Desert Tortoise Council
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

1 May 2021
Zoom Online Meeting

CALL TO ORDER
The meeting was called to order by Chair, Ken MacDonald at 10:00 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, Judy Hohman, Ken MacDonald, Cristina Jones, Maggie Fusari, Mari Quillman, Bruce Palmer, Michael Tuma, Becky Jones, Joe Probst, Ed LaRue, Halle Kohn, and Michael Vamstad. Absent: Greer Dolby, Peter Woodman. Guests: None.

A. Welcome/Announcements/Introductions: None.

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

C. Approval of Meeting Minutes of 9 January 2021: Ed LaRue prepared draft minutes of the most recent virtual Board meeting, which were distributed, reviewed, and approved today as final with minor changes. Motion made (Joe Probst), seconded (Cristina Jones), and unanimously approved to accept the draft minutes as amended to be final.

D. Review of Board Actions since Last Board Meeting:

   a. Morafka Award: On 1/27/2021, Michael Tuma shared that the scientific review team for the Morafka Award decided that both submittals were worthy of the award, and the team recommended that both candidates be awarded. The Council is already committed to providing $1,500 for the first award with a $1,000 contribution from Sylvia Morafka. On 1/27/2021, Ed LaRue made a motion, seconded by Mari Quillman to fully fund a second Morafka Award for $2,500, which was unanimously approved by 12 of 15 Board members as of 1/28/2021 (as one of the review team members, Michael Tuma recused himself from the vote).

E. Next Meeting Date: The next virtual meeting of the Board of Directors will be on Zoom, beginning at 10:00 a.m. (PST), on 31 July 2021.

OFFICER/COMMITTEE REPORTS

F. Treasurer’s Report: The Treasurer’s Report was distributed by Joe Probst. Total income as of 3/31/2021 was $54,302.33, total expenses were $27,686.39, with total net assets of $191,204.84. Motion made (Judy H), seconded (Cristina J), and unanimously approved to accept the Treasurer’s Report as final.
G. Corresponding Secretary’s Report: Becky Jones reported there has been routine correspondence. We received a $500 check from the Santa Barbara/Ventura Chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club, to which Becky Jones provided a thank you note.

H. Membership Committee’s Report: Mari Quillman provided the report, which was discussed. We currently have 769 members in our data base, including 260 active members and 488 overdue members. Halle Kohn is the newly elected Membership Coordinator. The first priority of the Membership Committee is to bring Halle up-to-speed on the membership database and then to transition the duties to her. There have been 20 active members added since January. Mari Quillman will work with Halle Kohn to transition into her new position.

I. Nominating Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma reported that Mari Quillman is now the Chair of this committee. Michael has reached out to several potential Board members. Michael Tuma will contact a tortoise biologist from Utah who may be interested in serving.

J. Ecosystems Advisory Committee’s (EAC) Report: Ed LaRue reported that there were 19 projects identified, one deadline that was missed, two that are outstanding during the reporting period between 1/9/2021 and 5/1/2021. He also emphasized that the item considering the lawsuit for the West Mojave route designation effort is beyond the EAC scope; it requires commitments from all Board members to ensure the submitted information is scientifically sound and we are in agreement when the time comes to prudently spend any potential legal fees.

K. Media Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma provided a report. Mary Lane Poe is largely responsible for helping to increase our posting on various social media platforms. Michael said that we can use help and expects after the field season to increase the frequency of postings. Halle Kohn has some ideas for the next Newsletter, including a brief overview of the last Symposium, and can use input from all Board members, including sponsor recognition and awards recap. Mari Quillman and Cristina Jones will provide Halle Kohn with specific information for Symposium sponsors. The next Newsletter is expected late summer, so Halle would like to have submissions by late June. Michael mentioned Christian Tyler, a young man in Nevada who is increasing awareness of releasing Mylar balloons into the desert. Maggie Fusari will write an article on the Introductory Course for the Newsletter.

L. Grants Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma reported we are not currently accepting Grant Requests until we get a better understanding of the financial impact of COVID-19 on our budget. At least two groups have followed up to ask about the availability of funding for restoration services, so we will need to determine when we want to resume issuing grants. The Southern California Edison (SCE) grant was awarded to Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC). We’ve received updates from the field from THC, including photos and descriptions of activities and the status of the work. Michael Tuma has not been able to reach anyone at SCE to get permission to announce the project via social media postings. Michael Tuma will reach out to Christian Tyler about possibly funding some of his campaign to minimize release of Mylar balloons into the desert.

M. Agency Coordinating Committee’s Report: Cristina Jones reported there has been no coordination among agencies, largely due to meeting restrictions due to COVID. We may resume coordinating meetings utilizing Zoom.
N. Education and Outreach Committee’s Report: Maggie Fusari said there was nothing to report at this time.

O. Fundraising Committee Report: Greer Dolby was absent today, so there was no report.

P. Mexico Coordination Committee. Michael Vamstad reported that we extended free invitations to three Mexican biologists for the Symposium.

Q. Training Program Committee Report:
   a. Introductory Training Course Committee’s Report: Maggie Fusari reported in 2020, we produced a successful Introduction to the Mojave Desert Tortoise course in two half-day sessions, on Friday afternoon November 6 and Saturday morning November 7. We had 147 attendees. The committee met via Zoom on 5/28/2021 and agreed to plan on a virtual indoor session and an in-person outdoor session with five-or-so instructors, anticipating 20 students per instructor, to be held for a full day in Ridgecrest with lunch midday. Turtle Survival Alliance has agreed to help with the indoor session this year. There is no requirement that the field portion be the next day after the indoor virtual course. In 2020, we charged $150 early registration and $50 for students, and $175 late registration and $65 for students. Given enhanced fieldwork services, we still need to discuss registration fees for 2021. The full course will be both indoor and outdoor, and Maggie suggested that those who attended the indoor course in 2020 have priority access to the 2021 field portion of the course.

   The video training captured last year with Rachel Woodard was well-received and Pete Woodman is considering several other video topics as part of this year’s effort. Maggie Fusari recently provided links to the talks presented at the 2020 Introductory Course. Southern Nevada Environmental Inc. (SNEI) has asked if they may use these videos for in-house presentations. Some members felt it was fine to grant this use given SNEI’s financial support of mixers at Symposia, so long as this sharing would not detract from attending the online course. Maggie Fusari will check with other groups about their sharing policies and will work with Bruce Palmer to draft a policy of how we may share videos and other proprietary materials.

   b. Advanced Training Courses Committee’s Report: Cristina Jones had nothing to report at this time.

R. Awards Committee’s Reports: Kristin Berry reported five awards were presented at the 2021 Symposium. She is working with a vendor to produce plaques. She received a nice letter from Dr. Elliot Jacobson thanking us for his award. She and Bruce Palmer will be talking about individuals who would receive plaques versus certificates. Bruce mentioned that we should consider agency personnel to be recognized.

S. Annual Symposium Program Committee’s Report: Kristin Berry reported she is regularly receiving reports on effects of COVID, which show that about a third of the cases are showing residual cognitive impairment. We may want to require vaccine cards for those attending future in-person events. We could plan for either a fully virtual Symposium or a hybrid in 2022. Thanks to Mari Quillman for coordinating the 2021 event, which demonstrates that we need to have a designated coordinating person for the 2022 event. Given our late timing in 2020, we had only about 200 registered, compared to closer to 300 in person. February may be a difficult timeframe as western chapter of The Wildlife Society has recently moved its symposium to February.
Abstracts would need to be submitted no later than September to be ready for a February Symposium. Joe Probst reported Symposium financials included an income of $73,302.20, expenses of $37,284.15, for a net profit of $32,022.05. The Bylaws require that our Annual Business Meeting needs to be in the first quarter coinciding with the Symposium, so we will need to consider this when looking at changing the schedule for the Symposium. Suggestions for the next Symposium should be discussed between now and the next Board meeting when we will need to discuss location and format for the 2022 Symposium.

**T. COVID Public Safety:** This was deferred to another meeting.

**Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Ken MacDonald, at 11:25 a.m.

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.

Edward L. LaRue, Jr.
Desert Tortoise Council, Recording Secretary
Ecosystems Advisory Committee Report
DTC Board Meeting of 1 May 2021

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

1. Low-Effect HCP for the Gamebird Substation Expansion (Nye County, NV)
   12/17/2020 – On 12/17/2020, a third party informed us of this project, with comments due on 1/19/2021. The draft letter was distributed on 1/12/2021. With 10 votes, the letter is submitted 1/16/2021.

2. Alta Mesa Wind Farm (Riverside Co., CA)
   1/4/2021 – On 1/4/2021, Becky Jones provides a link for this proposed wind energy project, which was distributed to the Board on 1/20/2021, with a due date on 1/24/2021. The draft comment letter is distributed on 1/22/2021. With four votes, the letter is submitted to Riverside Co on 1/24/2021.

3. Lake Havasu Shoreline Trail (Lake Havasu City, AZ)
   1/6/2021 – On 1/6/2021, an anonymous member shared a link to this project, which was distributed to the Board on 1/20/2021, and has a due date of 2/5/2021. The draft letter is distributed to the Board for approval on 2/2/2021. With nine votes, the final letter was delivered on 2/4/2021.

   1/13/2021 – On 1/13/2021, an anonymous member shared a link to this project, which was distributed to the Board on 1/20/2021, and has a due date of 4/15/2021. On 2/17/2021 there is a notice that the Biden administration has stopped the reconsideration of the DRECP, and the project is no longer active.

5. Bellefield Solar Project (Kern Co, CA)
   1/19/2021 – On 1/19/2021, Jeff Aardahl of Defenders of Wildlife shared a link to this project, which was distributed to the Board on 1/20/2021, and has a due date of 2/15/2021. Ed LaRue distributes the draft letter completed by another member on 2/7/2021. With four votes, the final letter was delivered on 2/15/2021.

6a. Participation in legal challenge of West Mojave Route Designation decision (West Mojave, CA)
   1/26/2021 – On 1/26/2021, Ed LaRue forwards an email from Lisa Belenky, Senior Attorney with Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) asking the Council if we want to participate in a legal challenge of the WEMO Route Designation project, against which we filed a formal protest. Hearing only one response by 2/3/2021, Ed resends the original email asking the Board for input. With 10 of 15 Board members responding affirmatively, Ed lets Belenky know that the Council would like to participate on 2/4/2021. On 2/12/2021, Ed participated in a call with the potential litigants and circulated a draft Notice of Intent (NOI) to sue BLM and USFWS. With input from Ed and one other Board member, the Council’s comments were sent to CBD on 2/19/2021.

6b. Decision to sign-on to NOI for West Mojave Route Designation decision (West Mojave, CA)
   2/25/2021 – The “final” NOI was forwarded to the Board on 2/25/2021 for feedback confirming that we still want to proceed given the information in the document. The new action item question asks: “Given the attached NOI, does the Council support appearing as a cosigner on the NOI,” which was distributed on 2/25/2021. With eight endorsements, I let CBD know that the Council supports the NOI on 3/1/2021 during a Zoom call attended by Ed LaRue in the afternoon. As part of this item, Ed prepared a statement on 3/11/2021 to be included in CBD’s press release, asking for input and endorsements, which were as follows: Ed LaRue (author), Joe Probst, Judy Hohman (with input), Maggie Fusari, and Michael Tuma (with input). With these five endorsements, the press release quote was sent to Ileene Anderson on 3/12/2021. The formal NOI was issued on 3/24/2021, with Ed asking for proactive Board member support.

6c. Decision to sign-on to Retainer for West Mojave Route Designation decision (West Mojave, CA)
   3/3/2021 – CBD provides a retainer on 3/3/2021, which Ed LaRue distributes on the same date, with the question: Is the Board in agreement with Ed signing the retainer on behalf of the Board? Follow-up with
the question, should Ken MacDonald, as Chair, be the signatory on the retainer. The letter with Ken MacDonald’s signature with six endorsements and one recusal, is submitted it to CBD on the 3/12/2021 deadline.

6d. Formal complaint letter for West Mojave Route Designation decision (West Mojave, CA)
3/9/2021 – On 3/9/2021, Ed LaRue receives the official complaint letter, which is related to the three above actions, which was distributed to the Board on 3/11/2021, with a deadline of 3/29/2021. This is the formal document that lists our concerns with and complaint against USFWS and BLM for the 2019 decision. On 3/22/2021, receive a note from CBD that since the NOI was delayed to accommodate Defenders, the new due date for the complaint is 4/12/2021. In the absence of any input, I inform CBD on 4/11/2021 that the letter will have to be submitted as is.

7. Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) petition to increase funding for USFWS (National)
2/16/2021 – On 2/16/2021, we receive request from CBD to sign a petition supporting increased funding by House and Senate appropriators for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect, conserve and recover our nation’s endangered species and natural ecosystems, due on 2/19/2021. With 10 endorsements and 1 recusal, Ed LaRue completes the petition on 2/18/2021 and thanks CBD for the opportunity.

8. CBD petition supporting Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (RAWA) (National)
2/17/2021 – On 2/17/2021, we receive request from CBD to sign a petition supporting RAWA. According to CBD, “Securing $1.4 billion for biodiversity protection is a once in a generation achievement, and if successful, it will define broad wildlife funding for decades to come.” Distributed on 2/17/2021, there were 7 endorsements, and the petition was signed by Ed LaRue on behalf of the Council on 2/17/2021.

9. Off-highway vehicle preliminary grant applications to the BLM (Barstow, Ridgecrest, CA)
2/18/2021 – On 2/18/2021, Ed LaRue receives a draft letter from Jeff Aardahl of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) concerning preliminary applications for 2021 off-highway vehicle grant funding to the Off-highway Motorized Vehicle Recreation Division of California State Parks. Ed responds with comments later that day, with a deadline of early March identified by Aardahl. A new draft is received from Defenders on 2/23/2021, with a request from Aardahl that we wait until internal review is over before sharing with the Council, which will be available in May. Jeff Aardahl send the draft letter, which is distributed on 4/28/2021. With six endorsements, Ed lets Aardahl know that we endorse the letter on 4/29/2021.

10. Southern Transmission System (Clark County, NV)
2/23/2021 – On 2/23/2021, we receive the link to this BLM project from a third party, which is distributed on 2/25/2021, with a deadline of 3/24/2021. In this draft Environmental Assessment (EA), Southwest Gas Corporation is proposing to install 69.5 miles of new 24-inch-diameter steel natural gas pipeline through tortoise habitats in southern Nevada. The draft comment letter is distributed on 3/18/2021. With five endorsements, the final letter was submitted to the BLM, including the Nevada Field Office and the State Director’s office on 3/23/2021.

11. John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act (Dingell Act) (CA deserts)
3/5/2021 – On this date, we receive a letter from Jeff Aardahl of Defenders of Wildlife (DoW) asking the Council to cosign a letter seeking information from BLM about the current status of a provision in the Dingell Act regarding wildlife corridors and their intent, if any, to incorporate it into the California Desert Conservation Act Plan, which is distributed the same day. With six endorsements, Ed LaRue lets Aardahl know that the Council supports the letter later in the day, on 3/5/2021. The final letter from DoW was sent to Sky Esser for posting on 3/11/2021.

12. Aratina Solar Project (Kern Co, CA)
3/17/2021 – On this date, Jeff Aardahl of Defenders of Wildlife sends a comment letter with the Council as coauthor. This is a version of a letter that was applied to a project of the same name in 2020 for Initial Study and Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Aratina Solar Farm
Project 2.0, which was distributed to the Board on 3/17/2021, with a deadline of 3/29/2021. With five endorsements, Ed lets Aardahl know on 3/18/2021 that the Council wishes to be a coauthor on the letter. This letter is submitted by Aardahl on 3/25/2021.

13. Shivwits Plateau Landscape Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (Mohave Co, AZ)
3/8/2021 – On this date, we get a notice from BLM announcing Public Scoping on this proposed restoration project would take place on the Shivwits Plateau, Mojave County, Arizona within Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument (GCPNM), which is distributed on 3/18/2021, with a due date of 4/7/2021. On 4/4/2021, Maggie Fusari receives information the project is not in tortoise habitat.

14. Centennial, Panamint and Slate Range Herd Areas Wild Burro Gather Plan (Kern Co, CA)
3/16/2021 – On this date, we receive a notice from the Ridgecrest Field Office of the BLM with a link to this draft EA, which is distributed on 3/18/2021, with a deadline of 4/15/2021. The draft letter is distributed to the Board for approval on 4/13/2021. With 8 endorsements, the letter is submitted on 4/15/2021.

15. Oberon Solar Project (Riverside Co, CA)
3/17/2021 – On this date, we receive a notice from a third party with a link soliciting scoping comments, which is distributed on 3/18/2021, with a deadline of 4/19/2021. Oberon Solar Project would be on 4,700-acres of BLM-managed public lands in Riverside Co, CA. The draft letter is distributed to the Board for approval on 4/13/2021. With 8 endorsements, the letter is submitted on 4/15/2021.

16. ADOT’s Tentative Five-Year Construction Program (Arizona)
3/18/2021 – On this date, we receive a notice from Arizona Department of Transportation with a link soliciting comments on the five-year draft plan, which is distributed on 3/18/2021, with a deadline of 6/3/2021.

17. Lake Mead Complex Wild Horse and Burro Gather Plan Environmental Assessment (Nevada)
4/1/2021 – Due to personal workloads, Ed LaRue is unable to comment on this project.

18. Lithium exploration project (Wikieup, AZ)
4/12/2021 – Mining project comments are due by 5/11/2021.

19. Commercial OHV touring in the Nelson Hills area of Eldorado Valley (Nevada)
## Ecosystems Advisory Committee
### Summary Table from 1/9/2021 to 5/1/2021

**Current date for this latest table revision is:** 4/30/2021

<table>
<thead>
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<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Dates (2020/2021)</th>
<th>Board Member Responses</th>
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<tr>
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<td>BJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gamebird Substation</td>
<td>12/17/20 1/12 1/19 1/16</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alta Mesa Wind Farm</td>
<td>1/4/21 1/20 1/24 1/24</td>
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<td>Y/PI</td>
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<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Participate in WEMO legal challenge</td>
<td>1/26/21 1/26 asap 2/4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cosign NOI to sue</td>
<td>2/25 2/25 asap 3/1</td>
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<td>CBD petition for USFWS funding</td>
<td>2/16/21 2/16 2/19 2/17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Shiwits Plateau</td>
<td>3/8 3/18 4/7 N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>ADOT 5-year Plan</td>
<td>3/18 3/18 6/3 N/A</td>
<td>Maggie Fusari indicates there’s no need to comment on this project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Codes:**
- **Y** = Vote of Yes
- **N** = Vote of No
- **PI** = Provided input
- **Blank** = No Response
- **R** = Recused
- **A** = Authors/Lead Board member
- **NA** = Replied they were not able to respond by indicated date

**Notes:**
- On 2/17 learn that the draft environmental document is being rejected, so no need to comment
- Not in tortoise habitat, so no comments submitted
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<td>4/30</td>
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<td>5/11</td>
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BJ = Becky Jones, BP = Bruce Palmer, CJ = Cristina Jones, EL = Ed LaRue, GD = Greer Dolby, HK = Halle Kohn, JH = Judy Hohman, JP = Joe Probst, KB = Kristin Berry, KM = Ken MacDonald, MF = Maggie Fusari, MQ = Mari Quillman, MT = Michael Tuma, MV = Michel Vamstad, PW = Pete Woodman