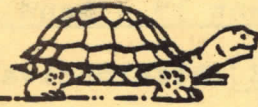


TORTOISE T-R-A-C-K-S



THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER +++ FALL, 1982
P.O.Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555 + Vol. 4, #1 + Gloria Nowak, Editor

You are urged to write two letters to the Bureau of Land Management, both of which are vital to the survival of the desert tortoise in its principal habitat areas. Their subjects are not related, although they may seem to be; so please do not try to cover both of them in the same letter. In fact only the first one has a specific deadline, November 15th; so it must receive your immediate attention. Your letters need not be long or filled with scientific words, but they should show your concern and reflect some knowledge of these two matters, which are as follows:

1. CALIFORNIA DESERT PLAN AMENDMENTS - FURTHER THREAT TO DESERT TORTOISE POPULATIONS: The California Desert Plan, completed in 1980, contains less than adequate protective measures for even the four remaining major desert tortoise populations of the California desert. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the 1982 Plan Amendments is now out for public review, and requires our consideration and comments. By far the majority of the proposed 53 amendments are provisions for more intensive use of the desert; several directly threaten the survival capabilities of desert tortoise populations.

Please carefully consider the following recommendations, and direct your concerns BEFORE NOVEMBER 15TH to:

California Desert District
Bureau of Land Management
1695 Spruce St.
Riverside, CA 92507
Attn.: PLAN AMENDMENTS

OPPOSE Amendment 6 - Barstow to Vegas motorcycle race course. The last year this race was run was 1974. The 1976 EIS on the race course showed impacts to be much greater than anticipated. The proposed course will severely damage many sensitive natural resources. Especially of concern is the part of the course through Ivanpah Valley, which is considered crucial habitat for the desert tortoise as it supports one of the **four** major tortoise populations.

OPPOSE Amendment 14 - Grazing rule changes. The amendment proposes to delete the criteria of distance of forage from water and degree of slope in determining carrying capacity for grazing. Since grazing is proportional to available water and stock will trail up hillsides after foraging on less steep slopes, this could increase habitat degradation and forage competition for such species as the desert tortoise.

OPPOSE Amendment 18 - East Mojave Scenic Area Boundary Reduction. The proposal is to remove the northeastern portion due to mineral development interests. If approved, this is the beginning of serious long term impact on the desert tortoise habitat in Ivanpah Valley. This is the first in a series of future amendments that will continue to chop off portions of **the** Ivanpah Valley Class L (Limited Use) lands north of I-15.

Amendment 19 - Rand Mountains/Fremont Valley Use Class Change.

OPPOSE Alternative A - Change Rand Area from Class M (Moderate Use) to Class I (Intensive Use)

SUPPORT Alternative B - Change Rand/Fremont Valley area from Class M to Class L (Limited Use)

This represents one of four desert tortoise crucial habitats in California, and the area most threatened by habitat destruction. If this area does not receive more (Alternative A) rather than less (Alternative B) protection, the Desert Tortoise Natural Area will continue to suffer from heavy vehicle impact along the northeastern boundaries. Further, the West Rand Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) will become totally worthless for tortoises.

Amendment 20 - Change Planning Unit 32 from Class L to Class M.

OPPOSE Alternative A - Change all PU 32 from Class L to Class M

OPPOSE Alternative B - Change heavily mined area from Class L to Class M

This area north of Barstow was mostly designated Class L, to protect Mohave ground squirrel and desert tortoise habitat. Alternative A would remove the protective guidelines of Class L and would directly threaten wildlife. Alternative B would not be as direct a threat, but as stated in the DEIS for the amendments, "Impacts would result from spillover due to increased recreational use within those areas which would be changed to Class M."

Amendment 23 - Change Planning Unit 36 from Class L to Class M.

OPPOSE Alternatives A, B & C - Include varying area changes from Class L to Class M

SUPPORT Alternative D - No action - present Class L remains as such

If any of the "change" alternatives are accepted, the result would be tremendous impact on wildlife habitat and populations. As stated in the DEIS, "Tortoise densities throughout the area range from 100 to over 250 per square mile. Relaxing recreational vehicle use (restrictions) here would accelerate the decline of resident populations due to collection, destruction and habitat degradation." Alternatives A, B & C would impact raptor population, mainly Golden Eagle and Prairie Falcon, for which the area is part of a core breeding area.

OPPOSE Amendment 25 - Change Red Cloud Mine Area from Class L to Class M.

This would impact the Chuckwalla crucial desert tortoise habitat (another of the four major populations, and cause damage to the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC. Tortoises are now being shot in this general area, as are chuckwallas and other lizards. Class M designation would bring increased human use and decreased control guidelines.

The 1982 Desert Plan Amendments reflect a magnification of a basic Bureau management problem, with which the Committee continues to take exception. This is that the Bureau does not but must manage wildlife from an ecosystem approach. By far the majority of the amendments represent increased piecemeal degradation of habitat with no consideration of desert-wide needs and conditions of wildlife species such as the desert tortoise. The Bureau should again be reminded of this!

- Laura A. Stockton

2. RECREATION MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE RAND MOUNTAINS - The Committee recently commented upon the first draft of this plan and designation of roads and trails in the Rand Mountain ACEC. Neither of these plans adequately addresses the status of the tortoise in the Rand Mountains, nor makes any provisions for their protection; much less their enhancement.

Heavy off-road vehicle use is planned on all of the area except the northwest sector, which was apparently closed to most travel as a sop to the Committee and related interests. The rest of the area is heavily criss-crossed by trails, and continued use will lead to tortoise habitat destruction to the point of eventual non-viability for the population there.

The Bureau is making no real plans for a Habitat Management Plan (required in an ACEC) and is even considering non-ACEC status; because ACEC designation and ORV use are incompatible. Please continue to support its designation as an ACEC and oppose efforts to eliminate it or change its status. Your letters and comments on this are vital.

Although the deadline for comment has passed, we are told by the Ridgecrest BLM office that they are still in the process of identifying and resolving conflicts, such as impact on wildlife, that would result from the proposed changes; and therefore comments are still valid and will receive due consideration.

- Carol Panlaqui

"ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN!" Applications for oil and gas leases on the public land of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA) came into the BLM Ridgecrest Resource Area Office in 1981. The Ridgecrest Area recommended, with the concurrence of the Desert District Office, that leases in the DTNA be denied. The final decision was to rest with the BLM State Director, who was expected to go with the Area/District recommendations. In August, the Committee heard rumors that leases were approved in the Natural Area. BLM denied this until the Committee's legal counsel requested written verification.

On September 23rd the written response confirmed that leases were "accidentally" approved in the northeast end of the DTNA, but were rescinded. The applicants are appealing the decision... This represents another example of the unfortunate need to continually monitor all aspects of resource management. There are more positive and productive uses of Committee time and effort!

- L.A.S.

A VERY BIG WORD OF THANKS: The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee wishes to express its deepest appreciation to the Foothill Chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club for their contribution of \$1,000. This was presented to the Committee by the outgoing president, Rita Boget; during the Foothill Chapter's successful 18th annual show on September 19th.

The money will be used for land acquisition and for the placement of a sign at the Interpretive Center on the Natural Area. This will serve as a reminder not to take tortoises from the area, nor to release unwanted pets there. It will provide CTTC Chapter phone numbers, where adoptions and proper disposition of pets may be arranged.

The Foothill Chapter recently held an election of officers, in which David Kavanagh became the new president. We wish them all the best.

VISITORS TO THE DTNA: According to the latest release from the Ridgecrest BLM office, 1601 people visited the Desert Tortoise Natural Area on 267 visitor days during fiscal year 1982; and 719 of them viewed the Committee slide program, which was presented on 23 occasions.

ANNUAL BANQUET: Full details about this will be provided in the next issue, which will include a reservation blank; but plan now to attend and learn more about the Committee's activities and concerns. It will be on Saturday, January 29, 1983; at Hodel's Buffet in Bakersfield.

Dr. Kristin Berry, our founder and chief advisor, will present a program about the tortoise, based on manuscripts on which she has been working. It will describe the historical distribution of the desert tortoise in the western Mojave. Her information comes from accounts of desert residents and visitors who lived or worked in the area from the 1920's on. This will be illustrated by maps and slides.

IT'S TIME TO THINK CHRISTMAS! Don't forget that our Committee fund-raising products make thoughtful and unusual gifts for everyone on your list, and as always, your purchase of them will also do much to help the tortoise. Send for our order forms and be sure to allow ample time for delivery.

WRITE THOSE LETTERS! Remember to get your comments on the California Desert Plan Amendments to the Riverside BLM office by November 15th. Thank you!

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE, INC.
P. O. Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555

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