Desert Tortoise Council
Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

26 March 2022
Zoom Online Meeting

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson, Mari Quillman 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, Peter Woodman, Judy Hohman, Ken MacDonald, Maggie Fusari, Mari Quillman, Michael Tuma, Becky Jones, Joe Probst, Ed LaRue, Halle Kohn, and Michael Vamstad. Absent: Cristina Jones, Bruce Palmer Guests: Ron Berger and Jun Lee with the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) and Heidi Brannon with Solution Strategies to discuss the illegal cannabis grow farm issue.

A. Welcome/Announcements/Introductions: None.

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

C. Approval of Recent Meeting Minutes: Ed LaRue prepared draft minutes for both the most recent virtual Board meeting on 1/8/2022 and the Annual Business Meeting on 2/15/2022, which were distributed, reviewed, and approved today as final. Motion made (Ken MacDonald), seconded (Joe Probst), and unanimously approved to accept both sets of draft minutes as amended to be final.

D. Review of Board Actions since Last Board Meeting:

1. Revised Bylaws: On 1/10/2022, Bruce Palmer distributed revised Bylaws asking for comments or endorsements no later than 1/11/2022, so they could be posted within 30 days of the Annual Business Meeting. On 1/12/2022, Bruce Palmer motioned to approve the proposed revisions of the Bylaws (dated 1/12/2022) for consideration and voting by the general membership during the Annual Business Meeting, seconded by Mari Quillman, and approved unanimously by 11 other Board members on 1/12/2022.

2. Council Zoom account: Based on research provided by Ken MacDonald in an email on 1/13/2022, Kristin Berry made a motion to acquire a Council Zoom account for $149 plus any taxes and fees, to be updated annually, as needed, which was seconded by Michael Tuma, and approved unanimously on 1/14/2022 with 11 votes.

3. Grant Awarded to Transitions Habitat Conservancy (THC): In an email dated 3/15/2022, Michael Tuma informed the Board that the newly-named Grants and Academic Funding Committee awarded THC $9,000 for the Edison International grant to implement restoration activities in the Fremont-Kramer Critical Habitat Unit.
E. Special Discussion Items:

1. Website Maintenance: Kristin Berry and Mari Quillman will work with Sky Esser to update the Council’s website and keep announcements about Symposium information current/up to date.

2. Cannabis grow farms: Our three guests (see above) joined us at 10:30 am for a special discussion. Heidi Brannon shared that within the last two years, illegal grow houses have inundated Apple Valley and other portions of San Bernardino County, including critical habitat. As many as 80 grow houses in Apple Valley may have already impaired tortoise habitat connectivity. Recent data suggest that as many as 1,000 acres have been adversely affected. There is a Marijuana Enforcement Team at the county level, which recently approved $10 million to abate illegal grow houses. Most of these facilities are run by cartels, not mom and pop operators. Deputies have been shot at in the Lucerne Valley and Newberry Springs areas. The Mojave Water Agency has also been working to track locations and stop water theft and groundwater contamination. The amount of marijuana grown does not matter, all illegal cultivation is a misdemeanor, which should be changed to felony status. The only places where cultivation is legal in the California desert are within the city limits of Adelanto and California City, and in Inyo County, all of which require permitting through legal means. The state has a remediation fund that may not apply to illegal activities like these. Enforcement may be facilitated if the private landowners can be held responsible, including restoring damage. The county could contact private land owners through tax bills to let them know of their remediation responsibilities. Maggie Fusari shared that there is an upcoming meeting of sheriffs on April 23, 2022 that we may want to attend. Heidi will provide contact information to Mari Quillman, who will share the contact information with the Board so that we know to whom we can report illegal grow houses. • Halle Kohn will develop a newsletter article on the issue of illegal grow farms.

Ron Berger has tried to reach out to California Cannabis Industry Association that oversees legal cultivation but has had no response. Ron found that EcoFlight would need to charge between $6,000 and $9,000 for the fuel to provide otherwise free flights over the desert to map the facilities, with the added problem of entering Edwards Air Force Base restricted flight areas. Ron suggested contacting Google, Air Force, and/or U.S. Geological Survey for real time images of the facilities. Finally, he spoke to Friends of Jawbone, where Randy Banis indicated his support to use an app that DTPC could produce and riders could use to report facilities. He said that DTPC is willing to instigate a coalition to address the issue. Jun Lee shared that the state already has a website that allows people to report facilities online. He will continue to research regulatory factors, including law enforcement and policies, governing legal versus illegal cultivation.

Judy Hohman and Becky Jones have been documenting direct and indirect impacts of the illegal cannabis grow farms on the Mojave desert tortoise and its habitat. They suggest adding other species of special concern to this outline including Mohave ground squirrel, western burrowing owl, American badger, and desert kit fox. Kristin Berry suggested adding LeConte’s thrasher. The purpose is to let the public know what the impacts are to these species and their habitats as they are a public trust resource. Our members who are on the ad hoc committee pursuing this issue will continue to meet with our guests and others as they join the coalition.
F. Next Meeting Date: The next virtual meeting of the Board of Directors will be on Zoom, beginning at 10:00 a.m. (PST), on 21 May 2022, and the meeting after that is scheduled for 6 August 2022. For future meetings, Mari Quillman will distribute the Zoom invitation to all Board members within several days of the meeting.

OFFICER/COMMITTEE REPORTS

G. Treasurer’s Report: In an electronic version of the Treasurer’s Report dated 3/26/2022, Joe Probst shared that our total income for 2022 so far is $37,768.57; total expenses are $36,479.08; with total assets of $228,299.85. Motion made (Michael Vamstad), seconded (Ken MacDonald), and unanimously approved to accept the Treasurer’s Report as final. Joe also provided an Excel spread sheet showing the 2022 proposed budget versus the 2022 actual expenditures, to date.

H. Corresponding Secretary’s Report: Becky Jones provided her report via email on 3/25/2022. Most of the correspondence was for projects in Arizona and one from Nevada, which is an indication that BLM is getting better at informing us about impending projects. Becky wrote a thank you letter to Sylvia Morafka for her contribution to the Morafka Award.

I. Membership Committee’s Report: In an electronic version of her report on 3/26/2022, Halle Kohn reported that members included 833 Total, 274 Active, 551 Renewal Overdue, which a decrease in 49 members since January 2022. Halle created a QR code that Ed LaRue used in Reno at The Wildlife Society meeting, where at least a few people were observed using it with their cell phones, although Ed is not sure if this resulted in any new members. Halle plans to create an eblast calendar to reach out to current and past members. She may develop a procedure for job postings in the future.

J. Nominating Committee’s Report: In an electronic version of her report of 3/26/2022, Mari Quillman reported the elections were completed at the 2022 Annual Business Meeting where Joe Probst and Becky Jones were reelected as Treasurer and Corresponding Secretary, respectively. Bruce Palmer and Michael Vamstad were also voted into the Board Member at Large positions. The total size of the Board is currently 14 (Bylaws require no less than 8 and no more than 20 members of the Board). We would like new Board members with one or more of the following skills: Grant Writing; Fundraising; Habitat Restoration/Invasive Plant Control (“deep roots” in these skills); Early Career Professionals; Educators; Utah Representatives; Various Types of Diversity (willing to reach out to increase diversity); and Anyone Willing to Roll Up Their Sleeves and Do Work. Ed LaRue will reconnect with a person in Utah to see if she has any interest in serving on the Board.

K. Ecosystems Advisory Committee’s (EAC) Report: In an electronic version of his report (see attachment), Ed LaRue reported that there were 18 projects identified and 10 reviewed by the Board in the reporting period between 1/8/2022 to 3/26/2022, so no opportunities were missed and seven projects are outstanding, some imminent. There seems to be more effort by BLM and other proponents to contact the Council directly, through both hard copy letters and email. For the Harris Springs travel management plan environmental assessment, the BLM was so proactive in revising the final environmental assessment to address our concerns, that Ed contacted the BLM and thanked them for their responsiveness. There was a recent email stating that the uplisting of Mojave desert tortoise from state Threatened to Endangered will likely be postponed another year, until April 2023. Since Cristina Jones has to recuse herself from EAC activities and Greer Dolby recently resigned, it is important that we seek other Arizona Board member(s) to help Maggie Fusari provide feedback on EAC activities for projects in Arizona.
L. Media Committee’s Report: Halle Kohn’s report of 2/23/2022 shared the following statistics: Instagram followers: 1,274 to 1,337 = 63 new followers since December 2021; Facebook likes: 2,463 to 2,562 = 99 new page likes since December 2021; Facebook followers: 2,636 to 2,758 = 122 new followers since December 2021; Twitter followers: 259 to 315 = 56 new followers since December 2021; and LinkedIn followers: 100 to 112 = 12 new followers since December 2021. The Media Committee has been posting photo contest winners every few days on Instagram and Facebook since the end of the 2022 Symposium. Some of these posts have impressive engagement! So far this year we have posted on Instagram and Facebook 27 times, as compared to last year’s total of 37 posts. The 46th issue of the Newsletter was published by Halle Kohn on January 21, 2022, with the next one anticipated in June 2022. Halle Kohn will contact Maggie Fusari about the introductory workshop and Michael Tuma about grants activities for potential newsletter articles.

M. Strategic Planning Committee Report: There was no report in Bruce Palmer’s absence.

N. Grants and Academic Funding Committee’s Report: In his report dated 3/26/2022, Michael Tuma reported the Morafka Award (Feb 2022) was awarded to Jacquelyn Tleimat from Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi ($2,500); the Best Student Paper Award (Feb 2022) was awarded to M.A. Walden and Steve Hromada from University of Nevada, Reno ($500 each); that Southern California Edison Funding (Mar 2022) was awarded to Transition Habitat Conservancy (THC; $9,000); and a report from THC for the first round of funding is expected in the coming weeks.

O. Agency Coordinating Committee’s Report: Cristina Jones was not here but let Mari Quillman know that there is nothing to report at this time.

P. Mexico Coordination Committee: Michael Vamstad’s electronic report was distributed this morning, indicating that his committee was active this quarter by reaching out to Mexican researchers to offer fee waivers for the Symposium. The Symposium announcement page was translated into Spanish and distributed to the email group on file. There were three researchers/groups that received the code to waive the symposium fee. Additionally, during the Symposium Michael Vamstad provided translation for Dr. Albert Bertolero from Spain who was uncomfortable giving his presentation in English.

Q. Training Program Committee Report:

   1. Introductory Training Course Committee’s Report: In an electronic version of her 3/26/2022 report, Maggie Fusari shared that in 2021 there were the Online Lecture Course and two (identical) outdoor-only Field Workshops. These were separate offerings although most people who completed the online lecture series were able to sign on for a field workshop. Understanding that both the lectures and the field training are vital for a complete course, the 2022 plan is to present them as one, combined offering. The plan is that all attendees will register for the lecture series, presented on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, October 28-29, 2022. After taking a very simple online quiz (to assure that they did attend the class) they will come to Ridgecrest on either November 4 or 5, 2022. We will continue to rely on David Hedrick or Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) for online support for Zoom. We need to replace Ray Bransfield as our U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) contact, who will have retired by this fall. Ed LaRue suggested contacting Brian Croft in the Palm Springs office here in California. Judy Hohman pointed out that there are also USFWS offices in the other three states. Last year’s registration for the lectures was $150 (student registration was $50). Registration for a workshop was $150 (student registration was $100). Maggie proposes a fee of $300 for the complete course ($200 for students), and an audit fee for the lectures of $25.
2. **Advanced Training Courses Committee’s Report**: Cristina Jones told Maggie Fusari that there are no plans for an advanced course in 2022.

R. **Education and Outreach Committee’s Report**: Maggie Fusari shared that the only recent activity was Ed LaRue’s visit to the Western Section of The Wildlife Society (TWS) meeting in Reno, NV, where he and Sharon Dougherty sat at the products table and sold about the same amount of SWAG as we sold several years ago in Yosemite for the same event. Maggie will continue to work with Halle Kohn and Michael Tuma to reach out to academic institutions via social media. **Maggie Fusari** will check into the Council having a products table at the TSA meeting in August in Tucson, AZ. • **Joe Probst** indicated he would be willing to transport the products to the TSA event. • **Mari Quillman** will work with **Joe Probst** (who will provide Mari with the recent inventory) and Sky Esser to use photographs to develop the online store.

S. **Annual Symposium Program Committee’s Report**: In an electronic version of her report dated 3/23/2022, Kristin Berry reported we had 216 registrants to the Symposium; 18 of these were compensated and 6 of the 18 were speakers. **Maggie Fusari** will be sure the six invited speakers obtain recordings, at least, of their presentations, and **Kristin Berry** will be sure Maggie has the list of compensated speakers. Ed LaRue and Michael Vamstad did great jobs chairing the meeting. And special thanks to Michael Vamstad for assisting Dr. Albert Bertolero and translating his outstanding and critically important translocation paper. The 216 registrants resulted in usually about 100 people online at a time, based on Kristin’s checks of those numbers in the box at the bottom of the screen. At best in Las Vegas, we had about 250, or 275, and once 325 registrants. Kristin thought we had a better quality program this year, because we were able to obtain top-of-the-line giants in a field (climate, translocation, viviparity) from sources in the USA, Europe, and Australia.

What about the 2023 Symposium? Kristin said that she is committed to preparing the Program but will not likely be able to attend in person. We have made a $3,000 deposit to a facility in St. George, Utah, which is still active, and Joe Probst did not know of a deadline for that deposit. But we still need to decide if we want to have it virtual or hybrid. It is important that all of us continue to look at hybrid events to see how well they are working (Ed LaRue shared that the TWS hybrid event in Reno worked very well). **Mari Quillman** will contact TSA about costs associated with their hybrid event.

T. **Fundraising Committee Report**: Ken MacDonald has agreed to chair this committee. He has contacted several people and will continue to do so. Prior to Greer Dolby’s resignation, the committee consisted of Mari Quillman, Judy Hohman, and Ken MacDonald. Maggie Fusari is considering the use of bitcoins and subsequently provided the following link for more information: [https://thegivingblock.com/resources/accept-bitcoin-donations/](https://thegivingblock.com/resources/accept-bitcoin-donations/). Judy Hohman had been working with Greer concerning golf tournaments as fundraisers, and Ken has been involved in golf and poker tournaments as a means of raising money. **Judy Hohman** will provide information to **Ken MacDonald** about golf tournaments involving realtors for fundraising. Joe Probst shared that the Amazon Smile account is up and running, and the Go Fund Me program was never established. **Joe Probst** will send pertinent information on Amazon Smile and Go Fund Me to **Ken MacDonald** for his use.
U. Awards Committee’s Reports: Kristin Berry’s report from 3/23/2022 identified the 2022 awards recipients as follows: Kristin H. Berry Annual Award: A. Peter Woodman; Robert C. Stebbins Research Award: Dr. Brian D. Todd, Dr. Tracey D. Tuberville, and Dr. Kurt A. Buhlmann; Glenn R. Stewart Service Awards: Dr. Alice Karl, Rachel Woodard, T.G. Jackson, Cynthia Furman, and Don Zdeba and Jason Lillion of Indian Wells Valley Water District; Power of Persistence (a new award): Jeff Aardahl; and Implementation of Conservation (a new award): Kerry L. Holcomb. Going forward, Kristin Berry will coordinate with Sylvia Morafka, Michael Tuma, and Mari Quillman to be sure the final Morafka Award meets her expectations.

V. Covid Policy: Michael Tuma reported that the policy is still in its draft form, that there has been no recent activity on this policy, and that we need to continue to look at available information to keep abreast of the latest standards.

NEW BUSINESS: No new business was identified.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson, Mari Quillman, at 12:40 pm.

Draft minutes were recorded, distributed on 26 March 2022, 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 26 March 2022

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

1. **Cosign Defenders of Wildlife Letter to USFWS to Reassess Tortoise Recovery Plans (4 states)**
   1/4/2022 – On this date, Ed LaRue receives a draft letter from Jeff Aardahl of Defenders with the Council as a coauthor directed to the USFWS Regional Director in Sacramento requesting an update of the latest, 2004 formal assessment of the recovery plan. On 1/5/2022, Ed provided comments on the letter, which is currently in draft form and will be distributed to the Board once Aardahl has received approval from Defenders’ national office.

2. **EA for Waddy's Parking Corral at Sand Mountain (UT)**
   1/14/2022 – On this date, we receive an email from the BLM announcing the availability of the Environmental Assessment (EA), with comments due on 2/15/2022. The draft comment letter is distributed on 2/6/2022, and with seven endorsements, was submitted to the BLM on 2/12/2022.

3. **Pathways to 30 x 30 California: Accelerating Conservation of California’s Nature (CA)**
   1/13/2022 – On this date, we receive the notice from a third party that the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) is soliciting comments on conserving 30% of California wildlands by 2030, with comments due by 1/28/2022. The draft comment letter is distributed to the Board on 1/24/2022, and with four endorsements, is submitted to CNRA on 1/28/2022.

4. **Harris Springs Recreation Area Management Plan (NV)**
   1/19/2022 – On this date, we receive a link to comment on this project, which has a deadline of 2/18/2022. There were no links to documents on the BLM’s website, so Ed LaRue sends an email to BLM (John Asselin) on 1/29/2022 asking for any available documents. With seven endorsements, the final letter was submitted to BLM on 2/15/2022.

5. **So Cal Gas Co CDCA Operations and Maintenance Long-Term Incidental Take Permit (CA)**
   1/19/2022 – On this date, Becky Jones receives a notice from a project consultant, which she forwards to Ed LaRue on the same date, with a deadline of 2/18/2022. On 1/29/2022, Ed registers for a webinar at 4 pm on 2/2/2022, which he attends and asks to become an affected interest. With five endorsements, the final letter was submitted on 2/18/2022.

6. **Sign on letter to Congress: Increase ESA funding in FY23 (National)**
   2/22/2022 – On this date, Ed LaRue receives a request from Stephanie Kurose of Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) providing a link to a form letter, asking if the Council is willing to sign the letter, with a deadline of 3/4/2022. With nine endorsements and one recusal, Ed completes the form on behalf of the Council on 2/24/2022.

7. **Greenlink West Transmission Line (NV)**
   2/1/2022 – We receive a link to an invitation to attend a virtual public information meeting on 2/23/2022. Ed LaRue misses this webinar, but we did provide scoping comments in November 2021 and are on the mailing list for the impeding EIS.

8. **Gold Butte National Monument Implementation Plan (NV)**
   2/13/2022 – On this date, we receive a link from a third party informing us that scoping comments are being solicited until the deadline of 3/3/2022. The draft letter was distributed to the Board and four external reviewers on 2/28/2022. With nine endorsements, the final letter is submitted on 3/3/2022.
9. BLM Online Spring Land Sale in Las Vegas Valley (NV)
2/16/2022 – On this date, we receive a link for information for this land sale, with comments due by 4/4/2022.

10. Virgin East Water Tank and Pipeline (UT)
2/16/2022 – On this date, we receive a link and background information from Laura Goff of the BLM (Ed LaRue responds with an email thanking her for the contact), with a deadline of 3/17/2022. After checking maps and the draft environmental assessment, find that this project is outside the tortoise’s range.

11. Morongo Highway 62 Communication Site project (CA)
2/17/2022 – A third party sends us a link for scoping comments on the project on the indicated date, with a deadline of 3/21/2022. Ed LaRue attends a virtual public meeting (with 90 participants) hosted by the BLM on 3/17/2022 and distributes the draft letter on the same date. With five endorsements, the final letter is submitted to the BLM on 3/20/22.

12. Logandale Trails Planning Criteria (NV)
2/4/2022 – On this date, a third party provides information on this new travel management issue, with comments due by 3/7/2022. The draft letter for this project is distributed to the Board on 3/5/2022, and submitted on 3/7/2022 when nine Board members approved the draft letter.

13. Southern Nevada District Restoration Opportunities (NV)
2/23/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 4/8/2022.

14. Connect Arida and Mohave Substations near Laughlin (NV)
3/2/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 3/31/2022.

15. BIA Chuckwalla Solar (Moapa Indian Reservation, NV)
3/4/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 4/18/2022.

16. El Centro Mineral Exploration Project (CA)
3/4/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 4/4/2022.

17. Mineral Withdrawal Adjacent to Barry M. Goldwater Range (Arizona)
3/9/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 6/7/2022.

18. Sullivan Springs water development for cattle in wilderness (Arizona)
3/10/2022 – A link to this project was received from a third party on the indicated date, was distributed to the Board on 3/12/2022, with a due date of 3/14/2022, which is only a four-day turnaround. The draft letter is circulated on 3/13/2022, and with 10 endorsements is submitted to Arizona BLM on 3/14/2022.
### Ecosystems Advisory Committee

#### Summary Table from 1/8/2022 to 3/26/2022

Current date for this latest table revision is: 3/20/2022

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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

BJ = Becky Jones, BP = Bruce Palmer, CJ = Cristina Jones, EL = Ed LaRue, 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

Final Minutes of Board of Director’s Meeting of the Desert Tortoise Council on 26 March 2022