

Final Final Final

**Desert Tortoise Council,
Minutes of Annual Business Meeting**

**9 February 2021
Virtual Meeting on Zoom Platform**

Ken MacDonald called the Annual Business Meeting to order at 08:00 a.m. in an unprecedented, virtual Zoom meeting. **Motions made, seconded, and approved are shown in bold red font.**

Attendees: Kristin Berry, Halle Kohn, Judy Hohman, Maggie Fusari, Ken MacDonald, Becky Jones, Joe Probst, Mari Quillman, Bruce Palmer, Cristina Jones, Pete Woodman, Greer Dolby, and Ed LaRue. **Guests:** There were approximately 65 Symposium attendees at the Annual Business Meeting.

A. Introductions: Board members introduced themselves to those in attendance.

B. Review Agenda: A preview of today's agenda items was presented by Ken MacDonald.

C. Officer and Committee Reports:

1. Chairperson's Annual Report: Ken MacDonald summarized what will be a detailed Chairperson's report presented later this morning during the Symposium, which will summarize Board member activities during 2020.

2. Treasurer's Report, Annual Budget, Audit Committee Report: Joe Probst read his report, which included the Council's total 2020 income of \$123,995.56, expenses of \$179,487.58, with net assets of \$161,793.84 as of 12/31/2020. The annual audit has not yet been completed. The draft budget has been distributed and will be finalized at the first Board meeting in May 2021. **Motion was made by Ed LaRue, seconded by Bruce Palmer, and the membership in attendance unanimously approved to accept the Treasurer's Report.**

3. Corresponding Secretary's Report: Becky Jones indicated that most of the hard copy mail was relative to federal projects on public lands. There were also emails, with many unsolicited offers to work on our website, and miscellaneous correspondences about pet and wild tortoises. Other inquiries were about the Symposium and workshops.

4. Membership Committee Report: Mari Quillman reported 2,381 people in the Council's contact database, which is about 200 more than in early 2020, including 260 active members, which will change with the Symposium. The committee was enlarged in 2020 but activities and communication were reduced due to COVID-19. The committee's highest priorities for 2021 are to update member benefits, to post job opportunities on the website, to initiate the online store, and recruit new members, particularly students.

5. Nominations Committee Report: In his written report, Michael Tuma shared that in 2020 the Board of Directors was comprised of 15 positions, with five vacant positions. Several Council members have been approached to see if they are interested in serving on the Board. The three positions to be voted on this morning are Chairperson-elect, Recording Secretary, and Membership Coordinator.

6. Ecosystems Advisory Committee Report: Ed LaRue provided a summary report for 2020 indicating that, from 1/12/2020 to 1/9/2021, the Council received 80 notices, commented on 78, authored 44 letters, coauthored 3 letters, cosigned 22 letters, signed 7 petitions, declined to cosign 2 petitions, participated in 1 student film, and expressed our willingness to join 1 lawsuit, if necessary. Environmental actions included 30 in California, 14 in Nevada, 13 in Arizona, 7 in Utah, and 16 on national issues. In terms of responsiveness, we commented on only 20% of the projects in 2017, 90% in 2019, and 97% in 2020.

7. Agency Coordinating Committee Report: Cristina Jones reported that, while the Agency Coordinating Committee held two meetings with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2019, we did not host or participate in formal meetings in 2020. In 2021, we hope to coordinate with the USFWS to include a presentation and lead a discussion on this committee and the Council to each of the Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Teams at their virtual meetings.

8. Training Program Committee Report: Because the advanced training courses, such as the Health Assessment Procedures for Translocations of Mojave Desert Tortoises, require in-person, hands-on curricula, we were unable to hold courses in 2020. We will continue to work with the USFWS on finalizing the 2009 Field Manual, which will serve as the basis to draft specialized curricula for individual advanced trainings on tortoise handling techniques, basic health assessments, telemetry, construction monitoring, and other training in association with agency permitting. We hope to resume in-person courses in 2022.

9. Basic Introductory Course: Maggie Fusari reported there 147 attendees. This was a Zoom webinar, showing the presenters while they were speaking with their PowerPoint presentations on screen and as a group for the two main question and answer sessions. Ed LaRue was our emcee. David Hedrick and Jordan Gray of the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) were our technical hosts. Speakers shared information via the chat function. Participants were not visible and asked questions via the Q&A function. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to TSA, for their support and to Cristina Jones who made that happen. David Hedrick especially walked everyone through both individual rehearsals and an overall technical rehearsal. He solved several serious issues with folks having different computer issues. My personal goal was to assure an excellent, online course. I think we did it. Everyone should be proud. Special thanks to all the speakers (Bruce Palmer, Kristin Berry, Michael Tuma, Alice Karl, Pete Woodman, Ray Bransfield, and Ed LaRue) and to those who assisted on panels (Cristina Jones, Larry LaPré, and Judy Hohman). Also, to those who helped prepare the handouts (Agencies and References) (Cristina Jones, Ray Bransfield, and Judy Hohman). And thanks to Ed LaRue for hand-lettering 147 certificates.

10. Media Committee Report: Ken MacDonald reported for Michael Tuma, Chair of this committee, who was unable to attend. This committee is responsible for the website, social postings, newsletter, and printed media. The Media Committee Policy was finished and approved in 2020, and several new Council members have joined the committee to help with social media posting and newsletter features. The latest newsletter was recently completed by Halle Kohn and posted on our website.

11. Outreach and Education Committee Report: Maggie Fusari reported the Education and Outreach Committee had limited activity to report for 2020. Onsite presentations were not possible, nor was it a good time to arrange field activities or internships. We hope to continue to offer presentations for the California Science Teachers conference, as teachers are among the best resources for passing important information to young people and their families. We are excited that Katerina Koytcheva, a student in Las Vegas, created a film, “Desert tortoises: Protecting a threatened species.” She will show this film on Thursday February 25, at 10:15 a.m. We invite ideas for effective activities (website links, videos, interpretations of important issues, background information about desert tortoises, special information for teachers, opportunities for outreach, etc.). Contact Education & Outreach Committee at outreach@deserttortoise.org.

12. Grants Committee Report: Ken MacDonald reported for Michael Tuma, Chair of this committee, who was unable to attend. Transition Habitat Conservancy was awarded \$9,000 by the Council through funding acquired from Southern California Edison to conduct habitat restoration on Bureau of Land Management lands where high-density tortoise populations occur. In 2020, the Morafka Award winner was Steven Hromada (University of Nevada, Reno) and the Lockheed-Martin Diversity Grant winner was Daniel Guerra (Texas State University). Lockheed-Martin funding was not acquired in 2020, and the Diversity Award could not be offered in 2021.

13. Fundraising Committee Report: Greer Dolby is chair for this new committee, which was formulated in 2019 and became a full standing committee as of today. She and her committee of four are looking at new ways to raise funds through events, merchandise, and strengthening partnerships in 2021. In 2020 an Amazon Smile account for the Council was launched, as well as the first Go Fund Me campaign which raised \$6,000 to respond to tortoises impacted by Arizona wildfires.

14. Awards Committee Report: Four Desert Tortoise Council Awards were given at the 45th Annual Symposium in Las Vegas, Nevada in February 2020. Recipients included Richard Spotts (Annual Award), Santiago Sánchez-Ramírez (Research Award), Cristina Jones (Glenn R. Stewart Service Award), and Peter Woodman (Glenn Stewart Service Award). Sponsors also were given awards.

15. Annual Symposium Program Committee and Local Host Committee Reports: There were 298 attendees at the 45th Symposium in Las Vegas, which cost more than its income. Dr. Kristin Berry has designed an outstanding program for the Council’s first virtual Symposium in 2021. Also, a special thanks to David Hedrick and Jordan Gray of the Turtle Survival Alliance for the enormous amount of time they have put in to help the Council put on the virtual Symposium and to help speakers prepare for the presentations. The host committee includes Mari Quillman, Kristin Berry, Ed LaRue, Cristina Jones, Maggie Fusari, Bruce Palmer, Tracy Bailey, Molly Peters, and Par Singhaseni. In addition, Sky Esser, the Council’s webmaster, also invested a lot of time to post the virtual Symposium components on the website. Thanks so much to our Symposium sponsors, who donated \$12,750, which will help to defray the costs of the Symposium and will add to funding future Council activities.

16. Mexico Tortoise Conservation Coordination Committee. Michael Vamstad indicated he was planning to travel to Sinaloa in 2020 but the trip was cancelled due to COVID-19. The committee reached out to some Mexican biologists, and provided free access to this year's virtual Symposium, which was accepted by several of them.

D. New Business:

1. Election of Officers: The three current nominations are Mari Quillman for Chairperson-elect, Ed LaRue for Recording Secretary, and Halle Kohn for Membership Coordinator. **Given these nominations, no new nominations from the floor, with a total of 62 members available to vote, there were three motions that were seconded and approved for Mari Quillman to serve as Chairperson-elect (98% of the vote), Ed LaRue as Recording Secretary (97% of the vote), and Halle Kohn as Membership Committee Chair (83% of the vote, with the remaining voters abstaining) as per the terms of offices given in the Bylaws.**

Bruce Palmer made the motion to accept Ken MacDonald's summary of activities for 2020, which was seconded by Mari Quillman, and unanimously approved by 88% of those voting, with 12% abstaining.

Joe Probst made the motion to adjourn the Annual Business Meeting, which was seconded by Cristina Jones, and unanimously approved by 91% of those voting, with 9% abstaining.

E. Adjourn to Opening the Symposium: With the above motion, Ken MacDonald adjourned the Annual Business Meeting at 08:36 a.m.

Draft minutes were recorded, later distributed and modified with Board member review and input, then approved in a formal vote in May 2021, and now respectfully submitted as this final version by Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary.



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