



Winter 2017
Edition 37: 4

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter



Most of the Fall work party volunteers, October, 2017

LAND MANAGEMENT

On October 21, twenty three volunteers drove close to 5,000 miles to participate in the annual fall work party. This year, the work party was unique in that it was part of the Department of the Interior's National Public Lands Day. NPLD is a designated day which brings together hundreds of thousands of individual, student, and organizational volunteers to help maintain and restore America's public lands. This added support from BLM allowed for a great lunch, free NPLD t-shirts, and coupons for free entry into any national park!

The day before had been full of harsh gusts of wind and there were concerns about what the weather would do the following day, but nature listened to our plea and gave us a beautiful, calm day. Visitors traveled from all over California to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the desert and to lend a much appreciated hand doing some over-due work at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area. As soon as volunteers started showing up, offers were given to help set up check-in, organize tools, and get started on tasks.

Once everyone had arrived, we quickly put together teams to work on various tasks around the DTRNA.

New pea gravel that had been delivered the day before was spread across the parking lot to fill in gaps and re-distribute mounds of gravel that had built up along the edges. The interpretive kiosk, which has needed a good cleaning every few months, was again rid of the raven "art" left on the interpretive panels and bird deterrent was installed on top of the panels to prevent ravens from perching. Trail maintenance occurred by fixing brochure boxes and posts, and taping each marker with colorful tape to allow visitors to more easily see the trails. Lastly, volunteers walked several miles along the DTRNA fence line looking for damage or maintenance needs.



*(Continued on
page 2)*

DTPC President, Ron Berger, helps to distribute new parking lot gravel

With over 50 miles of new and old fencing surrounding the DTRNA and its expansion areas, fence monitoring and maintenance is crucial to keeping the 39.5+ square miles of desert tortoise habitat protected from illegal trespass.

After much work had been done, the crew settled down for some hot dogs and hamburgers grilled by BLM staff, some slightly melted ice cream sandwiches, and great conversation. The following day, DTPC staff and a few volunteers who camped overnight headed out to do some land monitoring.

We would like to thank all of the volunteers who took time out of their weekends to help us out with these much needed tasks. We cannot express how much we appreciate your support and the support of all of our members and donors. We will continue working to protect the desert tortoise and their habitat and are grateful to you all for your help.



Volunteer Tim Kirkpatrick after re-installing a trail post



Interpretive kiosk before



Interpretive kiosk after

The Power of Collaboration: How to do More with Less

By Chris Noddings, Cardno

Habitat restoration to benefit the Agassiz's desert tortoise is widely recognized as critical to tortoise recovery, and the West Mojave Workgroup of the California Mojave Recovery Implementation Team (RIT) consistently ranks it as the highest priority recovery action among all west Mojave Critical Habitat Units. Despite this, Abella and Berry (2016) noted that no examples of implementing a comprehensive suite of habitat enhancements currently exist. The Desert Tortoise Council's (Council's) 5-Year Strategic Plan aimed to correct this situation, but we had a problem: as an overburdened, all-volunteer Board, it became clear that if we were to complete this task, we would need outside help.

To this end, I enlisted the help of a team of master's students (pictured below) from the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at U.C. Santa Barbara to first identify a restoration site and then apply the latest scientific research to create a habitat restoration plan. Within the first three months, the Council and the students selected a 460-acre site at the southeastern corner of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area's (DTRNA's) Eastern Expansion Area as the study area. Over the next six academic months, the students worked with experts from the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC), the Council, and others to develop the site-specific restoration plan.

Phase 1 of the restoration plan would span two years; during this time, approximately 170 acres of the most degraded habitat and priority buffer zones would be restored through weed removal, road camouflage, seeding of forage plant species, and the active revegetation of approximately 29 acres of partially or wholly-denuded habitat by planting over 1,650 cover plants. Phase 2 involved the adaptive management of the remainder of the parcel, pending the successful completion of Phase 1.



Dedicated to the recovery and conservation of the Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) and other rare and endangered species inhabiting the Mojave and western Sonoran deserts.

**The
Desert Tortoise
Preserve Committee, Inc.**
Founded 1974
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Tortoise Tracks is published
four times a year.

From its inception, we designed the project to be strategic, maximizing the conservation benefit while minimizing its financial costs. It is in this regard that the restoration plan truly excels, as it calls for restoring more habitat and at less cost – roughly \$50,000-\$60,000, depending on the number of volunteers used to complete the work – than any other project under consideration by the California Recovery Implementation Team in 2016.

To fund the project, the Council has successfully sought \$7,500 from the California Community Forests Foundation. The Council has also submitted an application to the West Mojave Workgroup of the California RIT and is actively seeking other funding options. Pending the results of the RIT decision (expected in spring 2018), the Council will also work with the DTPC to fund the project directly.

It was a daunting, yearlong project that required tremendous effort from the students, the DTPC, the Council, and other experts, but the Council's Board of Directors agree: the project has been a huge success that would not have been possible without collaboration. We look forward to working with the DTPC on its implementation!

Annual Meeting Presenter: Dr. Phil Leitner

Philip Leitner has been associated with the Endangered Species Recovery Program of California State University, Stanislaus since 2001. However, his research interest in the state-listed Mohave Ground Squirrel goes all the way back to 1988. He has spent many months in the Mojave Desert using live-trapping, camera trapping, and radiotelemetry to investigate the current distribution, habitat requirements, and annual cycle of this elusive little rodent. (Photo by Kelly Leshner)



Dr. Leitner with a Mohave ground squirrel

Phil Leitner has been a member of the DTPC since 2003, but his days of roaming the California deserts goes back almost 60 years. A fellow graduate student at UCLA was studying the physiological ecology of Mohave ground squirrels back in 1959. Phil remembers going out to the south side of the Lovejoy Buttes east of Palmdale and catching all the MGS you needed for lab studies in an afternoon. Those were the days! Phil ran across them again in 1979, trapping up north in Rose Valley, Inyo County. The species had only just been listed by Cal Fish & Game in 1971 and they were considered very rare by then. Dr. Leitner continues to study the species and help inform the science and conservation community about its status.

EVENTS

GoFundMe Fundraiser

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has kicked off a new fundraiser aiming to raise funds for renovations to the interpretive trailer which is made available to visitors during the naturalist season at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area each spring. Funds will go towards renovating the interior of the interpretive trailer and creating vibrant new displays that will depict details about the desert ecosystem, species' adaptations to living in the desert, and threats to the desert. Additionally, we would like to provide a tablet interface to display photos, videos, and facts about desert tortoises and their behavior. As members, we ask for a lot of support from you, however if you are able, please share a link to our GoFundMe page to help spread the word about our campaign.

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T-shirt design contest

Are you a gifted artist? Does your child like drawing? Are you a supporter of Desert Tortoises?

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is looking for a new design for our next t-shirt campaign.

The design is for the front of a unisex T-shirt and should feature the theme of desert tortoises or the Mojave Desert and must be a simple vector graphic, for printing purposes. If you have questions about file requirements, please contact us.

Please submit your entries to Jill Estrada at dtpc@pacbell.net. The winning design will be featured as our next t-shirt!



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
 Invites You to Join Us At Our
43rd Annual General Meeting*
*(*and a wonderful lunch buffet)*
Saturday, January 27, 2018

The DTPC's Annual Meeting and Luncheon will be held Saturday, January 27, 2018 at **The Lancaster Columbus Club, Knights of Columbus, 719 West Avenue M, Lancaster, CA** The afternoon Annual Meeting will feature a review of the Committee's ongoing programs and activities and plans for 2018. Speakers from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will provide updates on important activities throughout southern California. The luncheon speaker will be Dr. Phil Leitner, the world's foremost expert on the rare and threatened Mohave ground squirrel, who will present an update on their current status.

PROGRAM

Doors Open	11:00am
Buffet Luncheon	11:45am
Annual Meeting	12:30pm to 2:45pm

To RSVP or For Additional Information Contact:

Jill Estrada at (951) 683-3872 or Email: dtpc@pacbell.net

\$ _____ **Luncheon Reservation (\$45.00 per person)**
 \$ _____ **Optional tax-deductible donation**
 \$ _____ **Total of my enclosed check**

Name(s): _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____ E-Mail: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Organizational Affiliation (if any): _____

Make check payable to: DTPC, 4067 Mission Inn Avenue, Riverside, CA 92501



New Membership Fees

Due to the growing costs of our programs, we will be raising our membership fees starting on January 1, 2018. 90% of our public-based income goes towards land acquisition, fencing, restoration, research, education, and outreach. The remaining percentage funds staff and general administrative costs.

We would like to apologize for the new membership costs accidentally making their way onto the contribution form that was distributed with our annual fundraising letter. Thank you to those who contributed the extra amount early!

Membership Level	New Rate
Individual	\$25.00
Family	\$40.00
Sponsor	\$75.00
Benefactor	\$100.00
Patron	\$200.00
Corporate/ Organization	\$200.00
Life	\$1,000.00

Note about online donations/membership renewals:

From February 1– 28, online payment will be temporarily shut down for maintenance and updates. Contributions can be sent to our Riverside mailing address.



Our electronic newsletter is growing in popularity and we want to see it continue to grow! One added benefit of receiving the e-newsletter is that it is provided in color and is received sooner than those that are mailed. If you would like to be added to our e-newsletter list, please email us at dtpc@pacbell.net.

DTPC Calendar of Events & Volunteer Opportunities

- January 27—Annual Meeting (Lancaster)
- February 23-25—Desert Tortoise Council Symposium (Las Vegas)
- March 12—Beginning of Naturalist Season (DTRNA)
- March 17—Spring Work Party (DTRNA)
- March 24— Naturalist Welcome Event (DTRNA)



The DTPC would like to thank the following people for their support:

Bonny Ahern	Craig Erridge	Michael Kirkpatrick	Sandra Perry	Jessica Russell
Craig Bansmer	Emilee Harding	Tim Kirkpatrick	Dana Stephenson	Libby Vincent
Carol Berger	Chuck Hemingway	Lisa LaVelle	Michael Skibsted	Carrie Woods
Ron Berger	Linda Huffman	Charles Massieon	Russell Skibsted	
Allan Eggleton	Steve Ishii	Laura Mogg	Alyssa Russell	

For more information call (951) 683-3872 or send an email to dtpc@pacbell.net, or check out the DTPC's website www.tortoise-tracks.org and Facebook page www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc.

DTPC MEMBERSHIP/CONTRIBUTION FORM

1. YES, I want to help save the threatened desert tortoise and its habitat! Here is my tax-deductible membership contribution of:

- ☐ \$20 Individual
☐ \$30 Family
☐ \$50 Sponsor

- ☐ \$75 Benefactor
☐ \$100 Patron/Corporate
☐ \$500 Life Membership

2. My membership is current but here is an additional donation of \$_____.
 Please use it for:

- ☐ Fencing ☐ Land Acquisition ☐ Where Most Needed
☐ Other:_____

3. I'd like to help you grow the DTPC endowment. Please accept an additional donation of:

- ☐ \$250 ☐ \$2,500
☐ \$500 ☐ \$5,000
☐ \$1,000 ☐ Other \$_____
☐ Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson,
 Greg Lathrop at 2redgrey@gmail.com or (415) 637-7187 for instruction

Let's grow the endowment!

- ☐ I would like my contribution to remain anonymous
☐ I would like to receive Tortoise Tracks electronically (please provide email address)

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

Email Address:_____

Please make your check payable to DTPC and mail to:

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
4067 Mission Inn Ave.
Riverside, CA 92501.

Thank you.

*All contributors receive the Tortoise Tracks newsletter. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee is an IRS recognized tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. All contributions and/or annual membership dues are fully tax-deductible. Contributor information is kept confidential and is not disclosed to third parties.

If you would like to renew your membership or donate online, please visit * www.tortoise-tracks.org *



Tortoise Tracks

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by email at DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org

**When visiting the desert, always remember to
check under your vehicle for wildlife.**

