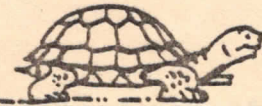


TORTOISE T-R-A-C-K-S



THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER +++ SUMMER, 1985
P.O.Box 453, Ridgecrest, CA 93555 + Vol. 5, #4 + Gloria Nowak, Editor

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED FOR DESERT TORTOISE LISTING! In October, 1984 the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service was petitioned to list the desert tortoise as an endangered species; in Arizona, southeastern California and southern Nevada. (See TORTOISE T-R-A-C-K-S, Summer/Fall, 1984.) The time for public support is at hand.

In 1977 the first listing petition was dismissed, due to a lack of supporting data. The recently completed 838-page report, The Status of the Desert Tortoise (Gopherus agassizii) in the United States, presents overwhelming evidence that the remaining desert tortoise populations are at or near the threshold for recovery. No matter how significant the facts, the "politics" of the proposal must be taken seriously -- your letter of support for the listing is extremely crucial.

Why is this listing so important? Prime tortoise habitats once supported over 200 tortoises per square mile. Since then, populations have declined and continue to decline due to human activities, causing a 90% loss of tortoise numbers and a 60% loss of the geographic range. People continue to take tortoises from the desert; also continue to shoot, run over and vandalize them by other means. Further, rapidly increasing habitat loss and killing from grazing, off-road vehicle (ORV) activity, urbanization, agricultural development, mining and energy development, and construction of roads and utility corridors continue to occur. With low tortoise reproductive potential and our increasing use of the desert, it is possible that within 10 to 20 years, viable tortoise populations will be found only in the Desert Tortoise Natural Area (DTNA).

Yet the DTNA cannot be considered the entire solution to desert tortoise survival. First, it does not include a sufficient portion of the original geographic range. Second, it is a natural area in concept only, because of serious impact and management problems. The following situations represent only a few reasons why desert tortoise populations continue to decline, even in the DTNA:

1. There are still approximately 11 square miles of private holdings to be acquired by purchase or exchange. Private owners can do anything they wish with their land.

2. The rate of vandalism of tortoises in the DTNA is significant. In one remote part of it, 14% of the dead tortoises had been shot. In April a researcher marked a tortoise just outside the DTNA fence, near the Interpretive Center. The next day it was found INSIDE the fence, shot to death.

3. Boundary fence gaps remain. Until recently, 2½ miles of the boundary were unfenced. Now, 3¼ miles are unfenced.

4. Through the fence gaps, sheep illegally entered and grazed on at least 3 miles of the Natural Area this spring.

5. There is increasing ORV encroachment at the Interpretive Center, and through fence gaps and fence cuts on other parts of the DTNA.

6. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) does not consider DTNA patrol and fence repair a priority. Although the DTNA was classified as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the 1980 Desert Plan, it has yet to be managed as such.

Endangered species listing is critical for desert tortoise survival throughout its geographic range, including the DTNA. Listing would require resource agencies to consider seriously the desert tortoise and its habitat in planning and management, and to protect this rapidly declining species. Such status would also mean increased availability of public and private

funds for tortoise habitat acquisition and protection.

In your comments, please voice your support of listing the desert tortoise as an endangered species, and your concern for the desert tortoise situation throughout the desert and in the DTNA. Include any personal observations that you may have made over the years, regarding tortoise population changes, habitat loss, vandalism and collecting tortoises on the desert.

Comments must be received BEFORE June 30, 1985, and should be sent to:

Karla Kramer
Office of Endangered Species
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
2400 Avila Rd.
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677

Also, it is important that a copy be sent to:

Associate Director - Federal Assistance (OES)
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Washington, D.C. 20240

- L.A.S.

SOME WORDS OF THANKS: To our good friends of the California Turtle & Tortoise Clubs for a gift of \$1,000 from the Tortuga Gazette account. Also, to Alan Baldwin for the sum of \$200, on the occasion of a recent tour of the DTNA given to a group of 6th graders by Committee members. And indeed, to Mr. Theodore Hanson, whose concern for the tortoise led him to make his 10 acres in Section 33 of the DTNA available to the Committee for a more than fair price.

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