Desert Tortoise Council
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

21 November 2020
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, Greer Dolby, Peter Woodman, 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: None Guests: None.

A. Welcome/Announcements/Introductions: None.

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

   a. Meeting Minutes of 22 August 2020: Ed LaRue prepared draft minutes at the last Zoom Board meeting, which were distributed, reviewed, and approved today as final with no changes. Motion made (Joe Probst), seconded (Kristin Berry), and unanimously approved to accept the draft minutes as amended to be final. • Ed LaRue will provide both the August 22, 2020 and January 11, 2020 (currently missing) to Sky Esser to post on the website.

C. Review of Board Actions since Last Board Meeting: There have been no actions requiring voting by Board members since our August meeting.

D. Special Items:

   a. Update on Uplisting of Agassiz’s Desert Tortoise in California: The petition was formally accepted in late October, so the California Fish and Game Commission has a year to consider this petition. Becky Jones shared that the Commission will be actively working on the review beginning in December 2020. Biologists may determine that uplisting is warranted but the Commission can still disagree. Becky Jones has offered her time to California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to help them consider the petition. Daniel Appleby is the CDFW biologist assigned to this project.

   b. Update on Federal Listing of Sonoran Desert Tortoise: There was a recent status assessment meeting among Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). Cristina Jones said members of this group will be meeting at regular intervals to discuss available data and the listing process.
c. The Center for Large Landscape Conservation’s (CLLC) Desert Tortoise Workshop: Cristina Jones indicated that organizers of this CLLC workshop are considering transportation-related issues of road’s effects on tortoises. Both agency personnel and consultants have been invited to participate.

d. University of Nevada, Las Vegas student tortoise film: Ken MacDonald reported that he has spoken with a student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas who has developed a dozen questions she would like to ask of tortoise experts while interviewing and filming them. The targeted audience would be students. The Council would be provided a draft of the film and may be asked to financially support the project. Several Board members indicated their willingness to participate in the project. During the interviews, the Board should promote participation in and membership to the Council.

E. Next Meeting Date: The next Zoom meeting of the Board of Directors will be between 10:00 a.m. and approximately 2:00 p.m. (PST), on 9 January 2021.

OFFICER/COMMITTEE REPORTS

F. Agency Coordinating Committee’s Report: Cristina Jones reported there has been no recent activity. In the next week-or-so, she will be meeting with Brian Croft of USFWS and others to talk about agency coordination.

G. Treasurer’s Report: The Treasurer’s Report was distributed by Joe Probst. His report shows that as of 20 November 2020, our income has been $117,995.56, with expenses of $159,871.20, and our current total assets of $151,457.05. He reported that the Introductory Course profited about $24,000, although Maggie Fusari said there are a few lingering expenses. Joe Probst will see if the $2,500 GoFundMe contribution has already been made through Pay Pal. Joe Probst will remove extraneous sheets from the Excel spread sheet comprising his report and include only the first page on accounting. Motion made (Ed LaRue), seconded (Cristina Jones), and unanimously approved to accept the Treasurer’s Report (minus the extraneous sheets) as final.

H. Corresponding Secretary’s Report: Becky Jones reported that we received questions about the Introductory Course, a question about tortoise fencing (Should the Council promote a certain fence contractor? Answer: No), and typical materials such as EAC project-related information.

I. Membership Committee’s Report: Mari Quillman provided an electronic report. According to her table, we now have 712 Total members, 391 Active, with 315 Overdue. There have been five new members in the last 30 days. The committee is still discussing posting jobs for member and non-member organizations. They continue to consider ways to clean up the database, working with Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) on the 2021 Symposium, and miscellaneous other items that are ongoing.

J. Nominating Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma shared that the elections needed during the 2021 Annual Business Meeting are Chairperson-elect, Recording Secretary, and Membership Coordinator. After discussion, it was suggested that Mari Quillman serve as the Chairperson-elect (beginning service as Chairperson in 2022), Ed LaRue as Recording Secretary, and someone to be determined for Membership Committee Chair (i.e., Mari Quillman would need to
vacate this chair position to serve as Chairperson-elect. Michael Tuma shared that Paul Delaney at Copper Mountain College is currently unavailable. He has also spoken to a student in Nevada who may be interested in serving, pending more discussion. At the January 9, 2021 Board meeting, we will need to consider the re-election of five Board members at Large whose three-year term limits end, including Greer Dolby, Maggie Fusari, Peter Woodman, Kristin Berry, and Halle Kohn.

K. Ecosystems Advisory Committee’s (EAC) Report: Ed LaRue reported that there were 23 projects identified and all 23 responded to by the Board in the reporting period between 8/22/2020 and 11/21/2020. Ed thanked everyone for their participation in ensuring that all available project comment deadlines were met. Bruce Palmer dismissed himself from the discussion about potential legal actions relative to the Northern Corridor Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Kristin Berry indicated the need to recuse herself from any future decisions leading to legal action.

L. Media Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma reported that Halle Kohn has recently provided a draft newsletter to him that he will soon publish and distribute. Halle Kohn provided a committee report that included features and columns for the newsletter. She also provided the following statistics: Instagram followers: 727 to 842 = 115 new followers since June 2020, Facebook likes: 1,802 to 2,056 = 254 new page likes since June, Facebook followers: 1,896 to 2,183 = 287 new followers since June, and Twitter followers: 262 to 270 = 8 new followers since June. Michael Tuma has been working with Caitlin McMurtrie on developing a social media plan. Three students of the Introductory Course contacted Michael about helping with the social media plan and perhaps serving as newsletter co-editor. Halle Kohn plans to remain as the newsletter editor and would benefit from having a co-editor. Part of the media plan will ensure concurrent website and social media postings. Michael Tuma will ensure that the 2020 Five-Year Strategic Plan is posted to the website.

M. Education and Outreach Committee’s Report: Maggie Fusari’s report was provided electronically. She has been in Contact with the Nevada student developing the film discussed in point D.d above.

N. Grants Committee’s Report: Michael Tuma reported that the Southern California Edison Grant received three new proposals as of yesterday’s deadline. He will be sharing these three proposals with members of the Grants Committee, with Kristin Berry recusing herself as she is affiliated with one of the three proposers. Michael Tuma is working with several people concerning the diversity grant. Lockheed-Martin did not ask the Council to participate in the diversity grant funding this year (they provided $2,000 in the last effort, and the Council added $500), so we need to decide if we want to internally fund the diversity grant in the absence of external funding and determine an amount. Michael Tuma will be posting the availability of the $2,500 Morafka Award in the near future, and will contact Sylvia Morafka about her continued support.

O. Fundraising Committee Report: Greer Dolby reported that since the last meeting, the committee contacted Neal Darby at the Mojave National Preserve about funding tortoise surveys on Cima Dome following the recent fire. This person mentioned that, whereas there was no imminent need for tortoise surveys, there may be research opportunities on tortoise mortality along roads and/or habitat restoration. Mari Quillman will follow-up with the Mojave National
Preserve contact about research/management funding. Several ongoing questions the committee is considering include: (1) Do we want future fundraising efforts to focus on Council improvement and/or membership growth? And, (2) How does fundraising support the Five-Year Strategic Plan? Bruce Palmer shared that the three top priorities of the Strategic Plan were (a) develop better communication with agency contacts, (b) fund actions that promote tortoise recovery, and (c) expand Council membership.

P. Mexico Coordination Committee. Michael Vamstad reported that he wants to encourage participation by Mexican researchers at the Symposium by providing translations of Symposium-related announcements. If there is a good response and it looks like we have participation by Spanish-speaking participants, we may want to hire translator(s) for simultaneous English-to-Spanish interpretation. Michael Vamstad’s travel plans continue to be postponed.

Q. Training Program Committee Report:

a. Introductory Training Course Committee’s Report: Maggie Fusari’s electronic report was distributed. She was very encouraged by the teamwork that resulted in a successful Introductory Course, with 147 paid participants. The entire course was recorded, so we need to consider how and to whom we make the recordings available. Maggie mentioned that at least two paying participants who lost power during the course would benefit from the recordings. She also thought the recordings should be available to the Board. Maggie suggested that for $85/year we consider the purchase of a Vimeo Plus license. Ken MacDonald suggested that each committee should have latitude to spend certain amounts (up to $500 was mentioned) to implement committee efforts without a vote of the full Board (there were no additional discussions or decisions on this suggestion).

b. Advanced Training Courses Committee’s Report: Cristina Jones reported that Scott Hoffman of USFWS will be taking a new position originating from Washington D.C., so no longer out of the Palm Springs, CA office. Even so, Scott Hoffman is still working with Kerry Holcomb and Kim Field to update the 2009 Field Manual, and Cristina Jones continues to participate in the revision representing both the Council and AGFD.

R. Awards Committee’s Reports: Kristin Berry and members of the awards committee continue to look at candidates for awards. There are the annual award, student awards, service awards, etc. that fall into “standard awards.” Kristin suggests that we need to take a closer look at award recipients who are internal (e.g., Board members) compared to external (e.g., outstanding researchers) relative to the Council. For the external group, a management award for outstanding agency/management personnel would be a good idea. Bruce Palmer and Kristin Berry will discuss potential new organization of the awards categories.

S. Annual Symposium Program Committee’s Report: Kristin Berry reported that Maggie Fusari, Mari Quillman, and Cristina Jones have been working on essential components of the Symposium and need to schedule additional coordination meetings to continue to plan logistics. They have been working with David Hedrick of TSA to talk about managing posters and having the photo-contest on the website with a mechanism for voting (e.g., identify photographers, categories for their photos, etc.). Judging the photos will likely be the simple part. The posters can be presented in a separate virtual room and available for viewing to all registrants. The awards for both posters and photos should be presented as part of the program. “E-cards” can be used to determine and later identify raffle winners. The online store should be functional by early February.
There may be enough presentations for there to be a total of six half-day sessions. Kristin has already received more than 30 abstracts, and is hoping to have two plenary speakers or an invited speaker to begin each morning. Elliott Jacobson has recently published two large volumes and is excited to talk about these new books. Given the USFWS’ road workshops, Kristin may not pursue several speakers on road impacts. There may be a paper on badger predation, a way to assay DNA to identify predators, several papers on Bolson tortoise, several memorials (e.g., for Phil Rosen and Phil Medica), translocation in Ivanpah Valley, etc. It will be important for TSA to work with presenters to be sure they understand the logistics of presenting over Zoom during the Symposium (to be discussed by the subcommittee mentioned above).

T. COVID/Public Safety Policy: Ken MacDonald deferred this item until the next meeting.

U. Diversity Statement: Ken MacDonald deferred this item until the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

V. Strategic Plan: Judy Hohman suggested that we have scheduled discussion(s) on progress of the Strategic Plan during subsequent Board meetings.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Ken MacDonald, at 2:00 pm.

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 11/21/2020

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

1. **Lake Powell Pipeline Draft Environmental Impact Statement (eastern Nevada)**  
   6/4/2020 – A notice for the Draft EIS on the Lake Powell Pipeline is received on **6/4/2020**, with a comment deadline of **9/8/2020**, distribute to the Board on **6/15/2020**. The draft letter is distributed to the Board on **9/7/2020**. With 11 endorsements, the final letter is submitted on **9/8/2020**.

2a. **DTC - Northern Corridor Draft EIS and Amended HCP (St George, Utah)**  
   6/11/2020 – Receive link to draft EIS, amended Resource Management Plan, and amended Habitat Conservation Plan on **6/11/2020**, with a deadline for comments on **9/10/2020**, distribute to the Board on **6/15/2020**. After 50 hours of review and tabulated comments, Ed LaRue shares the draft comments with others on **8/10/2020** to begin finalizing our comments. The draft comments are distributed on **9/4/2020**. With 11 endorsements, the final letter is submitted on **9/8/2020**.

2b. **CSU - Northern Corridor Draft EIS and Amended HCP (St George, Utah)**  
   9/6/2020 – Draft comments from Conserve Southwest Utah (CSU) were received on **9/6/2020** and immediately distributed to the Board. The draft letter includes the Council on the cover page as a coauthor, so the question to the Board is do we endorse the comment letter as a coauthor? With 4 endorsements, Ed LaRue lets CSU know that we are willing to appear as coauthors on their final letter on **9/8/2020**.

3. **Golden Valley Transmission Line (Kingman, AZ)**  
   7/31/20 – On **7/31/20**, Richard Spotts provides the Council with a link to this project, which was distributed to the Board on **7/31/2020** and has a deadline of **9/2/2020**. The draft comment letter is circulated to the Board on **8/31/2020**. With seven endorsements, the final letter is submitted on **9/2/2020**.

4. **Minnesota-Connor Mine and Mill Site (Mohave County, AZ)**  
   8/6/2020 – After a failed attempt for BLM to send this directly to Ed LaRue, Becky Jones forwarded the information and link to Ed on **8/6/2020**, which was immediately forwarded to the Board, with a due date of **8/30/2020**. The draft letter is circulated to the Board on **8/23/2020**. With nine endorsements, this letter was submitted on **8/28/2020**.

5. **Aratina Solar Farm project (Kern County, CA)**  
   8/24/2020 – On **8/24/2020**, Ed LaRue receives a draft letter from Jeff Aardahl of Defenders of Wildlife, with a due date of **9/14/2020**. Ed responds with suggested edits on **8/26/2020**. The revised version of the letter is sent back to Ed and forwarded to the Board for approval on **8/27/2020**. With nine endorsements, Ed lets Jeff know that the Council approves the latest version of the letter on **9/2/2020**. Defenders submits the letter to Kern County on **9/3/2020**.
6. XpressWest High-Speed Rail & Desert Bighorn Sheep Migratory Corridors (Vville to Vegas)  
8/25/2020 – On 8/26/2020, Ed LaRue (on vacation) becomes aware of a request of 8/25/2020 from National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) asking the Council to cosign a letter asking Caltrans to provide underpasses for bighorn sheep. After Ed responds to NPCA that there is no mention of tortoise, the letter is revised, redistributed for endorsement, and due on 8/27/2020. With four endorsements, Ed lets Chris Clarke know we are signatory on 8/27/2020.

7. Training and Public Land Withdrawal Extension, Fort Irwin, CA (San Bernardino Co, CA)  
9/1/2020 – On 9/1/2020, Jeff Aardahl invites the Council to cosign a Defenders of Wildlife letter on the above-referenced project, which Ed LaRue immediately distributes, with a deadline on 9/10/2020. With eight endorsements, the final letter was submitted by Defenders on 9/8/2020.

8. Yellow Pine Solar Project Follow-up Letter to BLM (Clark Co, Nevada)  
9/4/2020 – On 9/4/2020, we receive emails from Laura Cunningham and Kevin Emmerich of Basin and Range Watch (BRW) alerting us that our comment letter dated 5/1/2020 was not addressed in the Final EIS for the Yellow Pine Solar Project. After sending proof of submittal of our letter to BLM to BRW, Ed LaRue receives a letter addressed to BLM to be cosigned by the Council. With four endorsements and one recusal, Ed informs BRW on 9/6/2020 that they may submit the letter with our logo.

9. CDFW Small Game Guzzler Enhancement EA (Riverside Co., California)  
8/10/2020 – We receive a draft EA from a third party on 8/10/2020 regarding the replacement of five quail guzzlers in Riverside County, including three in critical habitat, with a due date of 9/8/2020. The draft letter is distributed on 9/7/2020. With 10 endorsements and 1 recusal, the final letter is submitted on 9/8/2020.

10. Ivanpah Control Project (Bishop to Barstow, California)  
8/31/2020 – On 8/31/2020 we receive a link to this project from Aspen Environmental, which involves a 358-mile transmission line from Bishop to Barstow, where the notice was distributed on 9/8/2020 and comments due on 9/30/2020. The draft letter is distributed to the Board on 9/28/2020. With six endorsements, the final letter is submitted on 9/30/2020.

11. Arrow Canyon Solar Project SEIS (Clark Co, Nevada)  
8/27/2020 – Ed LaRue receives a link for this project on 8/27/2020, distributes it to the Board on 9/9/2020, with a due date of 9/21/2020. The draft letter is distributed to the Board on 9/15/2020. With the minimum of four endorsements, the final letter is submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs on 9/20/2020.

12. Kudu Solar Project (Kern County, California)  
9/28/2020 – Jeff Aardahl (Defenders of Wildlife) drafted a letter that was distributed on 9/28/2020, which has a deadline of 10/9/2020. Since Ed LaRue worked on this project, he recused himself and Ken MacDonald is the signatory on behalf of the Council. With eight endorsements and one recusal, the final letter was submitted by Defenders on 10/2/2020.
13. Kalamazoo Chloride Project (Mohave County, AZ)
9/28/2020 – On 9/28/2020, the BLM contacted Ed LaRue directly with a notice of this project. The draft letter was distributed to the Board on 10/6/2020, with a due date of 10/28/2020. With six endorsements and one recusal, the final letter is submitted on 10/15/2020.

14. Arica Solar, LLC and Victory Pass I, LLC (Riverside County, CA)
10/2/2020 – The Council was contacted by a third party (not BLM) for two solar projects, each affecting approximately 2,000 acres (at this time, it is not clear if these are interrelated projects or why BLM has provided a single notice for two projects). Due on 11/2/2020, Ed LaRue distributes the notice on 10/6/2020 and the draft letter on 10/29/2020. With five endorsements, the final scoping comment letter is submitted to CDFW and BLM on 10/30/2020.

15. Spring Mountain Raceway (Pahrump, NV)
10/2/2020 – The Council was contacted by a third party (not USFWS) for this raceway project near Pahrump, NV. Unlike most projects on public lands, this one is on private lands and has an EA and HCP. Due on 11/2/2020, Ed LaRue distributes the notice on 10/6/2020 and the draft comment letter on 10/24/2020. With six endorsements, the final letter is submitted to USFWS using the portal on 10/31/2020.

16. Crown Castle Communications Network (Clark County, NV)
10/6/2020 – The Council was contacted by a third party (not BLM) for this communication network. With comments due on 11/6/2020, Ed LaRue distributes the notice on 10/6/2020. The draft letter was circulated to the Board on 11/3/2020. With five endorsements and one recusal, the final letter is submitted to the BLM on 11/5/2020.

17. Oppose new regulations weakening critical habitat protections (National)
10/7/2020 – On 10/7/2020, we receive a request from Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) asking the Council to cosign an electronic form letter opposing the USFWS’ new regulation that would weaken critical habitat protections for endangered species. The letter also references the regulation that came out last month defining “habitat” under the Endangered Species Act. The request is immediately distributed to the Board, with a deadline of 10/8/2020. With six endorsements, the final letter was submitted on 10/8/2020.

18. Conserve SW Utah letter on Northern Corridor (St George, UT)
10/16/2020 – On 10/16/2020, we receive a request from CSU asking if the Council will cosign a letter to BLM concerning Red Cliffs Coalition Issues with the Inclusion and Consideration of Cost Estimates in the Northern Corridor Final Environmental Impact Statement, 2800 (UTC0300), UTU-93620, which was immediately distributed, with a deadline of 10/20/2020. With five immediate endorsements and one later, we informed CSU on 10/16/2020 that the Council is willing to cosign the letter.

19. BLM’s EA for the Long Valley Road Extension ROW (Washington City, UT)
10/26/2020 – We receive a draft letter from Tom Butine of Conserve SW Utah on 10/26/2020 asking if the Council want to cosign their letter regarding this road that would enter into an ACEC. With four endorsements, Ed LaRue informs Butine on 10/26/2020 that the Council is willing to cosign the letter.
20. Connectivity of Mojave Desert Tortoise Populations (Desert-wide)
10/18/2020 – On 10/18/2020, we receive a notice from a third party for an opportunity to provide comments on a draft white paper entitled "Connectivity of Mojave Desert Tortoise Populations: Management Implications for Maintaining a Viable Recovery Network." Our comments are distributed for internal review on 10/28/2020, with a letter addressed to Glen Knowles of USFWS and deadline of 11/2/2020. With five endorsements, final comments were submitted to the USFWS on 10/30/2020.

21. Avi Kwa Ame National Monument (Clark Co, Nevada)
11/7/2020 – On 11/7/2020, Ed LaRue receives a link from a third party asking the Council to sign a petition establishing the new Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Clark County, which is distributed to the Board on 11/9/2020. With four endorsements, Ed signs the petition on behalf of the Council on 11/10/2020, and also submits a note via the petition to the Nevada commissioners making the decision.

22. XpressWest High-Speed Rail & Desert Bighorn Sheep Migratory Corridors (Vville to Vegas)
11/9/2020 – On 11/9/2020, Ed LaRue receives a request from National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) asking the Council to cosign a letter asking Caltrans and other entities to ensure there are overpasses (note this is similar to but different from the letter in #6 above), which is distributed immediately. Receive a revised version of the letter with desert tortoise specifically added as being benefitted, and with four votes, inform Chris Clarke on 11/10/2020 that NPCA may have the Council as a cosigner.

23. Stagecoach Solar Project Notice of Preparation Comments (San Bernardino Co, CA)
11/9/2020 – On 11/9/2020, we receive a notice from Jeff Aardahl concerning the above project, with a deadline for comments on 11/13/2020, the draft letter was distributed on 11/10/2020. With four endorsements, the final letter is submitted on 11/11/2020, and shared with a coalition of environmental groups concerned about Lucerne Valley.
Summary Table from 8/22/2020 to 11/21/2020

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**Notes:**

- 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.