



Final Final Final

Desert Tortoise Council, Minutes of Annual Business Meeting

25 February 2025

Palace Station Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV and Virtual

Chairperson, Mari Quillman called the Annual Business Meeting to order at 08:05 a.m. (PST) at the Palace Station Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, NV and virtually on Zoom. **Motions made, seconded, and approved are shown in bold red font.**

Board member attendees: Kristin Berry, Judy Hohman, Maggie Fusari, Ken MacDonald, Mari Quillman, Bruce Palmer, Max Havelka, Pete Woodman, Luke Basulto, Mary Lane Poe, Ed LaRue, Rick Applegate, and David Hedrick (Operations Manager). Absent: Becky Jones and Michael Tuma. **Guests:** There were approximately 15 Symposium attendees in the room and an unknown number on Zoom at the beginning of the Annual Business Meeting.

A. Introductions: Mari Quillman introduced all Board members in the room.

B. Review Agenda: The agenda was provided by Mari Quillman and made available to attendees on our website (deserttortoise.org), with no new items added.

C. Officer and Committee Reports:

1. Chairperson's Annual Report: Mari Quillman welcomed everyone to the Annual Business Meeting. Her summary of Board member accomplishments in 2024 will be shared at the opening session this morning.

2. Treasurer's Report, Annual Budget, Audit Committee Report: In the absence of a formal Treasurer's Report, Mari Quillman shared that our current assets are \$552,924.93. In the footnoted slide¹, Mari shared the various types of income (e.g., Introductory Workshop, Symposium registration and sponsorships, donations, memberships, etc.) and expenses (e.g., operation manager's income, miscellaneous, awards, etc.) affecting our assets.

3. Corresponding Secretary's Report: In the absence of Becky Jones, Ed LaRue reported that typical correspondence includes hard copy mail for memberships, soliciting our joining various organizations, captive tortoise care, notices of proposed projects that Becky shares with the Ecosystems Advisory Committee, donations, and various letters concerning the Basic Introductory Course. With Joe Probst's passing in December 2024, Ed has drafted more than 80 letters thanking people and institutions for their donations to the Council in support of the Symposium and in memory of both Joe and Larry LaPré, previous Board member, who passed away in March 2024.

¹ <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/kguy1d5oljm1xliuikdee/2024-FINANCES-slide.pptx?rlkey=s5f2qvxp8gbcybe89xmzcg7gr&dl=0>

4. Membership Committee Report: With the chairperson position vacant, there was no formal report from this committee.

5. Nominations Committee Report: Committee chair, Ken MacDonald, reported there was only one nomination for Council officers (Recording Secretary) and there are three outstanding vacancies, as covered in Item D.2., below.

6. Ecosystems Advisory Committee (EAC) Report: Ed LaRue provided a summary report² for 2024 indicating that, from 1/7/2024 to 1/11/2025, the Council received 76 notices, commented on 75 (99%), authored 49 letters, coauthored 3 letters, cosigned 18 letters, signed 2 petitions, and missed 1 opportunity to comment. Environmental issues included 34 in California, 18 in Nevada, 11 in Arizona, 3 in Utah, and 8 on multi-state or national issues.

7. Media Committee Report: There was no report in the absence of a committee chair.

8. Grants and Academic Funding Committee Report: In his report dated 12/20/2024, Michael Tuma reported that the Morafka Award was presented to Sean Sutor from Texas Tech University (\$2,500) at the 2024 Symposium. No one applied for the Morafka Award for 2025. Ken Nagy is retiring from the selection committee. The Leeward Award, also presented at the 2024 Symposium, was awarded to Tianyi Xu with the University of Texas at Austin (\$2,500). The Allison Award was not offered in 2024, but a generous donation will allow the Council to offer it in 2025 and 2026 (\$2,500 each year). Sean Sutor was awarded first place for the Best Student Paper at the 2024 Symposium and Adrian C. Slade was awarded second place. The Edison International Funding grant was awarded to The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens (\$9,000), and a report was received from them in December 2024.

9. Training Committee Report: Maggie Fusari shared that the 2024 Introductory Course was completed with lectures on October 25 and 26 and with field days on November 1 and 2. The 2025 indoor virtual portion of the course will be October 24 and 25 with the field days on November 2 and 3. In 2024, there were 200 students, including 100 students on each of the field days, and 23 people audited the course. The fees in 2024 were \$300 (\$200 for students) for early registration, \$400 (\$250 for students) for late registration, and audit-only option for the lectures for \$25.

Mary Lane Poe shared that Kristina Drake of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office will host a closed session Health Assessment Training (HAT) refresher, kick-off meeting here at the Symposium on Wednesday evening from 5:30-6:30. Whereas attendance is not mandatory, this HAT refresher will be available only to previously certified biologists who are eligible to participate. This will be a discussion and a chance for course organizers to engage with course participants, to ask and answer questions, and to help guide the structure and topics to be covered during a virtual course that will be scheduled for later this year.

10. Operations Manager Report: David Hedrick joined the Council in July 2023 as Operations Manager. He oversees fundraising for the Council, development of an online merchandise store, “Drink Beer, Save Tortoises” fundraising events, donations of raffle items using Amazon wish list, helping conduct the Basic Introductory Course, assisting with social media, overseeing digital assets of the Council, and facilitating the Symposium. He is the first (and only) paid employee of the Council in 49 years.

² <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/vjpc6zgwfb1zdx0zjs4b/2024-Summary-of-EAC-Activities.docx?rlkey=2vgyaedzufw64nrf1v7xyhexa&dl=0>

11. Strategic Planning Committee Report: On 1/9/2025, Bruce Palmer provided the Board with a draft of the 2025-2030 Five-year Strategic Plan³ with recommended revisions to the 2020 plan and a 2023 review of progress made under the 2020 plan.

12. Agency Coordinating Committee Report: Seven Council members met virtually with three members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Palms Springs, CA field office on January 16, 2025 to discuss how the two groups can benefit each other's effort concerning tortoise conservation and recovery. Minutes of that meeting are attached in the footnote⁴.

13. Outreach and Education Committee Report: Please contact Education & Outreach Committee at outreach@deserttortoise.org for opportunities to attend various gatherings.

14. Fundraising Committee Report: Ken MacDonald shared that the Flight Line Tap Room had an above average turn out on 11/1/2024 in Ridgecrest, which corresponded with the Introductory Course, resulting in \$150 donations to the Council, and Joe selling \$750 in swag at the event. On 11/2/2024 in Henderson, NV, Mojave Brewing Company donated \$200 for that Drink Beer, Save Tortoises event and Sarah Mortimer from Tortoise Group sold \$288 in Council merchandise during the event. This year's Giving Tuesday campaign via eblast and social media on 12/3/2024 garnered nearly \$400. The end of the year push pulled in nearly \$900. The current donations in honor of Joe Probst are \$2,195. Symposium sponsorships are currently over \$50,000, with a few more anticipated. Ken continues to use the Just Write Grants program.

15. Awards Committee Report: Kristin Berry, Bruce Palmer, and Ed LaRue serve on this committee. In 2024, the following awards were presented: Kristin H. Berry Annual Award: Mari Quillman; Robert C. Stebbins Research Award: Cyler Conrad and team (J. Inglis, A. Wende, M. Sanborn, N. Mukundan, A. Price, T. Tenner, K. Wurth, B. Naes, J. Fair, E. Middlebrook, S. Gaukler, J. Whicker, J.L. Gerard, W. Tapia Aguilera, J.P. Gibbs, B. Wolf, T.K. Kattil-deBrum, M. Hagemann, J.A. Seminoff, T. Brys, R. Brown, and K.M. Derieg); Glenn R. Stewart Service Award: Ken McDonald, Joe Probst, Michael Vamstad; Power of Persistence Award: Ed LaRue and Tim Shields. Nominations were received from various Board members and (excluding the Morafka Award) a full slate of 2025 awardees was identified. Awardees will be recognized at the banquet on Thursday evening and those in attendance will receive letters and certificates of appreciation. **Ed LaRue will mail certificates to any the 2025 awardees not in attendance.**

16. Annual Symposium Program Committee and Local Host Committee Reports: At the 2024 Symposium, there were 13 sessions with a total of 50 papers presented, with each session followed by panel discussions between audience and authors. Two invited speakers were from out of country. An additional poster session included four presenters. Fifteen nonprofit partners and vendors provided displays. Chaired by David Hedrick, eight or nine pertinent Board members met monthly and then weekly in 2024 and early 2025 as the Symposium approached to coordinate and plan for this week's 50th anniversary celebration.

17. Mexican Tortoise Conservation Committee (MTCC): There was no formal report from this committee.

³ <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/kn1hffuukz0me5hkmb066/DTC-5-Year-Strategic-Plan-2025-2030-FINAL.pdf?rlkey=ow98jr9ctujf7d9l9lkd9mc82r&dl=0>

⁴ <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/hcy20fq0fd65qvr34y4gz/USFWS-DTC-Final-Coordination-Minutes.1-16-2025.pdf?rlkey=vuv11cxtike7jqcljgrhmsk7f&dl=0>

D. New Business:

1. Bylaws Revisions: Bruce Palmer shared that proposed Bylaws revisions are posted on the website. There are two recommended changes regarding the authority of the Board Chairperson. In one case, the Chairperson is given discretion to make unilateral decisions in emergency situations that would not allow for a vote by the Board, and the Chairperson may assume the position of any officer, again on an emergency basis, to accomplish a given action. **Motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved by those in attendance to adopt the Bylaws as revised.**

2. Election of Officers: The open positions are Recording Secretary (Ed LaRue is willing to continue in that position), and Chairperson-elect, Treasurer, and Membership Coordinator with no one identified to stand for these latter three positions prior to the Annual Business Meeting. **Given these nominations and no new nominations from the floor, 100% of the votes by those in attendance were in favor for Ed LaRue to serve as Recording Secretary, as per the terms of office given in the Bylaws.**

2. 2026 Symposium: Arrangements are being made for the 2026 annual Symposium at a place and date to be determined, likely in the last week of February 2026. The Council is considering Palm Springs, CA for 2026 and returning to Palace Station in 2027, to be determined.

E. Adjourn: **The motion to adjourn the Annual Business Meeting was made, seconded, and unanimously approved.** Mari Quillman then adjourned the Annual Business Meeting at 08:55 a.m. (PST).

These final minutes were recorded and respectfully submitted by Ed LaRue, Recording Secretary.



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