reviewed, and were approved today as final with minor changes. **Motion made (Kristin Berry), seconded (Becky Jones), and approved to accept the draft minutes as amended to be final.**

**D. Review of Board Actions Since Last Board Meeting:**

**1. Response to Tim Shields Research Proposal:** See Section F.4.d for detailed discussion about Tim Shields' grant request.

**E. Officer Reports:**

**1. Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer's Report was distributed by Joe Probst. Total financial assets are \$299,131.36, with \$39,133.43, in the Union Banking account, \$187,525.18 in the market account, and \$72,472.75 in the Edward Jones investment account. Ray Butler provided the audit report during today's meeting. The 2014 taxes were filed with no payment due. **Motion made (Bruce Palmer), seconded (Cristina Jones), and approved to accept the Treasurer's Report as final.**

**2. Corresponding Secretary's Report:** The Corresponding Secretary's Report was presented verbally by Becky Jones. Becky provided Ed LaRue with a notice concerning an EIS for a solar plant in Lucerne Valley.

**3. Membership Coordinator's Report:** The Membership Coordinator's Report was distributed by Mari Quillman via email on 6/3/2015. Her report shows that there are currently 590 total members. There was only one new member in the past month. **Mari Quillman and Maggie Fusari will continue to work with Mary Cohen on registration issues.** • **Mari Quillman will be working on the Membership Policy Statement and coordinate with Bruce Palmer.** Wild Apricot membership will soon be due; if we sign up by July 2015, we can secure this service for a two year period at the price of \$1,080/year by paying in advance. **Motion made (Maggie Fusari), seconded (Mari Quillman), and approved to continue the Wild Apricot services at the rate of \$1,080/year for the next two years.** Mari sent emails to all members who requested more involvement at the recent Symposium. Ed LaRue also sent draft comments on the West Mojave Route Designation Draft EIS to six members who indicated they wanted to help with comments; Brian Sullivan was the only person responding.

## **F. Committee Reports:**

**1. Ecosystems Advisory Committee (EAC) Report:** The EAC report was distributed via email by Ed LaRue on 6/3/2015, with the following highlights discussed today.

**a. West Mojave Route Designation Draft Supplemental EIS:** Ed LaRue summarized that the BLM proposes to (a) double open routes from 5,098 linear miles to 10,498 miles; (b) open Cuddeback Lake to unrestricted vehicle use; and (c) discontinue the recreation vehicle permitting process in the Rand Mountains. They would also allow new competitive corridors without specifically identifying where they would occur. There is no increase in conservation to offset doubling the number of open routes. Michael Tuma's modeling work (soon to be published) is that wide-ranging impacts resulting in habitat degradation are the main threat. **Ed LaRue will distribute Jeff Aardahl's letter on the West Mojave Route Designation to the Board.** Mike Senn: USFWS is not a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) agency. It's important to get involved at the scoping level, as agencies are less likely to change anything at the Draft EIS or Final EIS stage. It is also important to provide an annotated bibliography during scoping to be sure that lead agencies consider the available literature in their draft documents. USFWS is currently not reviewing NEPA-level documents due to reduced staffs.

**b. Soda Mountains Solar Final EIS:** The Final EIS for this project was issued yesterday, adopting the southern array area where all the tortoise sign was found and abandoning the north array area where only several carcasses were found. Ed LaRue recently spoke with a southern California news reporter outlining our concerns.

**2. Awards Committee Report:** The Awards Committee Report was presented verbally by Glenn Stewart and related to an email distributed on 6/1/2015. We are still early in the process and want to have award nominations in by December. Ganda (Garcia and Associates) recently offered to provide a \$500 award and a poster at the 2016 Symposium in honor of Rob Gilman who recently passed away. This award could go towards the outstanding tortoise management or conservation paper presented at the Symposium, perhaps in association with the Morafka Award or Best Student Paper Award. **Motion made (Joe Probst), seconded (Ken MacDonald), and approved to accept and facilitate a \$500 award at the 2016 Symposium in honor of Rob Gilman.**

### 3. Workshop Committee Report:

**a. 2015 techniques workshops:** Maggie Fusari will perform a “dry run” on Wild Apricot to pay for a sample registration to see if there are any problems. Costs will be \$285 for regular attenders and \$185 for a verified student [**motion made (Glenn Stewart), seconded (Joe Probst), and approved to conduct the 2015 techniques workshop at these rates**]. Maggie will change the test format from an Adobe form to a Google form. She would like comments and input from all instructors and will be sending a “blind link” to Board members that will allow us to access the reading materials. Please send any inquiries to the official workshop email address.

**b. Arizona techniques workshop:** Cristina Jones reported there are no firm plans for this workshop at this time.

**c. Fall Advanced Health Assessment Training (AZHAT):** Cristina Jones reported this workshop will be presented 24-27 August 2015 by invitation only. Roy Averill-Murray reported this would be the last event by invitation only; future workshops would be open to all who would like to attend.

**4. Grants Committee Report:** The Grants Committee Report was presented verbally by Glenn Stewart and facilitated by an email distributed on 6/1/2015.

**a. Mineral deposit exploitation by Sonoran desert tortoises:** Alan Bartoli had requested a bit more than \$9,975 to investigate mineral deposit exploitation by Sonoran desert tortoises. On 5/7/2015 Glenn Stewart identified additional information that would be needed and offered Bartoli \$4,762 to pay for materials and mileage, but there has been no response. **Cristina Jones will meet with Bartoli next week, at which time she will report to Glenn on this proposal.**

**b. Southwestern pond turtle research:** Jeff Lovich is still working on the southwestern pond turtle paper, will be presenting at the Turtle Survival Alliance symposium in August, and will submit a paper to a scientific journal. They captured 92 turtles 218 times. The initial population was estimated at 170, and found to be about 140 at the end of the study. There is still an opportunity to submit scientific information to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service after the 6/9/2015 deadline for input on the listing petition.

**c. Funding for USGS annotated bibliography:** (Though technically not a grant), Bruce Palmer reported on the U.S. Geological Survey policy to receive funding in support of projects such as this one. The product would be an open file report from the USGS that would be available to the public, and maybe provided upon request on a compact disc. This could be done by about September 2015 depending on available support staff. **Motion made (Bruce Palmer), seconded (Joe Probst), and approved (Kristin Berry recused herself) to provide a contribution of up to \$10,000 to USGS to complete an ongoing annotated bibliography listing peer-reviewed scientific journal articles for Agassiz’s desert tortoise up through 2015.**

**d. Tim Shields’ proposal on techno tortoise model:** There was some discussion supporting our decision to reject this proposal to test the attraction of ravens to these robotic tortoises. Glenn Stewart spoke with Tim Shields on 5/21/2015 (and provided minutes) about our reservations and encouraged him to continue with raven research.

There was then discussion about the best approach to consider (and modify) grant proposals. Kristin Berry pointed out that all Morafka Awards have acknowledged solid, worthy research, which indicates the Grants Committee has functioned well. There are already guidelines and priorities published on the website that should be submitted for prospective grantees and for those where the grant proposal is deficient. **Glenn Stewart and Michael Tuma will revisit the existing grant guidelines and refine them as needed based on today's discussion.**

**5. Information, Outreach, and Social Media Committee Report:** This committee report was presented verbally by Chris Noddings. He would like to work more closely with Becky Jones as the Corresponding Secretary. He is working on email optimization, which would direct available emails to specific places. Chris is also coordinating with Mary Cohen and Michael Tuma to refine the website (more visually appealing, informative, and accessible). Suggested that Mary Cohen make the changes and provide them on a proprietary link that can be visited by concerned Board members for input. Chris would like to get feedback on how to best develop the educational aspect of the social media program and how best to involve the general public.

**6. Newsletter Editor's Report:** The Newsletter Editor's Report was presented verbally by Michael Tuma. Michael needs biographical information from Bruce Palmer and Ken MacDonald for the next newsletter Board member profile section. He needs a Symposium synopsis, workshop announcement and summary of recent health workshop, highlights of Symposium field trip, etc. so that he can get the newsletter out within the next few weeks. Michael would also like help to produce an article on Taylor Edwards' recent genetics work.

**7. Web Master's Report:** Mari Quillman reported there is a "shopping cart" service to help sell products left over from the 2015 Symposium, which will allow 10 products to be posted for free. We would be reimbursed for shipping and mailing costs.

**8. Nominations Committee Report:** The Nominations Committee Report was presented verbally by Michael Tuma. Michael has reached out to two lawyers as potential Board members; lawyers with endangered species act experience would be preferable; may be better to have someone like this serve on a committee before joining the Board; also invite them to attend Board meetings. Three Board members will be up for nomination at the 2016 Symposium (Bruce Palmer, Joe Probst, and Becky Jones); otherwise we are at quorum.

## **9. 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Symposium Discussions:**

**a. Local Host Committee chairperson appointment:** Tracy Bailey has volunteered to serve as the chairperson for the 2016 Symposium.

**b. Program Committee – special topics and themes:** May have a Saturday morning session on desert bighorn sheep, including impacts by domestic sheep on wild bighorn (**Cristina Jones will help Kristin Berry with contact information**). It would be good to have a session on the effectiveness of mitigation measures to protect tortoises. The 2015 Saturday night speaker was a success due to shorter presentation with lots of photographs; maybe Kim Stringfellow could present some of her research photographs. Important that someone (Cristina Jones was suggested) serve as an apprentice to help and learn from Kristin Berry how to garner speakers and set up (far into the) future programs.

## **10. Desert Tortoise Council and Desert Tortoise Recovery Office Interface:**

**a. USFWS structure:** Mike Senn reported USFWS restructured how they deal with tortoise issues several years ago, consolidating five field offices into two dealing with tortoises, including one at the Palm Springs office in California and the Las Vegas office in Nevada. The Ecological Services is a branch within the larger USFWS structure that is responsible for issuing biological opinions and private incidental take permits. The DTRO is the USFWS' main base for maintaining and dispersing tortoise science (e.g., translocation and disease methods) rather than a regulatory function, which is handled at the field office level. Implementing proactive recovery measures is one of the main responsibilities of the DTRO. Kristin Berry expressed our concern about the weak (or lack of) protection associated with USFWS biological opinions.

**b. Management Oversight Group (MOG) and Recovery Implementation Teams (RITs):** The MOG was originally designed as a high-level managers group that eventually evolved into a lower-level biologists group. Mike Senn indicated they are trying to change this to go back to the original intent to involve higher-level managers. Whereas the RITs identified management priorities, it is ultimately at the discretion of the upper level managers of the MOG to determine what, if any, funding may be applied. A new function of the MOG will be to determine funding sources and commit funding for active habitat management and restoration projects, but mostly in Nevada. Recovery has not occurred under the regulatory approach (four of five recovery units are in decline), so USFWS is now looking at a partnership approach, which could include NGOs like us. Roy Averill-Murray indicated that they are also looking at how to incorporate the RITs input into tortoise recovery.

**c. How do we facilitate future cooperation between the Council and DTRO?** Roy Averill-Murray indicated that more frequent communication is beneficial, and today has helped. So, they could have someone attend Board meetings more often than every three or four years. Mike Senn indicated it would also be good for the Council to invite appropriate BLM managers to attend future Board meetings.

## **G. Discussions of Old and New Business:**

### **1. Policy Statements-Best Management Practices (schedule and assignments):**

**a. Habitat Restoration BMPs:** Kristin Berry reported an article was recently submitted by her and Scott Abella to a journal for publication. The habitat restoration BMPs are now on the website (see announcements column; [Michael Tuma will announce this in newsletter](#)).

**b. Habitat Connectivity BMPs:** [Chris Noddings reported he will contact several researchers about their potential input.](#)

### **c. Captive Tortoise Management:**

**i. Sterilization of Pet Tortoises:** There is another USFWS clinic in Las Vegas on July 15 and 16, and again in August, with 15 local veterinarians scheduled to attend in July. Mike Senn indicated their emphasis is to keep captive tortoises separated from wild tortoises, offering free registration and microchips for pet tortoises, and sterilization. They have resources from Clark County to sterilize 50 captive tortoises, both males and females. Last year USFWS trained a dozen vets and another half dozen this year (at a cost of about \$25,000).

**d. Translocation BMPs:** Kristin Berry reported there has been no progress as other priorities are pursued.

**e. Disease BMPs:** Kristin Berry reported there has been no progress as other priorities are pursued.

**f. Maintenance of Genetic Diversity BMPs:** Michael Tuma reported he will have more ideas by the end of this year, as will be in a chapter of his dissertation.

**g. Terms and Conditions BMPs:** Peter Woodman was previously identified to develop these BMPs. Roy Averill-Murray suggested it is also important to identify measures that do not work.

**h. Miscellaneous BMPs:** Exclusionary fencing BMPs, Subsidized predator management BMPs, and Development planning and project siting BMPs are all BMPs that do not have a specific person assigned, so not specifically discussed.

## **2. Council Position Letters:**

**a. Large Scale Translocation Site (LSTS):** Ken MacDonald has drafted this letter, which was reviewed by Michael Tuma, and will send it to Ed LaRue for distribution. Roy Averill-Murray indicated he could outline what they have done and what the current status is of the approximately 10,000 tortoises that have been moved into the LSTS.

**b. Morafka tortoise letter:** Maggie Fusari has agreed to write a letter on tortoises in the Black Mountain area, where there is a contact zone between Agassiz's and Morafka's desert tortoises, and how (if) that area may be added to the listed range of the Mojave population. A specific petition may need to be submitted to USFWS asking that this small population segment be added to the listed range, which could be done during a five-year status review. The letter would need to go to Steve Spangle, Regional Director in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

**c. Recovery Implementation Teams (RITs) Update:** This issue was discussed during today's meeting, so there is no longer a need to draft this letter.

## **3. Policy/Operations Manual:**

**a. Political endorsement issues/sign-on letters:** This issue refers to the Ecosystems Advisory Committee policy revisions. **Maggie Fusari will use Bruce Palmer's final version of the EAC policy letter to make a few additional recommendations.**

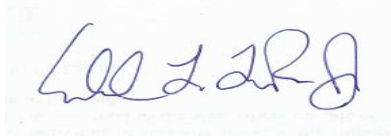
## **4. Miscellaneous Items and Updates:**

**a. Where do we go from here and how?** It is a good step to involve USFWS managers today and to invite BLM managers to a future (if not the next) meeting. During the DTC/DTRO discussion, Bruce Palmer introduced the notion to define a specific project area ("demonstration area") to manage it exclusively for tortoise recovery as a study to see how animals respond.

**H. Next Meeting:** The next business meeting of the Board will be at the DoubleTree Hotel in Ontario, California between 10:00 a.m. and approximately 4:00 p.m., 12 September 2015, with a strategy session on 11 September 2015 with USFWS and BLM invited guests.

**I. Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Ken MacDonald, at 15:45.

Draft minutes were recorded, later distributed and modified with Board member review and input, then respectfully submitted as this final version by Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary.

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

Edward L. LaRue, Jr.  
Desert Tortoise Council, Recording Secretary

## Ecosystems Advisory Committee Report DTC Board Meeting of 6 June 2015

Note: The table attached to this report on the last page follows the **bold red** numbered outline given below.

### **1. West Mojave Route Designation Supplemental EIS**

**3/2015** – After meeting with Edy Seehafer of the BLM Barstow office in February 2015, she has the disc with this draft SEIS sent to Ed LaRue. Comments are due on 6/4/2015. Between **4/26/2015** and **5/15/2015**, Ed spends 49 hours reviewing the document and producing a comment table. On **5/1/2015**, Ed distributes the first round of comments on Chapter 1 to the Board, six general members who signed up to comment at the Symposium, and others. Additional comments are sent to these and others on **5/11/2015** and **5/13/2015**, when Maggie Fusari agrees to review the comments as to form. The proposed final letter is distributed to the Board and Jeff Aardahl on the evening of **5/31/2015**, with minor revisions and redistribution on **6/2/2015**. The final draft was sent to the BLM on the evening of **6/3/2015**.

### **2. Aiya Solar Project in Southern Nevada**

**5/15/2015** – Ed LaRue receives a link to a website including the Draft EIS for this 900-acre site on the Moapa Indian Reservation located northeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. On **5/18/2015**, Ed distributes the notice and website link to the Board, announcing public meetings in Nevada on 6/17 and 6/18.

### **3. Defenders of Wildlife Letter to BLM Regarding Enhanced Mohave Ground Squirrel (MGS) Protection**

**5/18/2015** – Ed LaRue receives a letter from Jeff Aardahl asking the BLM to designate four specific areas to the west and northwest as ACEC for MGS, as a formal recommendation to the DRECP. Later that day he drafts a letter formally endorsing Defenders' proposal, which he distributes to the Board for their review, modification, and endorsement. After endorsement of only three additional Board members, Ed LaRue sends the letter to BLM on **5/31/2015**.



**Ecosystems Advisory Committee  
Summary Table from 4/26/2015 to 6/6/2015**

Current date for this latest table revision is: **6/3/2015**

No.	Reference	Dates (2015)				Board Member Responses														
		Rec'd	Dist.	Due	Sent	BJ	BP	CJ	CN	EL	GS	JJ	JP	KB	KM	MF	MQ	MT	PW	SA
<b>1</b>	WEMO Route Designation	3/2015	5/1, 5/11, 5/13, 5/15, 5/31, 6/2	6/4	6/3	R 6/2	Y 6/2	R 6/2	Y/PI 6/2	A/Y 5/31 6/2	Y 6/2	R 6/3	Y 6/2	R 6/1		Y/PI 6/1	Y 6/2	Y 6/2	Y 6/2	
<b>2</b>	Aiya Solar Project	5/15	5/18	6/28?																
<b>3</b>	MGS Enhanced Protection	5/18	5/18	N/A	5/31				Y 5/28	A/Y 5/31	Y 5/18		Y 5/19							

**BJ** = Becky Jones, **BP** = Bruce Palmer, **CJ** = Cristina Jones, **CN** = Chris Noddings, **EL** = Ed LaRue, **GS** = Glenn Stewart, **JJ** = Jason Jones, **JP** = Joe Probst, **KB** = Kristin Berry, **KM** = Ken MacDonald, **MF** = Maggie Fusari, **MQ** = Mari Quillman, **MT** = Michael Tuma, **PW** = Pete Woodman, **SA** = Scott Abella