



Winter 2021
Edition 40:4

Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter

2021 Annual Meeting



Ron Berger, President of the DTPC, and host of our historic remote 2021 Annual Meeting, welcomed the participants that joined the live presentation on Zoom Saturday, January 30th at 10am. Our list of speakers included: Clint Helms, BLM Wildlife Biologist, presenting on the Naturalist position funding. Tom Bickaaskas, BLM Associate Field Manager, presenting on contracts, agreements, and conservation. Dr. Kristin Berry, Founder & Board Member, presenting her research on *The Catastrophic Decline of Tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area: the Drivers of Loss*. Jun Lee, Director of Land Acquisitions, presenting on the completion of 5 major projects and the land acquisition updates. Financial highlights included the announcement that our Permanent Endowment established in 2015 with a modest balance of \$5,000 has grown to \$426,887, or a bit over 14% of our \$3 million dollar goal! At roughly \$3 million, even at 3% interest rate; the endowment would deliver about \$100K annually, covering a substantial portion of our annual operating budget. If you missed our Saturday meeting you still have access to the full presentation on our website using this link [Annual Meeting Video](#)

BLM Field Office Update



Tom Bickaaskas has been the BLM Associate Field Manager for two years and opened his presentation explaining the long relationship the DTPC has shared with the BLM. In 2021, the BLM is providing funding of \$15,000 for noxious weed monitoring and \$15,000 to fund the DTRNA Naturalist interpretive program. Additional collaborations are detailed in Clint Helms' Presentation.



Bureau of Land Management Conservation Actions

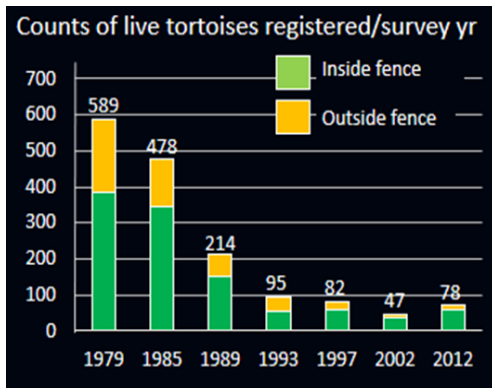


Clint Helms, Wild Life Biologist for the Ridgecrest Field Office expressed gratitude to the committee for a long standing productive partnership with BLM. 2020 was a year of obstructions and difficulties because of COVID-19 which put a damper on some of those collaborative efforts that had been ongoing in the DTRNA in previous years. The highly anticipated Public Lands Day and volunteer efforts were shut down because of the restrictions. The hiring of a Naturalist for the DTRNA in the spring helps out with vital public outreach, monitoring, interpretive talks, and tours of the Natural Area. The BLM will continue to fund this position until 2022 when a new agreement will need to be put in place to extend the opportunity in years to come. Clint is excited to continue to have a Naturalist creating vi-

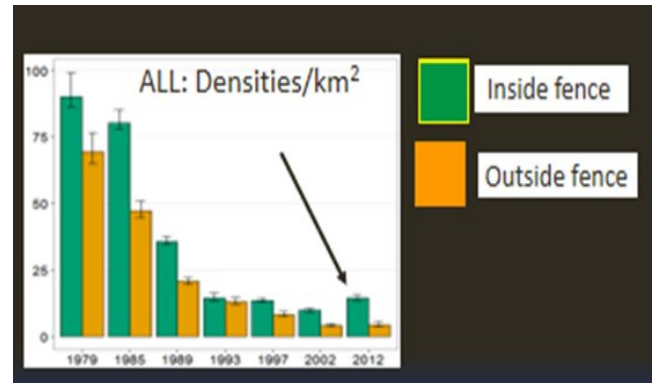
tal conservation outreach to the public and helping to instill the value of conservation. Clint believes this position gives the public a greater appreciation of the sensitive natural resources that they have access to.

For additional information on the Naturalist position see our ad at the bottom of page 5.

Dr. Berry Presents Research on Tortoise Decline



Dr. Kristin Berry presented her research with the USGS on *The Catastrophic Decline of Tortoises at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area: the Drivers of Loss*. Her research spanning from 1979 - 2012 primarily evaluated the effects of fence protection and its impact on the tortoise population. The chart on the left illustrates significant losses of population over time which Dr.



Berry attributes to disease, predation by Ravens and mammals, vehicles, sheep, vandalism, & collecting. But there is good news for the desert tortoise --the population densities within the fenced areas of the DTRNA increased in 2012. Dr. Berry's full presentation is available on our website.

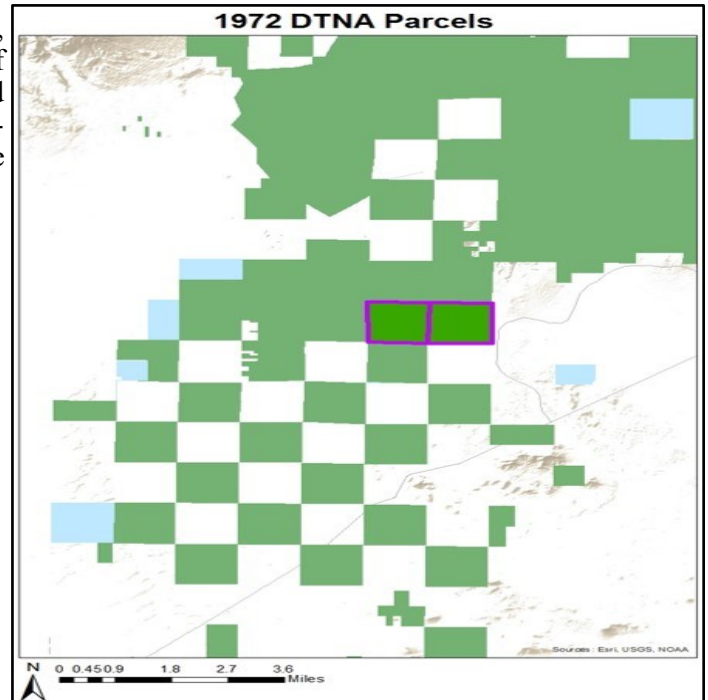
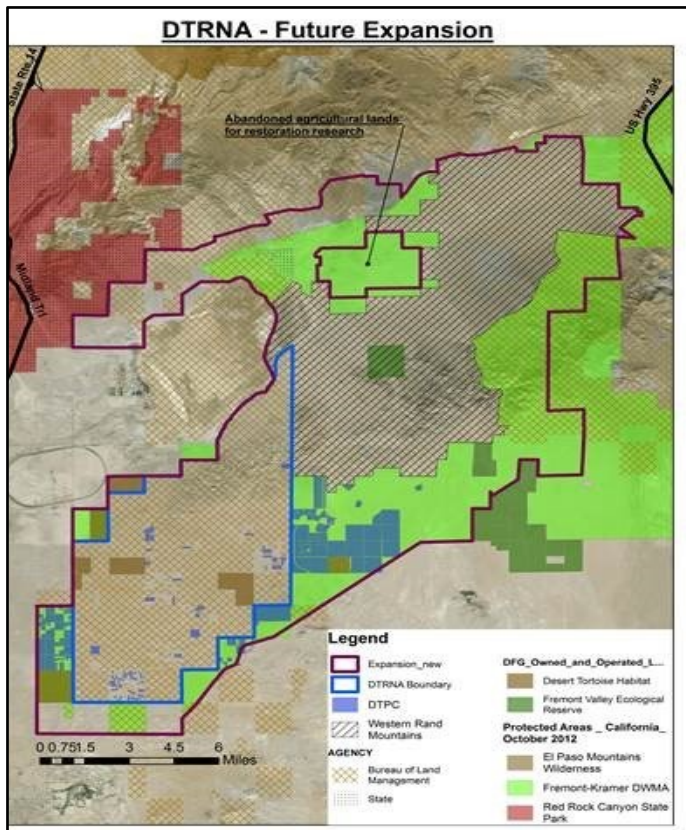
2020 Land Acquisition Update by Jun Lee

Jun Lee, Director of Land Acquisition, reported that we closed out several grants including 4 major OHV Green Sticker grants and 1 Wildlife Conservation Board grant and other long-term ongoing projects. The DTPC owns and manages 7,000 acres in Kern, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. In 2020, we conveyed 325 acres of conservation easements to Mojave Desert Land Trust for conservation lands in Piute Mountains Wilderness Area, Mojave National Preserve, and DTRNA areas for ongoing oversight of properties. In addition, the DTPC continues to acquire in-holding of parcels within the DTRNA to remove the risk of private property owners using their lands for uses that are incompatible with the desert tortoise conservation.



DTRNA Expansion Area

We are very proud of the work we have accomplished, chief among which is the creation of and the building of the Natural Area, a place where the tortoise is protected by our fencing, signing, and monitoring. In 1972, the Natural Area was comprised of 1,280 acres. In 2020, the DTRNA covers 29,991 acres, reflected in the map below.



There are major issues in protecting the tortoise. Climate change represents a challenge. Therefore, in 2015, your Board established a goal of working with our friends at BLM, CDFW, donors, and others to expand the Natural Area to include connecting corridors to cooler areas for tortoises, Mohave ground squirrels, and other threatened or endangered species. The DTRNA Future Expansion Map shows the existing Natural Area, bounded by the blue line, and our expansion plans highlighted by the purple outline.

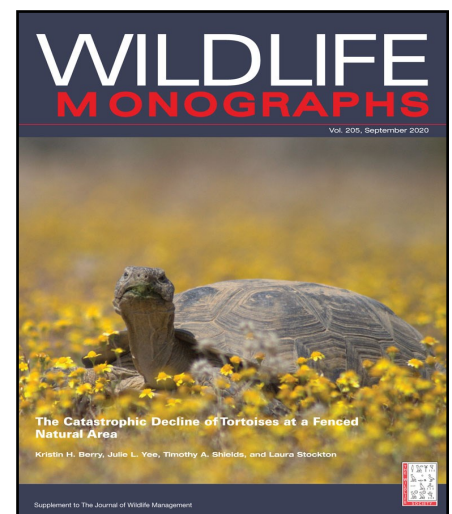
Status of the Mojave Desert Tortoise from Threatened to Endangered

One of the highlights for 2020 was the publication of the 34 years of research at the DTRNA in Wildlife Monographs which includes projects funded by DTPC and BLM funding for over 30 years. Sadly, the monograph paints a picture of a rapidly declining tortoise population.

On March 11, 2020, despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, we joined with the Desert Tortoise Council and Defenders of Wildlife in petitioning the California Fish & Game Commission to change the status of the Mojave Desert Tortoise from threatened to endangered.

We helped write the 49 page filing, and were the Commission unanimously voted that the desert tortoise may warrant listing as endangered.

Following the Commission's recommendation the California Department of Fish and Wildlife must undertake a 12 month evaluation before the Commission can make a final decision on changing the listing status the listing status.





Contributors to Our New Kiosk Panels

Thinking back to last year, we were going to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the Natural Area unveiling our new kiosk panels. Of course, COVID-19 arrived, the Natural Area was closed, the kiosk contractor couldn't complete the panels, and the year passed. However, we are pleased to announce that the panels have been completed and they will shortly be installed at the Natural Area. You are welcomed to stop by and tell us what you think. We sincerely appreciate the following supporters for this achievement: **Chris Barela, John Peters, Envirosigns, Jill Estrada, Carrie Woods, Dr. Kristin Berry, Clint Helms, Rachel Woodard, Rob Enriquez, and Dr. Brittaney Slabach.** All coordinated through the leadership of Laura Stockton.

Seeking a Naturalist for the 2021!

Employment Opportunities: Naturalist for the 2021 Season! Are you passionate about science education and enjoy our desert habitats? Join us as the Naturalist at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area! The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. is seeking a seasonal Naturalist for the DTRNA from mid-March until early June 2021. The Naturalist is expected to be on site Tuesday through Saturday during operating hours (8 am to 5 pm) during the 2021 season. The Naturalist will be responsible for interpretative services, data collection and reporting, assistance with activities and programs, and site maintenance among other things. Applicants should have strong interpersonal and communication skills, demonstrated professionalism, knowledge of desert ecology or willingness to learn! **To see the full posting and requirements for applying please visit the employment opportunities page on our website using this link** [Employment Opportunities](#)

2021 DTRNA Volunteer Opportunities



We are starting a list of volunteers for various work projects we are organizing throughout the 2021 season. Here is a chance to do good, socially distance, and enjoy the beauty of the desert. **If you would like to join our efforts please contact our Executive Administrator, Sophia Osho at** DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org



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

Board of Directors

Board Member	Greg Lathrop
Board Member	Dr. Kristin Berry
Board Member	Laura Stockton
	& Treasurer
Board Member	Larry Nelson
Board Member	Kathy Simon
VP & Secretary	Rachel Woodard

President Ron Berger

Director of Land Acquisition

Jun Lee

Executive Administrator

Sophia Osho

Telephone: (442) 294-4258
Email: dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org
www.tortoise-tracks.org



Tortoise Tracks is published four times a year.

\$300 Raised On Giving Tuesday In Honor of Tuffy



Frank Hanson recalls his first meeting with a desert tortoise at age 7 during bath time when their housekeeper, Mrs. Lee, tipped a box down to show him a tortoise she rescued from the side of the road. It was 1959. The Hanson family adopted the Tortoise now named “Tuffy,” and began to observe his curious nature that led to a string of misadventures, including climbing a wood pile, burrowing under fences, being found several blocks from his backyard, and even taking a leap into a pool where he was found floating with his head above the water. Tuffy can be seen in this black and white picture with Frank’s grandmother Belle White circa 1965. Frank’s daughter Alicia remembers having her finger mistaken for Tuffy’s favorite green beans and when a neighbor died and left a female tortoise named Tasha to the family. The pair became mates and spent 20 years burrowing and living in a wide range of living environments the family created for them before Tasha succumbed to a respiratory infection. Tuffy lives on and is estimated to be 100 years old (pictured below)! It was in honor of this treasured tortoise that Alicia began a “Giving Tuesday Campaign” on Facebook and raised \$300 through family and friends for the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee!



We are grateful to the Hanson family for their support of the DTPC & sharing Tuffy’s multi-generational story us.

The DTPC Needs Your Financial Assistance

The dramatic decline in interest rates has adversely impacted the DTPC. The DTPC depends upon Endowment earnings to fund a significant part of our general overhead expenses each year. We experienced a 15% decline in Endowment earnings in 2020. This will accelerate in 2021 as older investments mature as demonstrated by the 31% decline in Endowment earnings in the 4th quarter of 2020. **The only way to offset these declines at this time is to increase the size of our Permanent Endowment.** Your contributions to the Permanent Endowment of any size will help us greatly. In 2020 we received just over \$110,000 in new Permanent Endowment funds. We are currently at 14.25% of our \$3,000,000 campaign for new funds. In addition to cash, please consider us when making your 2021 IRA RMD or donating appreciated marketable securities. A strong Permanent Endowment helps to guarantee our survival into perpetuity. **Thank you in advance for your kind support.**
DTPC Finance Committee

An endowment is a gift
that is invested



Easy & Secure Online Donation Options on Our website

Would you like to support the DTPC with a contribution to our Permanent Endowment, renew your membership, or make a general donation in support of fence replacement and operational costs? Please use this link to access our convenient online payment options [Ways to Give](#)

Board Member News



Larry Nelson

The DTPC Board has seen a bit of activity this year. Bob Wood, our former Vice President, retired and resigned. Dave Zantiny, a long-time director, relocated to Texas and also resigned. We cannot begin to express the entire Board's gratitude, to Bob and Dave for their selfless, tireless, extraordinary service to this board. Rachel Woodard is our newly appointed Vice President at the end of 2020 in addition to her Secretary duties! New Board nominations for 2021: Kathryn Simon and Larry Nelson's term as Board members is expiring and the DTPC Board chose to re-nominate both of them, and they have each agreed to continue to serve. During the Annual Meeting Larry and Kathryn were unanimously elected to another 3 year term.



Kathryn Simon

Congratulations to Kathryn, Larry, and Rachel!

Preserve Manager Update

The DTPC Board would like to recognize our recently departed Preserve Manager, Dr. Brittany Slabach. Brittany accepted a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at Trinity University in Texas. Our thanks to Dr. Slabach for her numerous accomplishments while at DTPC, and we wish her well! In December of 2020 the DTPC posted the position of Preserve Manager seeking a research driven individual who will lead the "boots on the ground" efforts of our organization. As of the publishing of this newsletter the DTPC hiring committee is reviewing the resumes and writing samples of 16 candidates.

It is our goal to have the Preserve Manager position filled for the start of the 2021 DTRNA season.



Dr. Slabach in the Galapagos, May, 2019

Three Preserve Managers? Why Not!



Speaking of Preserve Managers, and until we hire one, we actually are blessed to have 3! Mary Logan, Preserve Manager in years past, has re-joined us on a contracted basis, as have our current Board Members Rachel Woodard and Kathy Simon. All three are essentially contracting to give the DTPC the very same, or an even greater, level of support that we receive when there is a Preserve manager on board full time, especially when all three are supported by some super volunteers and by our Executive Administrator, Sophia Osho.

Are You Looking Forward to Spring at the DTRNA?



Receive the *Tortoise Tracks* Newsletter Electronically



Sign up to receive the *Tortoise Tracks* newsletter electronically! Recipients will obtain the newsletter immediately after publication and will be able view the beautiful pictures in each edition in **COLOR**. This method reduces paper usage, reduces our costs, is better for our environment, and allowing us to better spend our limited capital on tortoise recovery.

To receive electronic copies of the newsletter, please notify us by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org.

GO GREEN

Calendar of Events:

As COVID-19 moves on, watch this space for new appointments to help the tortoise.

Thanks!



Tortoise Tracks

THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
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If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, notify us by email at dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org

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:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Patron/Corporate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$40 Family | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Benefactor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Life Membership |

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

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fencing | <input type="checkbox"/> Land Acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> Where Most Needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | |

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

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketable Securities (Stock): Contact DTPC Finance Committee Chairperson, Greg Lathrop at 2redgrey@gmail.com or (415) 637-7187 for assistance | | |

Let's grow the Permanent Endowment!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like my contribution to remain anonymous | <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to receive <i>Tortoise Tracks</i> 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
PO Box 940
Ridgecrest, CA 93556.

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 *