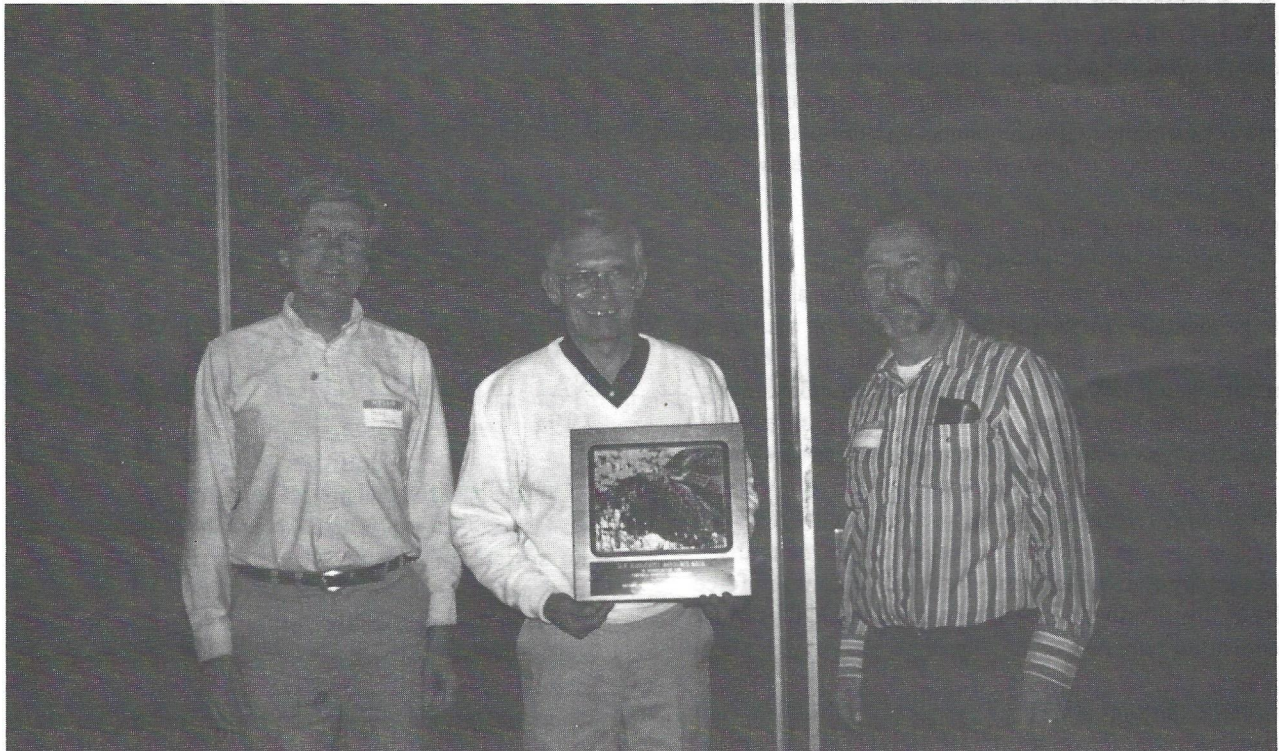


Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Winter/ Spring 1994

14:4



Staff of the Bureau of Land and Management's Ridgecrest Resource Area were honored at the Preserve Committee's annual banquet for their longstanding role in protecting the Desert Tortoise Natural Area. From left to right: Greg Thomsen, Lee Delaney (Resource Area Manager), and Bob Parker.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE BOARD

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee enjoyed another very successful year in 1993. In this issue of **Tortoise Tracks** the Committee's Board is pleased to present a summary of some of our major accomplishments during the past year. The report includes a year-end financial statement, as well as activity summaries from our Vice Presidents and Treasurer.

As we reported in earlier newsletters, 1993 saw many milestones in desert tortoise conservation. The Fish and Wildlife Service released a Draft Recovery Plan and designated Critical Habitat for the Mojave population of the tortoise. Given that the tortoise has been Federally listed as a threatened species for nearly four years, the Critical Habitat designation was long overdue, and was in fact hastened by a successful litigation effort of

concerned conservation groups.

Also in the litigation arena, conservation groups were successful in preventing sheep grazing from occurring in prime desert tortoise habitat last spring. The Preserve Committee served a support role in this effort and has remained in active communication with woolgrowers and the Bureau of Land Management in an attempt to prevent future conflicts between grazing and tortoise interests.

The Committee also continued its active role in the management and stewardship of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) in Kern County, California. During 1993 we purchased approximately 185 acres of

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**DESERT TORTOISE NATURAL AREA
1993 STEWARDSHIP REPORT**

By Laura Stockton, DTPC Vice President of Stewardship

Maintaining the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) as a protected area for wild inhabitants and for visitors has become increasingly complex since it was established 20 years ago. Management and protection of the DTNA involves the coordinated efforts of many dedicated professionals and volunteers.

On-Site Efforts

Since 1989, the Committee has arranged for a naturalist to be available for monitoring and assisting visitors at the DTNA during the spring months. In 1993 the naturalist job was contracted to EnviroPlus Consulting. Naturalists Jane Kidd and Mercy Vaughn greeted, monitored and educated 2,902 visitors between March 1 and May 31. They directly prevented the release of three wild tortoises from other areas and dealt with inquiries by others about such releases. The naturalists' observations of visitor behavior and questions reinforce how important and enormous our task of public education remains.

In 1993, the annual spring work party was held on April 3 with a follow-up on April 7. Eleven DTPC volunteers and staff of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) participated in these work days. The work crews removed the equivalent of 41 trash bags of weeds from the paths around the interpretive kiosk; installed a gate; completed three fence repairs and replaced several signs.

Since the BLM ranger for the area was not available to do a detailed fence assessment during the late fall, a formal fall work party was not held. Instead, several single vehicle patrols checked the fence along the east, south and west boundaries. Signs were replaced and nixolite (to discourage raven perching) was reattached as supplies permitted. Further needs were recorded to be completed during the 1994 spring work party.

Other Activities

Our ongoing land acquisition program resulted in the purchase of 187 acres of private land by the Committee in 1993. Over 80 percent of the private inholdings of land in the DTNA have now been acquired by the

various cooperating agencies. Acquisition of private inholdings is critical to maintaining the integrity of the DTNA.

Also in 1993, the Preserve Committee applied for and received a \$400,000 land acquisition grant from the State of California to purchase a 1,540-acre buffer area along the heavily impacted southeast corner of the DTNA.

The Committee continues to monitor and maintain active involvement in resource management issues that affect desert tortoise habitat on the Natural Area and throughout the range of the desert tortoise. These efforts are critical to successful stewardship of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

**ENVIROPLUS TO MANAGE
NATURALIST PROGRAM AGAIN IN
1994**

For the past five years the Committee has staffed the Desert Tortoise Natural Area with naturalists during the spring months to provide visitor interpretive services. Last year the Committee handled the naturalist program through EnviroPlus, a Ridgecrest based consulting firm with extensive experience in conducting tortoise research at the Natural Area. Based on a successful working relationship in 1993, the Committee has decided to contract with EnviroPlus again in 1994 to manage the springtime naturalist program. The head naturalist this year is Chuck Bowland. He will be at the DTNA during day time hours through May 31. He will receive support from several assistant naturalists including Susan Moore, Dave Silverman and Ellen Silverman.

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Officers

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Roger Dale | President |
| Tom Dodson | Vice President |
| George Moncsko | Vice President |
| Laura Stockton | Vice President |
| Jayne Chavez- Scales | Secretary |
| Carol Panlaqui | Treasurer |
| Bev Steveson | Board Member |
| Dr. Kristin Berry | Board Member |

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.
Preliminary 1993 Financial Summary

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURES FOR YEAR ENDED 12/31/93

INCOME:

Donations	\$31,277.67
Dues	12,715.00
Merchandise Sales	5,900.79
Interest/Dividends	13,664.44
Land Sales	190,500.00
Mitigation Payments	7,650.00
Miscellaneous	742.00

Total	\$262,449.90

EXPENDITURES:

Education/Stewardship Programs	\$15,485.93
Land Purchases	142,913.95
Naturalists	19,428.53
Newsletter	2,676.77
Professional Services	82,808.34
Operating Expenses	3,301.15
Taxes and Insurance	5,640.44
Fundraising	5,472.07
Merchandise for Resale	7,767.60

Total	\$285,494.78

ASSETS AS OF 12/31/93

CASH ACCOUNTS:

Cash on Hand	\$9,184.74
Restricted Accounts *	187,523.59
Designated Accounts **	44,997.06
Savings Accounts	113,454.22

Total Cash	\$355,159.61

OTHER ASSETS:

Real Estate (586.84 acres)	\$382,998.08
Merchandise and Slide Shows	7,762.52
Equipment (Depreciated Value)	14,663.00

	\$405,423.60

TOTAL ASSETS: \$760,583.21

* Use of funds restricted by funding source.

** Use of funds designated by DTPC Board; may be reallocated by Board.

1993 GOVERNMENT INTERFACE SUMMARY

By George Moncsko, DTPC Vice President of Government Interface

DTPC-BLM Coordination Meetings

The annual coordination meeting between DTPC and the staff of the BLM's Ridgecrest Resource Area was held in June 1993. At this meeting responsibilities under the joint Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for management of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) were reviewed for accomplishments. We also generated a list of action items that the participants felt we should pursue in the coming year.

There were four other meetings held during 1993 between myself and Lee Delaney (BLM's Ridgecrest Area Manager) to keep open our dialogue and coordination. Discussion topics included: Follow-up on the above action items; DTNA management; BLM's draft management plan for the Rand Mountains; Public education on desert tortoises; Ranger patrols; Sheep grazing in the desert; The status and impacts of the West Mojave Coordinated Management Plan; and DTPC/BLM planning for a Mojave Desert Educational Outreach Center.

The Government Interface role also included attendance at the quarterly BLM-DTPC land acquisition coordination meetings to maintain open sharing of all accomplishments and plans.

Rand Mountains Management Plan

In May 1993, there was a meeting and field trip of the Rand Technical Review Team to review the BLM's draft plan, observe off-highway vehicle (OHV) impacts, discuss potential mitigation approaches, and look at the fence being constructed along the south edge of the Rand management area and see how it is affecting OHV use patterns.

There were also periodic discussions with the BLM on the status of the Rand Plan through December when it was signed by the BLM District Manager and the California Department of Fish and Game. DTPC is currently coordinating with the BLM district office on establishing a sound monitoring program to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Plan

in the coming year. The Committee's primary concerns about the Plan are: 1) The high densities of trails and roads contained in the Plan; and 2) The potential inability of BLM to enforce the Plan due to lack of resources.

Sheep Grazing Issues

The Government Interface role also included participation in discussions with BLM on 1993 sheep grazing in the Ridgecrest Resource Area, and the BLM's monitoring and enforcement of the grazing. DTPC also participated in discussions with BLM and the woolgrowers regarding the areas that would potentially be opened to sheep grazing in 1994. As part of this dialogue, we discussed and outlined a possible study of grazing impacts on desert tortoise habitat, with the study to be jointly funded by BLM, DTPC and the woolgrowers.

BLM Ridgecrest Area Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is a group brought together by the BLM area manager to review planned actions, develop options and advise him. It includes approximately two dozen interest groups for the public lands. These include representatives of city and county governments, user groups (i.e., grazers, miners, OHV, equestrian), conservation groups (i.e., DTPC, Audobon, Sierra Club), agencies (i.e., California Department of Fish and Game, Red Rock Canyon State Park), and others (i.e., Native Americans, the local museum, and a "public" representative).

During the past year I represented DTPC as a desert tortoise advocate and completed my term as the Steering Committee Chairman. Tortoise-related issues addressed by the Steering Committee during 1993 included mitigation of tortoise impacts of the Briggs Mine project, and efforts to maintain OHV Green Sticker Program funding grants from the State of California to BLM.

1993 SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIVITY REPORTS

The summary below was compiled by Carol Panlaqui who, in addition to serving as the Committee's Treasurer, oversees DTPC's subcommittees on Membership, Products, Shows, Programs, and Tours.

Membership. As of December 31, 1993, the Committee had a total of 893 paying members and 89 complimentary/exchange members. The complimentary/exchange members are primarily other non-profit organizations with whom we exchange newsletters.

Products. Product sales during 1993 were again slower than in the late 1980's, but seemed to have stabilized at about \$5,000 per year. The highlight of the year was the production of a new DTNA t-shirt with a design by famous wildflower artist, Celia Howe. We plan to market the new t-shirt through national outlets, at turtle shows and special events, and through our mail order business. The response has been terrific; we have already sold most of our original order and have ordered a new stock to meet the demand. We have a new color for our hats which are now jade with a beige imprint; our cups are now beige with a jade imprint.

Shows/Events. During 1993, the Committee attended five California Turtle and Tortoise Club shows as well as the Desert Tortoise Council symposium, with an estimated minimum of 460 people watching our slide show and looking at our static display. About double that number also received our educational handouts. Proceeds from these shows, which included donations as well as product sales, totaled approximately \$3,100.

Programs/Tours. Two special programs were given this year to 45 students in Ridgecrest by Gloria and Leo Nowak. Three pre-arranged tours of the DTNA were given to a total of 89 people. In addition, the DTNA naturalists were available full-time during March, April and May to give informal tours.

GIVE AT THE OFFICE

One of the ways the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee receives funds is through the fundraising efforts of Earth Share of California. Last year Earth Share raised over \$2.3 million for its 82 member groups -- a 21 percent increase from the previous year.

How does Earth Share do it? By organizing and running workplace giving campaigns. Employees of participating corporations and Federal, state and local agencies can support the environment through payroll deductions. They can make a general contribution to Earth Share which then divides the money among the 82 member groups, or employees may choose to designate their contribution to a specific group such as the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee. The fact that contributions to Earth Share have been increasing every year shows that employees appreciate the opportunity to support environmental causes through workplace giving.

As a DTPC member, you can help us raise money through Earth Share. Does your workplace have an employee giving campaign? If so, does it include Earth Share? If you answered no to one or both of these questions, please urge your company to include Earth Share as a contribution option for its employees.

Workplace campaigns are easy and cost effective. They're a great way for employers to support their employees' interests, and to show their commitment to the environment and community. Safeway Stores, Kaiser Permanente, Levi Strauss, Charles Schwab & Company, the County of Santa Clara, and Patagonia are just a few of the many employers whose workplace giving programs include Earth Share.

To find out more about how you can help DTPC raise money through Earth Share, please call Mr. Jun Lee at (800) 972-6678.

Support DPTC through Earth Share of California

The following two articles are abstracts of papers presented at the Desert Tortoise Council Symposium in Tucson, Arizona in March 1994.

THE CLARK COUNTY SHORT-TERM HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN: ARE THERE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS FAILURE?

By Ronald William Marlow and Karen von Seckendorff Hoff, University of Nevada, Reno

On July 24, 1991 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a Section 10(a) permit to "take" up to 3,710 tortoises during the development of up to 22,352 acres of habitat in the Las Vegas Valley. This permit, one of less than a dozen issued at that time and the first for the desert tortoise was unique in that it proposed as mitigation to "conserve" 400,000 acres of habitat on public land by enhancing management. Mitigation also included spending \$500,000 on specific research and relocation projects, and during the three-year life of the permit produce a long-term Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that would substantially increase the area and level of protection for tortoises and other species of concern. In addition "take" was to be minimized by funding a public information program and requiring survey of construction sites and removal of tortoises prior to any land disturbance. Clark County (County) and several of its cities, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), the Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW) and the Service entered into a contractual agreement (Implementation Agreement, IA) that outlined and assigned specific obligations. Among other tasks the Service agreed that it would enforce each and every provision of the IA, the HCP and the Permit.

Ray Butler and the California Native Plant Society have called for evaluation of the successes and short-comings of HCPs in order that the cautionary tales thus generated would guide us in the formulation of new and better HCPs. As the expiration date for the County's permit approaches it is necessary to examine compliance with the specific terms of the HCP documents as well as the real conservation accomplishments of this groundbreaking HCP. All of the signatories have had significant problems in complying with the HCP, the IA and the Environmental Assessment (EA). The County has failed to meet any of its "conserved habitat" bench marks while it has continued to "take" tortoises. The County has failed to produce a multi-species HCP. It has expended only \$26,000 on research and failed to

implement a translocation study. BLM and the NPS have failed to produce a preserve management plan that establishes realistic management objectives that would preserve tortoise populations. The Service has failed to enforce the terms of the HCP, EA, IA and the Permit.

The habitat that has been "conserved" is severely impacted by vehicle traffic on highways, roads and utility access corridors. Traffic level has increased substantially during the life of the permit and resulted in a greater negative impact and "take" of tortoises and habitat in the "preserve" than is Las Vegas Valley where "take" is permitted. The failure to address impacts to tortoise populations within the "preserve" in a systematic fashion has resulted in tortoise populations in the preserve being less viable now than they were before the permit was issued. Despite boasting by all the signatories the Clark County Short-term HCP has failed to meet the Endangered Species Act (ESA) test to "not appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of the species in the wild." The Clark County Short-term Habitat Conservation Plan is a failure because the Service has not meet its obligations to enforce the terms of the HCP, EA, IA and the Permit. The County is now requesting an extension of this Permit and an 8,000 acre "take" increase in the amount of habitat.

Several lessons can be learned from the Clark County HCP: 1) mitigating "take" on private lands by supplementing the budgets of public land managers is risky if it is the mismanagement of the public lands that initially caused the species to be listed, 2) complex accounting of "take", funds, conserved habitat and management actions must be audited by objective and independent sources, 3) if the Service does not have the staff time or the inclination to enforce the terms of their 10(a) permits then the permits should not be issued. The integrity of the ESA requires that the Service attend to the implementation of the terms of the 10(a) permits with greater rigor than has been the case in Clark County thus far.

THE EFFECTS OF ANNUAL PRECIPITATION AND RAVEN PREDATION ON THE DESERT TORTOISE: MODELS DRAWN FROM THE NEW GOFFS LIFE TABLE

By Michael Weinstein, El Morro Institute for Ecological Research, Solvang, California

Using the recently revised and updated life table for the Goffs, California desert tortoise population, we modeled the effects of different rainfall regimes and raven predation levels on the ability of a cohort of females to replace itself through reproduction.

Preliminary analyses showed that food availability and/or water availability influenced clutch sizes, number of clutches per year, growth rates, and survival rates of tortoises. We made a series of assumptions and derived quantitative relationships between these effects and annual rainfall amounts. Using actual precipitation amounts for the past 80 years, we modeled the fate of three cohorts of female tortoises hatched in three successive years. The results showed that rainfall conditions during the first 2-3 years of the cohort's existence determine that cohort's ability to replace itself. If a cohort hatches during a period of average or above average rainfall, it can produce more than enough eggs to replace itself. A cohort hatched a year or two earlier or later, however, in a period of poor precipitation, may not be able to replace itself. For example, a cohort of 10,000 female tortoise eggs hatched in 1912 would be predicted to produce 18,985 eggs (or 1.9 female eggs per original female egg in the cohort), leading to a population increase of 2.1%. A cohort hatched a year earlier in 1911 (after one year of low rainfall) would only produce 1.3 eggs per original egg, equivalent to a population increase of 0.9%. A cohort hatched in 1910, beginning with two poor rainfall years, would only be predicted to produce 0.96 eggs per original female egg, for a population decline of 0.12%.

Raven predation was modeled by using a conservative estimate of the number of small tortoises taken by a nesting pair of ravens in a year. We then superimposed this additional source of mortality onto the actual mortality rates derived from the life table. Our results showed that a single pair of ravens hunting over a one square mile area of tortoise habitat would seriously

impair the ability of those tortoises to replace themselves, thereby impairing the population's ability to maintain its density over time. When applied to the overall life table (using mean values of growth and survival for the period 1977-1990), a cohort of 10,000 initial female eggs would live to produce only 500 female eggs (or 0.05 eggs per initial egg in the cohort). If this continued, the population would decline at a rate of approximately 9% per year. Even for a cohort begun during a period of high rainfall, the number of female eggs would decline from 1.54 eggs per individual as predicted by the model with average levels of mortality, to only 1.19 female eggs for the cohort with a single pair of ravens adding to the mortality rate. This is equivalent to a population increase of 0.57% per year, as opposed to an increase of 1.45% for the same cohort without raven predation.

NEW T-SHIRTS NOW AVAILABLE AT DISCOUNT PRICE

Our new t-shirts featuring a beautiful tortoise and wildflower illustration by renowned wildlife artist Celia Howe are selling extremely well. The impressive multi color design is printed on all-white shirts. The shirts are 100 percent preshrunk cotton.

We have almost completely sold out our original order and will soon be receiving a new batch of shirts. Because we were able to get a better price from our supplier on the second batch, we are now able to offer these shirts for the low price of \$12.75 each, including tax and postage (\$12.00 for out-of-state orders). The shirts are available in the following adult sizes: S, M, L and XL.

Please send your orders to:

DTPC
P.O. Box 2910
San Bernardino, CA 92406

Please include your name, address and phone number with your order.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE BOARD

(Continued from Front Page)

private inholdings of land within the Natural Area. Our land acquisition and stewardship efforts for the DTNA are cooperative programs with the Ridgecrest Resource Area of the Bureau of Land Management. For their longstanding role in protecting the Natural Area, staff members of the Ridgecrest Resources Area were honored with a special award at the Committee's annual banquet in January.

Other significant achievements for the Committee in 1993 included being awarded a \$400,000 grant for land acquisition from the State of California, and implementation of a "land bank" program using mitigation funds from a private development project.

We have also made solid progress on our plans to establish a Mojave Desert Educational Outreach Center. Later this spring we will be sending our members a special edition of Tortoise Tracks which will be entirely devoted to our progress on this project.

As always, we appreciate the support of our dedicated members.

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.
P.O. BOX 2910, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92406

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