

Final Final Final

**Desert Tortoise Council
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting – Day 1**

**11 September 2015
DoubleTree Hilton, Ontario, California**

The meeting was called to order by Ken MacDonald at 10:05 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: Joe Probst, Bruce Palmer, Becky Jones, Pete Woodman, Ken MacDonald, Cristina Jones, Jason Jones, Maggie Fusari, Kristin Berry, Mari Quillman, Michael Tuma, Chris Noddings, and Ed LaRue. **Absent:** Scott Abella and Glenn Stewart. **Guests:** Brian Croft (USFWS, California), Mark Massar (BLM, California), Roy Averill-Murray (USFWS, Nevada), Ray Bransfield (USFWS, California), and Greg Miller (BLM, California).

A. Introductions: Ray Bransfield, Brian Croft, and Roy Averill-Murray with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Mark Massar and Greg Miller with Bureau of Land Management were introduced.

B. Review Agenda: No new issues were identified.

C. Meeting Minutes of 6 June 2015: Ed LaRue prepared draft minutes at the last Board meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, which were distributed, reviewed, and approved today as final with no changes. Motion made (Pete Woodman), seconded (Becky Jones), and unanimously approved to accept the draft minutes as amended to be final.

D. Review of Board Actions since Last Board Meeting: No Board actions were identified.

E. Officer/Committee Reports:

1. Ecosystems Advisory Committee (EAC) Report: The EAC report was distributed via email by Ed LaRue on 9/10/2015, with the following highlights discussed today. Ed described the Council's approach to commenting on projects for the benefit of the agency people in the room. The Red Cliff/Beaver Dam National Conservation Areas are subject to a draft Resource Management Plan that is currently out for public review (having previously worked on associated environmental documents, Bruce Palmer recused himself from any vote). Jason Jones recommended that Ed LaRue contact Anne McLuckie for her input, and promised to send a recently completed modeling document to Ed. The Council has been asked to endorse many letters, which we've mostly done, except for Palen Solar, which we understood would not affect tortoises at the primary solar site. Ed LaRue will be working on scoping comments for a programmatic small mining Environmental Assessment in Ridgecrest, California, which is due by month's end.

2. Workshop Committee Report:

a. 2015 techniques workshops: Maggie Fusari provided a handout outlining planning issues. There are plans for two workshops in early November (2-3 and 4-5) 2015. We have in recent years trained 1,200 students at this workshop. Most students are novices with limited tortoise fieldwork. Caroline Woods will be replacing Larry LaPre as our BLM representative. For now, enrollment is relatively low and may call for combining the two, cancelling the second workshop, and having only one workshop. Maggie Fusari indicated that a workshop with only 25 students would break even, where expenses would equal income. **Maggie Fusari will send an email blast announcing the two workshops to all previous attenders, indicating that an advanced workshop is being developed for spring 2016, and that the techniques workshop maybe a prerequisite** (some disagreed with this last caveat).

b. Morafka tortoise techniques workshop: Not discussed today.

c. Advanced Health Assessment Training (AZHAT): This workshop was conducted several weeks ago in Arizona. Cristina Jones reported that Pete Woodman, Rachel Woodard, and several veterinarians served as instructors. Cristina was able to secure 81 pet tortoises to be used. There were 14 students in attendance. Each student handled six tortoises, drawing blood from them. There are seven specific skills being taught in the health assessments, including sterile techniques, how to collect blood, ascertain health status, etc. Future health assessment workshop(s) will be affected by the availability of pet tortoises, so unsure how many workshops will be conducted, both in Nevada and Arizona. USFWS letters acknowledging attendance and completion of the course were mailed out last week. Some letters say the student needs more practice. Additional experience is documented by a key contact person, submitted to USFWS, who will then amend the original letter as necessary and submit it to the student. Roy Averill-Murray commended the Council on handling logistics for both of the recent health assessment workshops. The tuition from the previous courses had been increased to accommodate an additional half day of training. The workshop generated revenue of \$7,200. It is likely the USFWS will require a refresher course that would be shorter and offered at a reduced rate, although a syllabus would need to be developed.

d. Advanced techniques workshop: This workshop is needed, and some would like to see it as soon as next spring. There would be needs to teach tortoise handling, transmitter attachment, salvage of specimens, advanced survey techniques, determining time since death for carcasses, etc. There will likely be the need to pay expert instructors for their time. It may be best to teach all the different skills during the same workshop, perhaps with concurrent classes, and possibly have a specific telemetry class on the last day, which would allow some students to attend only that day. **Pete Woodman, Ed LaRue, and others will work on developing a syllabus that will be available by the evening of 1 November 2015 so that potential instructors in attendance can get together and discuss this workshop before the Ridgecrest workshop.**

F. Strategy Session with USFWS and BLM Personnel: Ken MacDonald first went through the Old/New Business items listed herein as examples of the Council's concerns and focus. He then segregated the larger group into four smaller groups to address the following topic, "To recover the tortoise we must..."

In the following results, Ken asked the question as to which of the categories affects the others. For example, one would manage habitat before managing natural factors, augmenting populations, and monitoring populations, so habitat protection, enhancement, and creation is the foundation for other three categories. For Group 1, conservation/restoration of habitat, population monitoring, and education each affect three categories and therefore are all number one priorities.

Results: (parenthetical numbers relate to priorities, with 1 as highest priority, 2 as intermediate priority, and 3 as lowest priority). The arrows drawn among each of the topics within each of the four groups are captured in the four photographs at the end of these minutes.

Group 1 had five categories: (1) Habitat (protection, enhancement, restoration), (1) Population Monitoring, (1) Education (general public and agencies), (2) Management of Natural Factors (predators, disease, climate change), (3) Population Augmentation (repatriation and translocation).

Group 2 identified (1) Redirect Focus Towards Recovery, (2) Collaboration, (3) Monitoring/data sharing, (3) Funding, (3) Education (public and political).

Group 3 identified (1) Issue Stronger Protection (biological opinions), (2) Funding, (3) Habitat (conservation), (4) Political Influence, (4) Disease, (5) Predators, (6) Public Education.

Group 4 identified (1) Improve Funding of Management Actions, (2) Protect Habitat, (3) Protect Populations, (4) Restoration/Revegetation, (5) Improve Coordination among Agencies and Stakeholders, (6) Education, (7) Implement Headstarting/Population Augmentation.

Discussion: Ray Bransfield described how mitigation measures are determined between the project proponent, USFWS, and federal lead agencies. Mitigation generally consists of two aspects: protective measures – to reduce the amount of mortality during the implementation of projects – and compensation – to offset adverse effects that cannot be avoided, such as loss of habitat. Protective measures are generally consistent from project to project. He indicated that compensation is applied in a piecemeal fashion, and the tortoise is still in decline, particularly in the western Mojave Desert. It is difficult to issue a jeopardy opinion for a given project or action given the extensive range of the tortoise, the relatively large number of animals remaining, and the definition of jeopardy itself. Most of the military installations have programmatic biological opinions that allow them to independently manage tortoises on their installations. USFWS is encouraging BLM and Caltrans to do this as well.

Ray indicated, and Brian Croft agreed, that approved projects are having a minor impact compared to region-wide die-offs where no direct impacts are being authorized. It is important to address the region-wide impacts in management plans and ensure they are sufficiently funded to be prudently implemented. Judy Hohman of the Ventura office of USFWS has been working on trying to remove common raven from the list of protected birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act as one type of overarching measure to try to further recovery of the desert tortoise.

Ed LaRue expressed his concern about recent emphasis on recreation at the expense of conservation, particularly in the West Mojave Plan route designation process and DRECP, where Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA) and Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMA) would be established. Ray Bransfield indicated that SRMAs and ERMAs may act as a deterrent to solar development in these newly designated areas. The Board remains concerned that they may also facilitate new recreational activities, including competitive events.

Greg Miller indicated that BLM is inundated with requests from special interest groups, including conservation, recreation, mining, hunting, grazing/wool growing, etc. Like all agencies, BLM staff is occupied with small projects that keep them from working on larger recovery issues. There are numerous Executive Orders that affect BLM management, including those for solar energy development, protecting migratory birds, etc. BLM is beginning to look at priorities that are coming from the Management Oversight Group (MOG) and Recovery Implementing Teams (RITs). Recovery Action Plans already include multiple lists of recovery actions that need to be implemented, so we don't need to make a new list. The Council would like to work with BLM or other agency to designate a focal area managed specifically for tortoises, without multiple conflicting uses.

Fencing was considered a high priority in the RIT process. Ray Bransfield indicated a 25-mile stretch of I-40 will be fenced in December 2015. Kristin Berry indicated there has been some highway improvement along Highway 395 north of Highway 58 that has not been fenced. We should consider asking how Caltrans may be able to fence roads prior to widening projects. Caltrans may consider fencing only one side of a given highway where tortoise critical habitat is not on both sides (e.g., fence east side of Highway 395 north of Highway 58 but not west side, which is not designated as critical habitat).

Action Items: Council plans to support agencies with BMPs, continue to identify funding sources, and provide public outreach and education. Council could work with other affected NGOs to develop a scientific-based letter asking to remove common raven from the MBTA's protected list (or allow situational raven removal), and send this letter to Dan Ashe of USFWS. We may write a letter to Caltrans documenting the importance of fencing and suggesting that certain roads be fenced, which is one of the top priorities among identified RIT projects. Have a Council board member attend future MOG meetings. **It was agreed that Ed LaRue would attend future MOG meetings, take minutes, and report back at the subsequent Council Board meeting; next MOG meeting is December 8, 2015 at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas.**

G. Discussions of Old and New Business:

1. Policy Statements-Best Management Practices (schedule and assignments): Best Management Practices (BMPs) are important to document the best, most comprehensive biological standards for project proponents and agency personnel. Mark Massar indicated that protective measures are stipulated in all BLM environmental documents, including EAs and EISs. In EAC comment letters, it would be helpful to have BMPs and other policy statements that can be referenced to ensure that environmental documents are not deficient. We are creating reference documents that field biologists and others could refer to in order to effectively implement biological opinions, incidental take permits, and other documents with protective measures. Need to recognize that some of these are BMPs and some of these are more accurately referred to as "policy or position statements."

a. Habitat Restoration BMPs: The BMPs are a smaller part of a coauthored paper prepared by Scott Abella and Kristin Berry. An article has already been presented to a peer-reviewed journal. BMPs address best ways to stockpile and maintain topsoil, restore perennial plants, produce tortoise forage, rehabilitate areas, reduce impacts of roads, etc. The BMPs can be accessed through a quick link on our website.

b. Habitat Connectivity BMPs: Chris Noddings asked the group for input on developing these BMPs. How can we provide BMPs that will facilitate habitat connectivity proactively on a regional basis or reactively on a case-by-case basis as various projects are proposed? The DRECP indicated, for example, in a very general manner that there would be impacts to corridors. Kristin Penrod was able to give specific feedback to DRECP planners about how certain Development Focused Areas would affect linkages and corridors. Roy Averill-Murray indicated that there is no available analysis showing differences between structural connectivity and functional connectivity, or theoretical versus actual widths of corridors needed to connect populations. Roy wasn't sure that these BMPs could be developed given the lack of available information. **Chris Noddings will develop a paragraph for authors of environmental documents listing necessary considerations to ensure environmental documents are adequate with regards to corridors and linkages.**

c. Captive Tortoise Management: The following BMPs are in preparation, and not specifically discussed today: Closure of Desert Tortoise Conservation Center (No longer applicable.); Sterilization of pet tortoises; Disease; and Release of captives into the wild.

d. Translocation BMPs: There was a letter written several years ago that may serve as a baseline for developing translocation recommendations as a BMP, policy statement, or position paper. The following BMPs are in preparation, and unless otherwise noted not specifically discussed today: Moving of wild tortoises; Removing fences at the long-term translocation study site letter: Ken MacDonald and Michael Tuma have drafted this letter, which is not finalized. Genetic integrity; Disease: This to be removed and included in the Disease BMPs, below.

e. Disease BMPs: Disease in the translocation section above would be incorporated into this set of BMPs.

f. Maintenance of Genetic Diversity BMPs: These BMPs are in preparation, and not specifically discussed today.

g. Terms and Conditions BMPs: Intend to identify protective measures that would be applied to all projects, linear projects, mines, etc. Where there are deficiencies in an environmental document, we could refer proponents to the 2009 Field Manual with regards tortoise fencing, handling guidelines, translocation guidance, health assessments, etc. As part of this exercise, we are likely to be able to advise USFWS how the manual may be enhanced. How to deal with "fence-walking" for displaced tortoises, culvert design and placement, etc. are good examples of standardized measures to be cited in the BMPs. A logical first step is to look at the field manual, BLM's protective measures, CDFW's protective measures, etc. and identify gaps or ways we can apply our expertise to improve these measures. **Ken MacDonald is taking the lead and committed to producing an internal draft before October 31.**

h. Exclusionary Fencing BMPs: May look at different kinds of fences, including temporary versus permanent fences, how to deal with fences that are subject to erosion, how to maintain connectivity when fences fragment habitats, etc.

i. Subsidized Predator Management BMPs: These BMPs are in preparation, and not specifically discussed today.

j. Development Planning and Project Siting BMPs: This section may include site specific recommendations for specific conservation areas and actions.

k. Other BMPs? Brian Croft indicated it would be helpful to evaluate the “recovery value” of a given measure compared to land acquisition. For example, if land acquisition was valued at \$100 and required 3:1 compensation, then \$200 could be used for acquisition and the remaining \$100 would be applied to another protective measure or recovery action of equal value. Cat Darst has already quantified the value of fencing and several other actions that could be improved upon by determining the value of other recovery prescriptions she didn’t consider. The Council could publish a Request for Proposal to pursue this analysis.

l. Offered Property Donation: Someone recently offered to donate a private parcel in Twentynine Palms, California to the Council. It is located in the vicinity of the new Twentynine Palms casino. We are not land managers, as are the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee or Mojave Desert Land Trust, for example. We may suggest that the donor contact one or more of these groups.

H. Next Meeting: The next business meeting of the Board will be at Sam’s Town in Las Vegas, Nevada between 10:00 a.m. and approximately 4:00 p.m. with agency personnel on 8 January 2016, followed by a Board member-only meeting on 9 January 2016 from 0800 to 1200.

I. Adjourn: The first day of the Board meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Ken MacDonald, at 17:00.

Desert Tortoise Council
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting – Day 2

12 September 2015
DoubleTree Hilton, Ontario, California

The meeting was called to order by Ken MacDonald at 08:10 a.m.

A. Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer's Report was distributed by Joe Probst. Total financial assets are \$284,382.00, with \$28,715.28 in the Union Banking account, \$187,596.02 in the high rate money market account, and \$68,070.70 in the Edward Jones investment account. The income for the recent health assessment training in Arizona was \$24,415.70 with \$17,187.70 in expenses, for a total profit of \$7,228.00. The Edwards Jones account lost \$4,342 this year. **Joe Probst would like to explore other investment opportunities and will report back to the Board before making any decisions or commitments.** • **Ken MacDonald will talk with Joe Probst about the need for both 2015 and 2016 budgets, about reviewing pertinent policies to be sure we are spending in a responsible manner, and quarterly reports on income and itemized expenditures.** • **Motion made (Bruce Palmer), seconded (Maggie Fusari), and unanimously approved to accept the Treasurer's Report as final.**

B. Corresponding Secretary's Report: The only recent correspondence was the land owner in 29 Palms offering a parcel of land to the Council (see Item G.1.l from yesterday).

C. Membership Coordinator's Report: The Membership Coordinator's Report was distributed by Mari Quillman, documenting 601 total members, 523 active members, 337 renewals overdue, 71 lapsed memberships, 7 pending memberships, and 3 new members in the last 30 days. Notifications are emailed announcing that memberships are about to lapse or that they already have. Mary Cohen is working to correct the situation where lifetime members are being asked to pay dues. Still need to fix a problem differentiating membership dues from symposium fees where the two are paid simultaneously. Mari is working with Tracy Bailey to ensure we can keep track of payments for membership *and* symposium fees. Membership is on an annual basis, regardless of which month payment is received. **Mari Quillman will work with Mary Cohen to fix these problems and write up standards for membership status and renewal.**

D. Awards Committee Report: The Awards Committee Report was presented via email by Glenn Stewart prior to the meeting, which he could not attend. **Ed LaRue and Chris Noddings recommended two nominations for either a Service Award or Special Award, which they will forward to the awards committee via email.**

E. Nominations Committee Report: The Nominations Committee Report was not specifically discussed.

F. Grants Committee Report: The Grants Committee Report was presented via email by Glenn Stewart prior to the meeting. Since then, Taylor Edwards has asked for \$3,000 to provide the following paper via open access: "Shaping species with ephemeral boundaries; the distribution and genetic structure of desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) in the Sonoran Desert." This is an

important paper, as it is a required precursor to a subsequent publication that will identify a third species of *Gopherus*. It would be prudent to follow up and determine how many people access this article because of increased availability. Concern was expressed about setting this precedent and how many other authors will ask for similar financial support. It was agreed that we would consider each request on a case-by-case basis and maintain the right to say no. **Bruce Palmer, with help from Michael Tuma, has agreed to write a policy for future requests fund open access.**

- **Motion made (Kristin Berry), seconded (Maggie Fusari), and unanimously approved to provide Taylor Edwards with \$3,000 to gain open access for the above-referenced paper.**

G. Information, Outreach, and Social Media Committee Report: This committee report was presented verbally by Chris Noddings. There are 459 “likes” on our Facebook account, thanks in large part to support provided by Bianca Cirimele.

H. Newsletter Editor’s Report: The Newsletter Editor’s Report was presented verbally by Michael Tuma. There has not been a recent newsletter, pending input from several sources. An article provided by Taylor Edwards will be featured. There are announcements for upcoming workshops, and synopsis for recent health assessment workshops. **Maggie Fusari will review the workshop announcement and let Michael Tuma know if changes are needed.** ● **Michael Tuma plans to distribute the newsletter in the next few weeks.**

I. Web Master’s Report: Mari Quillman reported that she prefers to bring available products to the upcoming workshops and symposia rather than make them available online. We mostly have shirts with only a few mugs, hats, etc. Also have grocery bags that arrived late that we can distribute at the 2016 Symposium.

J. 41st Annual Symposium Discussions:

1. Local Host Committee: Tracy Bailey has volunteered to serve as the chairperson for the 2016 Symposium and will attend the January 9th Board meeting. She provided a list of extensive action items and responsibilities that was distributed via email by Kristin Berry prior to this meeting. She is asking that Sam’s Town provide a map showing key areas. She has identified a number of volunteers she plans on using for registration and other duties. The facilities will likely cost about \$1,000 more than usual for some increased supplies and expenses. Given this, do we need to raise registration costs? (question remains unanswered) **Maggie Fusari will work with Jason Jones to determine materials in stock and what needs to be bought.** There may be no need to acquire additional Chums. Jason Jones has 400 folders that came in too late for the 2015 Symposium that can be used in 2016. **Maggie Fusari is working with Tracy Bailey and Mary Cohen on producing printed name tags and ribbons identifying Board members, speakers, etc.** Tracy plans to acquire a raffle wheel, literature rack, and other items identified in the memo Kristin recently distributed. **Mari Quillman will check with a trophy company about producing several signs with our logo that can be put on the podium over the Sam’s Town logo.** ● **Kristin Berry will pursue producing a banner that includes our logo.** ● **Motion made (Bruce Palmer), seconded (Ken MacDonald), and unanimously approved to provide up to \$2,000 (plus the cost of the Chums, in necessary) to acquire materials Tracy Bailey has identified.**

With regards to the photo contest, Tracy Bailey would like to have the award winners come to the front to receive their awards, and have the winning photographs displayed. She would like to limit the submissions to one photograph per person per category. The photo contest should be announced during dinner rather than the mixer. Tracy recommended some changes to the timing, completing the meeting at 4:30 p.m. and having dinner at 5:30 p.m., which would be problematic. She would like to have everything done by 9:00 p.m., which is good. We can help shorten the Saturday evening program by awarding raffle items during the Symposium between sessions. Goal is to have all (or most) raffle items distributed before the banquet, so the auction occurs during dinner; advisable to have a few high end raffle items distributed during the banquet. **Tracy has recommended that Sean Daly serve as the emcee, which Kristin Berry will discuss with her.** It is important that Board members are visible and highlighted to let general members know who we are; Tracy would like to provide photographs of us.

Suggested we end the program at 4:30; with the mixer from 5:00 until 6:00 p.m. **Mari Quillman will contact Southern Nevada Environmental Inc. (and other potential sponsors) to see if they want to sponsor a mixer this year.** Dinner, photo contest, and the banquet speaker would be through 8:00 p.m., and have the auction from 8:00 until 9:00 p.m. Tracy will coordinate vendors, which relieves Chris Noddings of this task; **Chris Noddings will send Tracy all information he has on vendors (e.g., previous vendors, the vendor letter, etc).** Jason Jones offered storage space at Nevada Department of Wildlife, 4747 Vegas Drive, Las Vegas, Nevada 89108. Michael Tuma, Pete Woodman, and Joe Probst all have copies of "Conservation of North American Tortoises." Following the 2015 techniques workshop and book sales, we should reassess whether we need more copies for the Symposium.

2. Program Committee – special topics and themes: There are 10 big horn sheep speakers already committed to present at the Symposium. **Kristin Berry will facilitate a luncheon between the big horn sheep and desert tortoise disease experts during the Symposium.** Kim Stringfellow will be a Featured Speaker. Krista Schlyer has been invited to be the 20-minute banquet speaker. **Becky Jones will continue to coordinate the government session.** • **Ken MacDonald**, as the current Chairperson, will provide the welcome address. • **Cristina Jones** will solicit papers from Arizona personnel. • **Kristin Berry** will contact Amy Fesnock to see if she has a session she would like to coordinate.

K. Council Position Letters:

1. Large Scale Translocation Site (LSTS): A draft letter has been prepared by Ken MacDonald and Michael Tuma. **Ken MacDonald will redistribute this letter and ask for Board input.**

2. Northwest Arizona Tortoise Letter: Maggie Fusari has drafted a letter concerning a group of Agassiz's desert tortoise in the Black Mountain area, east of Colorado River in northwest Arizona, which she shared with the Board this morning. She needs to know to whom the letter would be addressed and to whom it should be carbon copied (**Steve Spangle would be the appropriate contact, which Cristina Jones will provide to Maggie**). The letter was originally intended as a formal request, not a petition (see June 2015 minutes). **Maggie asked that each Board member provide input on the draft letter.** Many thought this letter should serve as a petition rather than recommendation, particularly since USFWS is considering making petitions more lengthy and burdensome (see EAC item 12 in the attached table). Our recommendation is that this small population be added to the listed population of *Gopherus agassizii*.

3. Miscellaneous Recovery Actions:

i. Recovery Implementing Team status update; ii. Progress on scientific advisory committee and implementation: It would have been good to discuss these issues yesterday. We would like to see a list of RIT projects that are currently being funded and would be funded in the future. **Ken MacDonald** will contact Roy Averill-Murray and ask for this status update.

L. Policy/Operations Manual: Nothing new on this. **Ken MacDonald** should put this item earlier on a future agenda so we can give it more consideration.

1. Political endorsement issues/sign-on letters: No specific discussion today.

M. Miscellaneous Items and Updates:

1. Fundraising: **Ken MacDonald** will begin working on a fundraising strategy and plans on having a report on his progress at the next Board meeting.

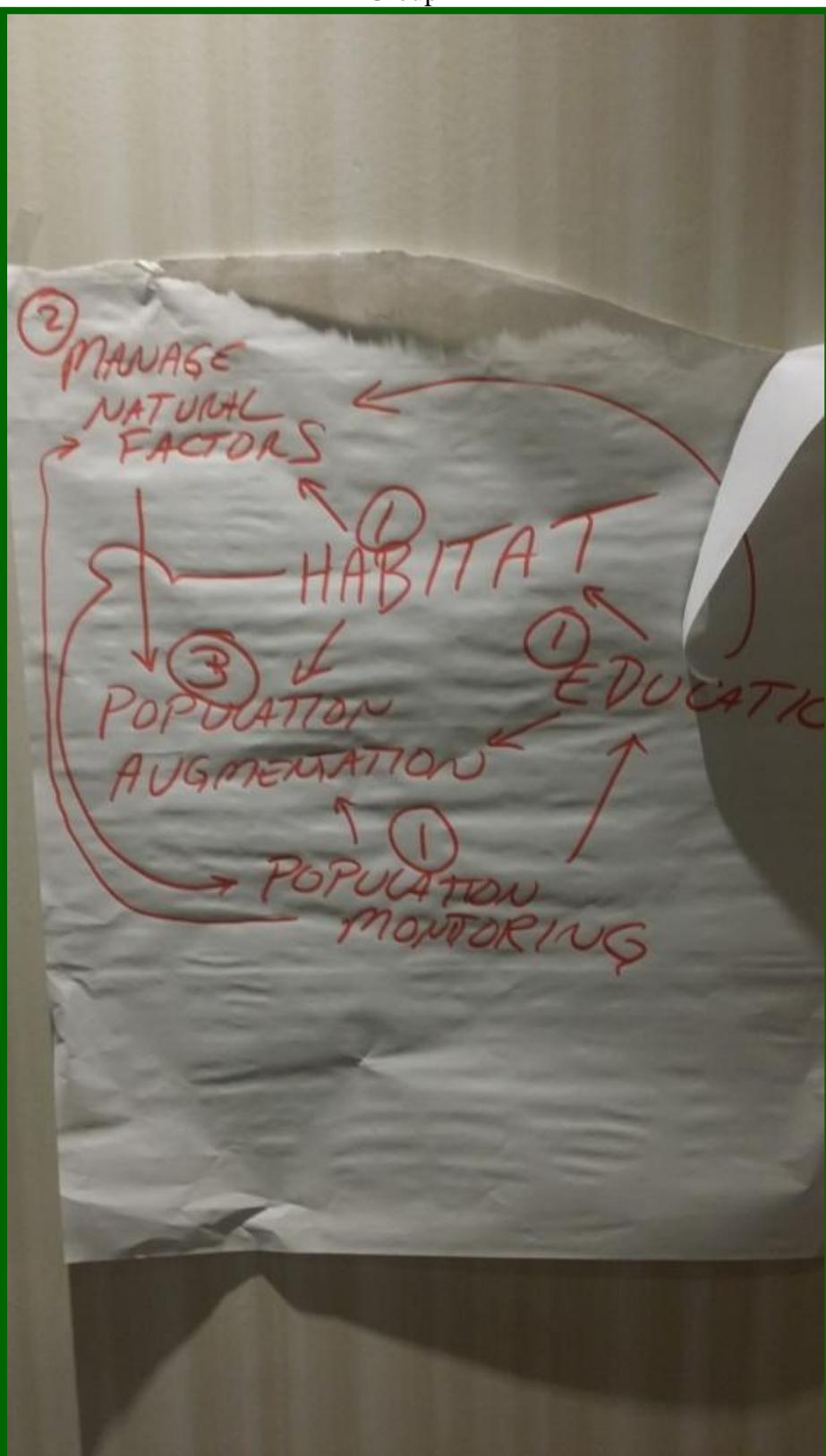
2. Future Involvement with Agencies: All agreed that the joint meeting with agency personnel yesterday was meaningful and helpful. Should there be permanent *ex officio* members? Should existing Board members who work for agencies be identified as *ex officio* members rather than Board members? Most agreed that one or more meetings each year with agency representatives is a good idea, and may effectively replace the *ex officio* approach. We may want to target large land managers, such as National Park Service and Bureau of Land Management, and agency personnel, particularly U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. **Jason Jones** will provide **Ken MacDonald** a contact list for BLM and NPS personnel to be invited to attend the first day of the January 2016 Board meeting. May be good to solicit agenda items from invited agency personnel. We should continue to structure Board meetings to have agency personnel attend the first day and only Board members on the second day, like this weekend. There was also brief discussion of hiring someone to take on certain responsibilities. This would be a staff position rather than another Board position. **Agreed to have Bruce Palmer consolidate this discussion about *ex officio* and staff personnel and present alternatives to be discussed at a future meeting.**

N. Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Ken MacDonald, at 12:00 p.m.

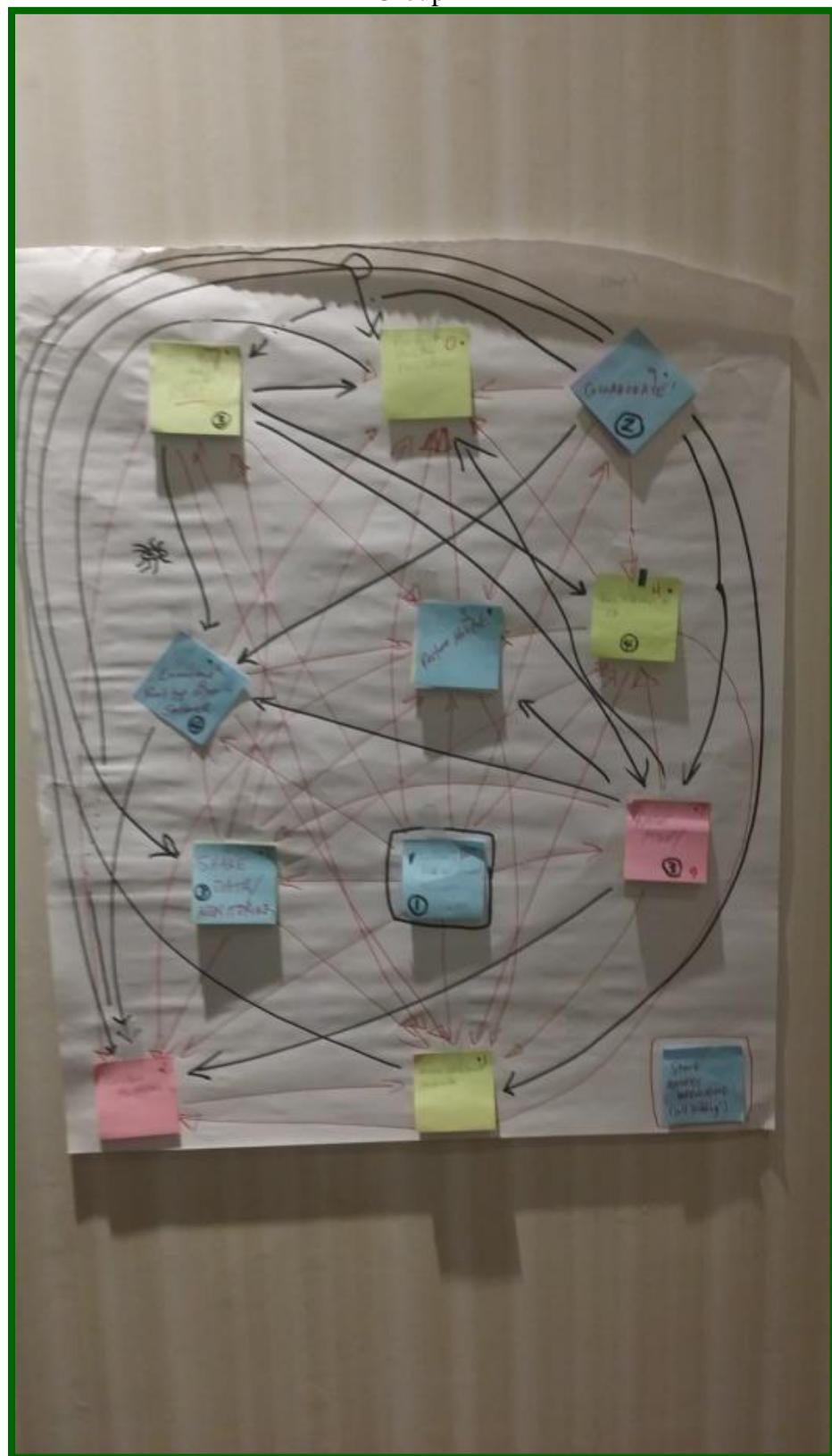
Draft minutes were recorded, later distributed and modified with Board member and Agency Biologist review and input, then respectfully submitted as this final version by Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary.



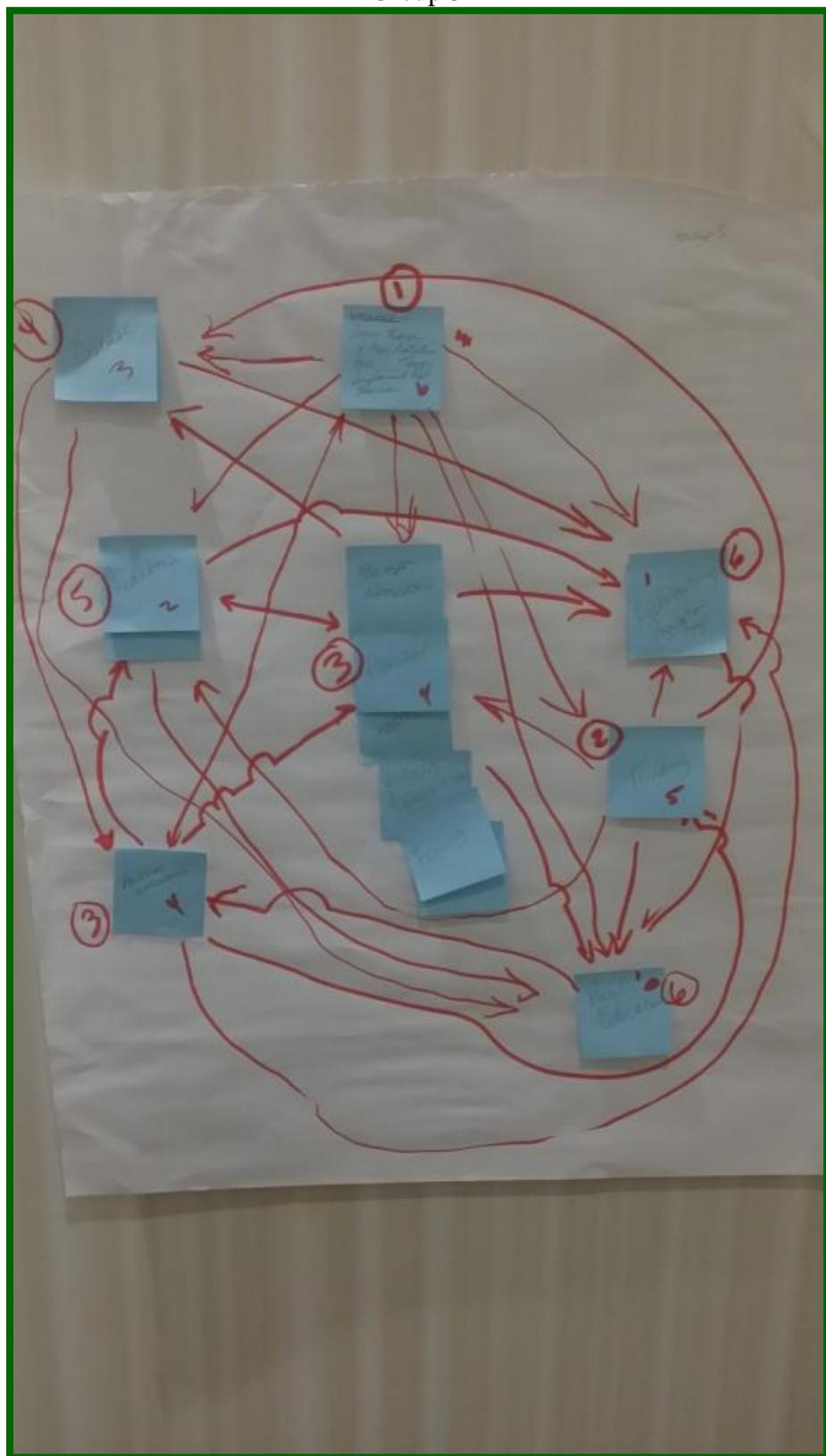
Edward L. LaRue, Jr.
Desert Tortoise Council, Recording Secretary



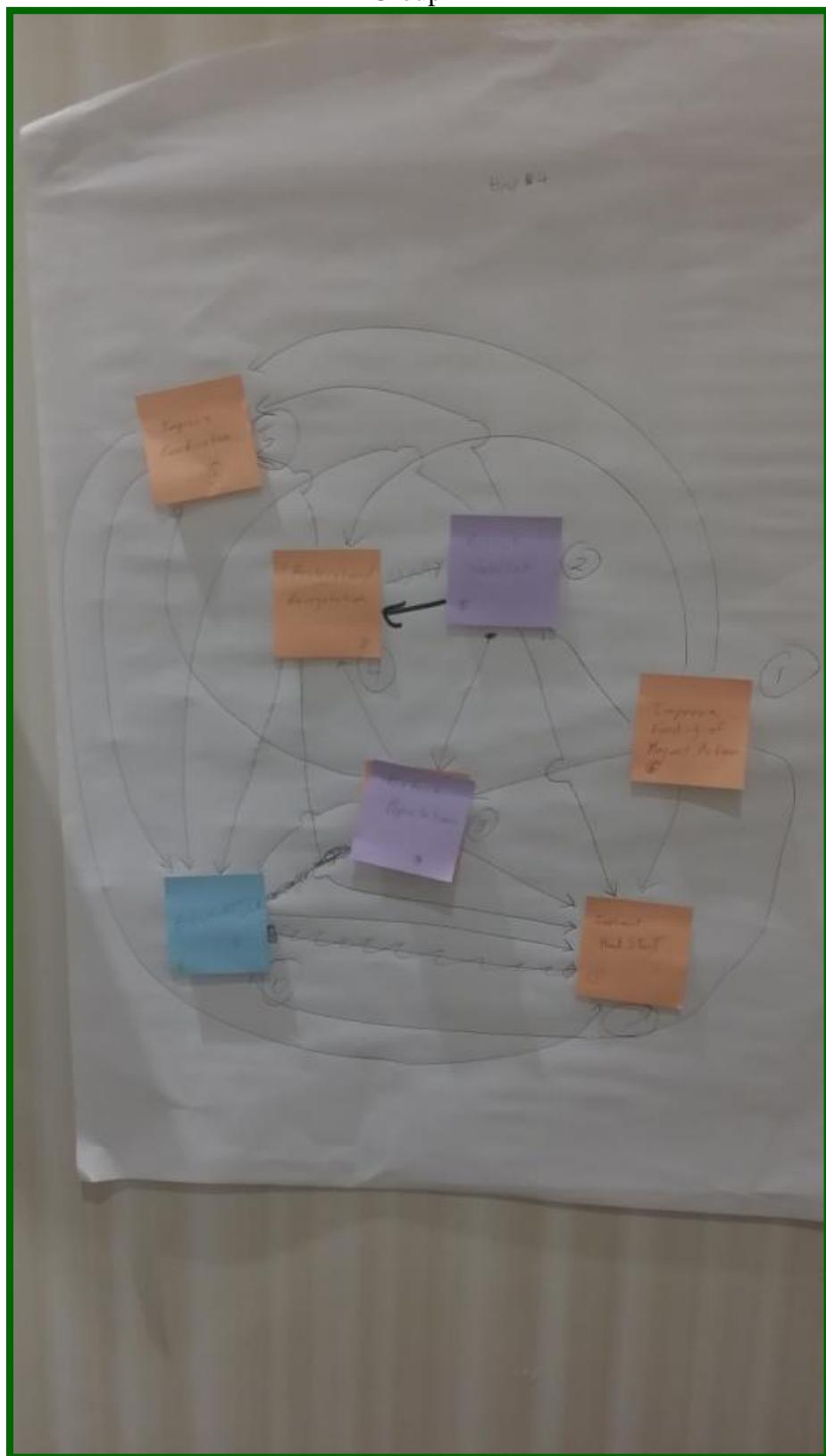
Group 2



Group 3



Group 4



Ecosystems Advisory Committee Report **DTC Board Meeting of 12 September 2015**

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

1. Red Cliffs Reserve Proposal for Bisecting Highway

5/29/2015 – Sid Silliman sends notice to Ed LaRue that there may be a new congressional mandate to construct a new highway through the Red Cliffs Reserve near St. George, Utah. On **6/11/2015** Ed responds to Sid (with cc to Board) that we have not heard anything directly about this project, and asks to let us know if there is anything we can contribute. (Note: this issue is cross referenced with issues 9 and 10 below)

2. Lucerne Valley Solar One Project

6/6/2015 – During the Board meeting on 6/6/2015, Becky Jones gives a notice of preparation to Ed LaRue, which was dated 13 May 2015. When Ed looked more closely at this on 6/14/2015, he discovered that the scoping comments were due on 6/13/2015. On **6/15/2015** Ed sends draft comments to the Board, which are approved on **6/16/2015** and submitted to the County, which accepted them two days late.

3. Cliven Bundy Cattle Trespass in Clark County, Nevada

6/6/2015 – Seven Board members receive a request from an anonymous entity asking that the Council mount an online action campaign against the chronic Cliven Bundy trespass grazing situation. Ed LaRue distributes this request to the same Board members on 6/9/2015 asking for their concerns and input. In response to a new email from the same entity, Ed LaRue responds with comments from four Board members on **8/20/2015**.

4. Aiya Solar Project Draft EIS in Southern Nevada

5/15/2015 – On 5/15/2015 Ed LaRue receives notice from an unidentified source of this proposed 900-acre site in southern Nevada. Ed produced draft comments that he distributes to the Board on 6/23/2015 asking that endorsement with or without modifications be received by 6/28/2015 to meet the 6/29/2015 deadline. With only four votes and one recusal, Ed sends the comment letter (with Maggie Fusari's changes) on the morning of **6/29/2015**.

5. Soda Mountains Solar Project miscellaneous activities

6/15/2015 – On 6/15/2015 Ed LaRue receives a request from Seth Shteir (National Parks Conservation Association) to send a letter to San Bernardino County Supervisor Lovingood asking for an extension of the protest period and public meeting with BLM to explain the recent release of the Final EIS that would allow development of those portions of the project south and east of I-15. Following endorsement by seven members, Ed sends an email to Chief of Staff Melissa McClain on **6/17/2015**.

On **6/21/2015**, Ed LaRue attends meeting in Barstow with Assistant Secretary of Land and Minerals Janice Schneider to discuss the Soda Mountain Solar Project. About 15 NGO and other conservationists attended this two-hour meeting. Ed emphasized BLM's failure to use available data and also introduced some discussion of West Mojave Route Designation project. A letter reiterating the information sent to Ms. McClain was sent to Ms. Schneider by David Lamfrom on **6/30/2015**.

6. West Mojave Route Designation

6/30/2015 – Ed LaRue and another Board member participate in a conference call with Jeff Aardahl (Defenders of Wildlife) to discuss a study BLM route management. Ed receives an update from Charlie Piechowski on **7/17/15**, and sends a response of renewed interest on **8/2/15**. Charlie's final report is sent to Ed and Kristin Berry on **9/9/2015**.

7. Castle Mountains Inclusion in Mojave National Preserve

7/14/2015 – Ed LaRue receives request from Seth Shteir of National Parks Conservation Association asking that we provide several paragraphs of the importance of the Castle Mountain area to tortoises. Having no knowledge of tortoises in that area, I send an email out to the Board on the same day asking for input. Although there was no consolidated response, several Board members provided input to Seth (see table for those responding). Most of these responses were forwarded to Seth on **8/2/2015**.

8. Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Photovoltaic Solar Project

7/15/2015 – Chris Noddings provides Ed LaRue with a link to an EA for a solar project at the 29 Palms Marine Corps Base. After hearing that Chris was the project manager for the project, Ed gave him the benefit of the doubt and did not review the EA.

9. Resource Management Plans for Beaver Dam Wash and Red Cliffs National Conservation Area

7/21/2015 – Ed LaRue receives link from an unidentified source providing draft RMPs for these two tortoise areas in Utah. On **8/2/2015**, Ed forwards this information to the Board seeking input from more knowledgeable members.

10. Washington Parkway/Northern Corridor through the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area

7/22/2015 – Susan Crook of Citizens for Dixie sends a notice to Ed LaRue regarding the proposal to put a new highway through the Red Cliffs National Conservation Area. On **8/2/2015**, Ed responds to Ms. Crook asking what we may do.

11. Inclusion of Searles Valley in Tortoise Critical Habitat

7/27/2015 – Ed LaRue receives request from Jeff Aardahl asking if Searles Valley should be included in tortoise critical habitat. Having little experience in this area, Ed forwards Jeff's request to Pete Woodman and Kristin Berry for their input on **8/2/2015**.

12. Sign on to “Revisions to Endangered Species Act Petition Regulations” Letter

8/7/2015 – Ed LaRue receives a letter from Center for Biological Diversity asking the Council to endorse a letter with the above title. On 8/8/2015, Ed circulates this letter to the entire Board, asking that each member respond by 9/1/2015.

13. NPCA Sign on Letter for Joshua Tree National Park

8/19/2015 – Ed LaRue receives letter from Seth Shteir asking us to endorse a scoping letter to NPS supporting the inclusion of ands withdrawn for mining in the 1950's. He wants our response right away, as the letter is due on 8/21/2015. On 8/20/2015, Ed slightly edits NPCA's letter and distributes it to the Board for a vote. Having received five votes, on **8/20/2015** Ed informs Seth that the Council agrees to cosign the letter.

14. NPCA Sign on Letter for Palen Solar Project

8/25/2015 – Ed LaRue receives request from Seth Shteir of National Parks Conservation Association asking the Council to cosign a letter opposing the deadline extension for the Palen Solar project, which is distributed to the Board immediately. Ed asks Alice Karl about impacts to tortoises, which occur in adjacent areas but not onsite. Seth's letter also does not mention impacts to tortoises. Given the six no votes, Ed sends an email to Seth indicating that the Board decided to not endorse this particular letter, while emphasizing that we would like to continue to work with NPCA.

15. Scoping Comments on Small Mining Operations in Ridgecrest Resource Area

8/26/2015 – Ed LaRue receives a notice from BLM soliciting scoping comments on an EA to be published from the Ridgecrest Resource Area in California, which he immediately distributes to the Board. Ed receives BOs from Ray Bransfield and distributes them to Board on **9/10/2015**.

Ecosystems Advisory Committee
Summary Table from 6/6/2015 to 9/12/2015

Current date for this latest table revision is: **9/10/2015**

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
1	Red Cliffs Reserve highway proposal	5/29	6/11	N/A					N/A											
2	Lucerne Valley Solar One Project	6/6	6/14	6/13	6/16	R 6/15			Y/PI 6/16	A/PI 6/15	Y/PI 6/17		Y 6/15		Y 6/17	Y 6/15	Y 6/16	Y/PI 6/15		
3	Cliven Bundy Cattle Trespass in Nevada	6/6	6/9	N/A					PI 6/10	N 6/9	PI 6/10			PI 6/8						
4	Aiya Solar Project	5/15	6/23	6/29	6/29	Y 6/29			Y 6/29	A/PI 6/23	Y 6/27		Y 6/24		R 6/28	Y 6/27				
5	Soda Mountain Solar	6/15	6/15	6/17	6/17				Y/PI 6/16	A/PI 6/15	Y 6/17		Y 6/15	Y 6/16		Y 6/16	Y/PI 6/15			
6	West Mojave Route Designation	6/30	N/A	N/A					PI 6/30											
7	Castle Mtn. Inclusion in Mojave Nat'l Preserve	7/14	7/14	N/A	N/A	PI 7/15			PI 7/15	PI 7/14				PI 7/15		PI 7/14		PI 7/14	PI 7/14	
8	MCAGCC Solar Project	7/14	-	8/8	-				PI 7/14	PI 7/15										
9	Beaver Dam and Red Cliffs RMPs in Utah	7/21	8/2	10/15					PI 8/2											
10	Washington Parkway	7/22	8/2	N/A	N/A															
11	Searles Valley as Critical Habitat	7/27	8/22	N/A	N/A				PI 8/2											
12	CBD Sign-on Letter	8/7	8/8	9/16	8/20			R 8/12		PI/Y 8/8	Y 8/8		Y 8/11	R 8/11	Y 8/11	Y 8/8			R 8/9	
13	NPCA Letter to NPS	8/19	8/20	8/21	8/20				PI/Y 8/20	PI/Y 8/20	Y 8/20		Y 8/20			Y 8/20				
14	NPCA letter on Palen Solar Project	8/24	8/25	8/28	8/27				PI/Y 8/25	PI/N 8/25	N 8/26		8/27		PI/N 8/25	PI/N 8/26	R 8/26	N 8/26		
15	Small Mining EA Ridgecrest	8/26	8/26	9/20																

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