



**California Program Office**

980 Ninth Street, Suite 1730 | Sacramento, California 95814 | tel 916.313.5800  
[www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)

March 23, 2020

Eric Sklar, President  
Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director  
California Fish and Game Commission  
P.O. Box 944209  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090  
Via Email to: [fgc@fgc.ca.gov](mailto:fgc@fgc.ca.gov)

Re: Petition to revise listing status of Agassiz's desert tortoise from threatened to endangered

Dear President Sklar and Executive Director Miller-Henson:

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, the Desert Tortoise Council and Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (Petitioners), I submit the attached petition to revise the listing of Agassiz's desert tortoise or desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) from threatened to endangered under provisions of the California Endangered Species Act (Fish and Game Code Sections 2050, et seq.) and Section 670.1, Title 14, California Code of Regulations (CCR).

Defenders of Wildlife is a national wildlife conservation organization founded in 1947 and is dedicated to protecting all wild animals and plants in their natural communities. To this end, we employ science, public education and participation, media, legislative advocacy, litigation, and proactive on-the-ground solutions to impede the accelerating rate of extinction of species, associated loss of biological diversity, and habitat alteration and destruction. Defenders of Wildlife has 1.8 million members and supporters in the U.S. including 279,000 in California.

The Desert Tortoise 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 desert tortoise species. Established in 1975 to promote conservation of tortoises in the deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico, the Council routinely provides information and other forms of assistance to individuals, organizations, and regulatory agencies on matters potentially affecting desert tortoises within their geographic ranges.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is a non-profit organization formed in 1974 to promote the welfare of the desert tortoise in its native wild state. Committee members share a deep concern for the continued preservation of the tortoise and its habitat in the southwestern deserts. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is dedicated to the recovery and conservation of the Desert Tortoise and other rare and endangered species inhabiting the Mojave and western Sonoran deserts.

The Fish and Game Commission listed the desert tortoise nearly 31 years ago as a threatened species on June 23, 1989. It was listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990 and followed by designation of its critical habitat in 1994.

Despite measures taken by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and federal land management agencies, the desert tortoise continues to decline due to human related activities that include habitat loss and fragmentation, widespread invasion by non-native plants, mortality caused by motorized vehicles and infectious diseases. The species is in much worse condition now than when it was listed as a threatened species three decades ago and is now below what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers minimum viable density in 9 out of 10 critical habitat units in California.

Our petition provides ample evidence that the desert tortoise warrants listing as endangered throughout California. It is our hope that the Fish and Game Commission and its staff, as well as the Department of Fish and Wildlife find our petition a compelling rationale that leads to uplisting of this critically imperiled species to endangered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Flick".

Pamela Flick

California Director

Defenders of Wildlife

[pflick@defenders.org](mailto:pflick@defenders.org)

Attachment: Petition