



Winter  
2022  
Edition 42:4

# Tortoise Tracks

Newsletter



## Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

The 1980's was a hallmark decade for the DTRNA, as exemplified by this article in the Golden Gardens Newsletter, September-October 1980: "Desert Tortoise Natural Area Dedicated"

*Concerned citizens had banded together forming the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. and the Desert Tortoise Council and worked long and hard to raise funds for tortoise protection. With the help of these groups, The Nature Conservancy, California Garden Clubs and Desert Empire District members, other private individuals, and public corporations like the Union Oil Co, enough funds were contributed to build the necessary fence around this 38 square mile area.*

*But the work is not completed: this is only the beginning. Further funds are needed for maintenance, trail expansion, trail brochures, etc.*

This second commemorative issue of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the DTRNA continues with recollections of Board members, volunteers, and staff about their first involvement with the Committee. Greg notably ties together our various outreach efforts, such as through EarthShare, and the personal interactions that motivated his valuable contributions.

### *For Pete's Sake*

I discovered the DTPC around 2000 when my employer, Wells Fargo Bank, participated in the EarthShare Workplace Giving Campaign. I liked the name of the organization because it dealt with desert tortoises. So, I started giving annually to the DTPC through payroll deductions.



I had owned 2 desert tortoises while living in Southern California as a kid and later an adult. After retiring at the end of 2010, my wife encouraged me to find a non-profit that could benefit from my skills. I attended the 2012 Annual Meeting of the DTPC in Palmdale and was impressed by Mary Logan Kotschwar, who was then the Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator, and Dr. Kristin Berry. At that point I chose to explore joining the Board. This is my second desert tortoise named Pete. He lived to about age 45 and has his own Founder's Plaque at the Natural Area's Interpretive Kiosk!



**Greg Lathrop**  
Investment Chairperson

## Timeline: The Growth Years in the 1980s

The 1980s was a tumultuous decade for the environmental movement, starting with the relocation of 700 families from the Love Canal, Niagara Falls, New York due to toxic contamination. Activist environmental groups such as EarthFirst! and PETA are formed. President Ronald Reagan declares in his 1984 State of the Union Address, “Preservation of our environment is not a liberal or conservative challenge, it’s common sense.” During this decade, the DTPC and the BLM further forges its partnership with renewed purpose summarized below:

<b>Habitat Acquisition</b>	The decade kicked off with a 1,580 acre acquisition by the BLM of private land within the DTRNA boundaries. Additionally, by the end of the 1980s, the DTPC’s funding of The Nature Conservancy’s land acquisitions resulted in 3.55 square miles of land.
<b>Protecting the DTRNA</b>	On January 28, 1980, the Secretary of Interior signed the withdrawal of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area from mineral entry and for formal designation of the area. Published in the Federal Register on February 5, 1980. In 1987, John Kalish becomes first BLM ranger for patrolling and patrolling the Natural Area and in 1989 Jeff Howland hired as first Naturalist at the Natural Area.
<b>Environmental Education</b>	In 1980, the DTRNA interpretive center and facilities, including the kiosk, one vault toilet, and four nature trails, were completed. In 1989, the DTPC incorporates the “Keith Drake Discovery Center” as part of the Naturalist program made possible by a donation by his wife, Helen Drake.
<b>Stewardship</b>	In the winter of 1983, the DTPC conducts its first clean up party in area adjacent to the Natural Area; first fence repair party; clean-up and fence-repair work parties follow, twice annually in spring and fall. The DTPC’s participation in planning a Pilot Program to Control Ravens at the end of the decade culminates over 10 years of interagency, public-private coordination.

### Welcome Aboard, Liam Connolly

Liam joined the Preserve Committee this November as our Preserve Manager and Conservation Coordinator. “Liam is young and highly motivated,” said Jun Y. Lee. “He drove from Massachusetts with different family members pitching in, participated in the Desert Tortoise Council online introductory training course enroute to California and arrived at the DTPC Ridgecrest office in time for the DTC’s field course and his new role with the DTPC.”

He will be involved in key stewardship functions including managing the DTRNA Naturalist program, spring and fall work-parties, and stewardship and habitat restoration projects as well as public outreach.

Liam recently earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, New York. In college, he worked on ecological monitoring and biodiversity assessment projects.





## Habitat Acquisitions

The decade kicked off with a 1,580 acre acquisition by the BLM of private land within the DTRNA boundaries.

By the Spring of 1986, the DTPC provided funding for acquisition of 2.5 square miles of private lands to The Nature Conservancy.

From 1986-1987: Board member Bev Steveson purchased 20 acres within the DTRNA at a Kern County tax sale (a first for the Committee); the DTPC signs its first mitigation agreement with Kerr McGee and the California Energy Commission; and the DTPC funds a 948 acre acquisition from the Rudnick family.

In 1989, the DTPC funded The Nature Conservancy's acquisition of 212.5 acres at Kern County tax sales and by the end of the decade protected an additional 362.5 acres within the preserve.

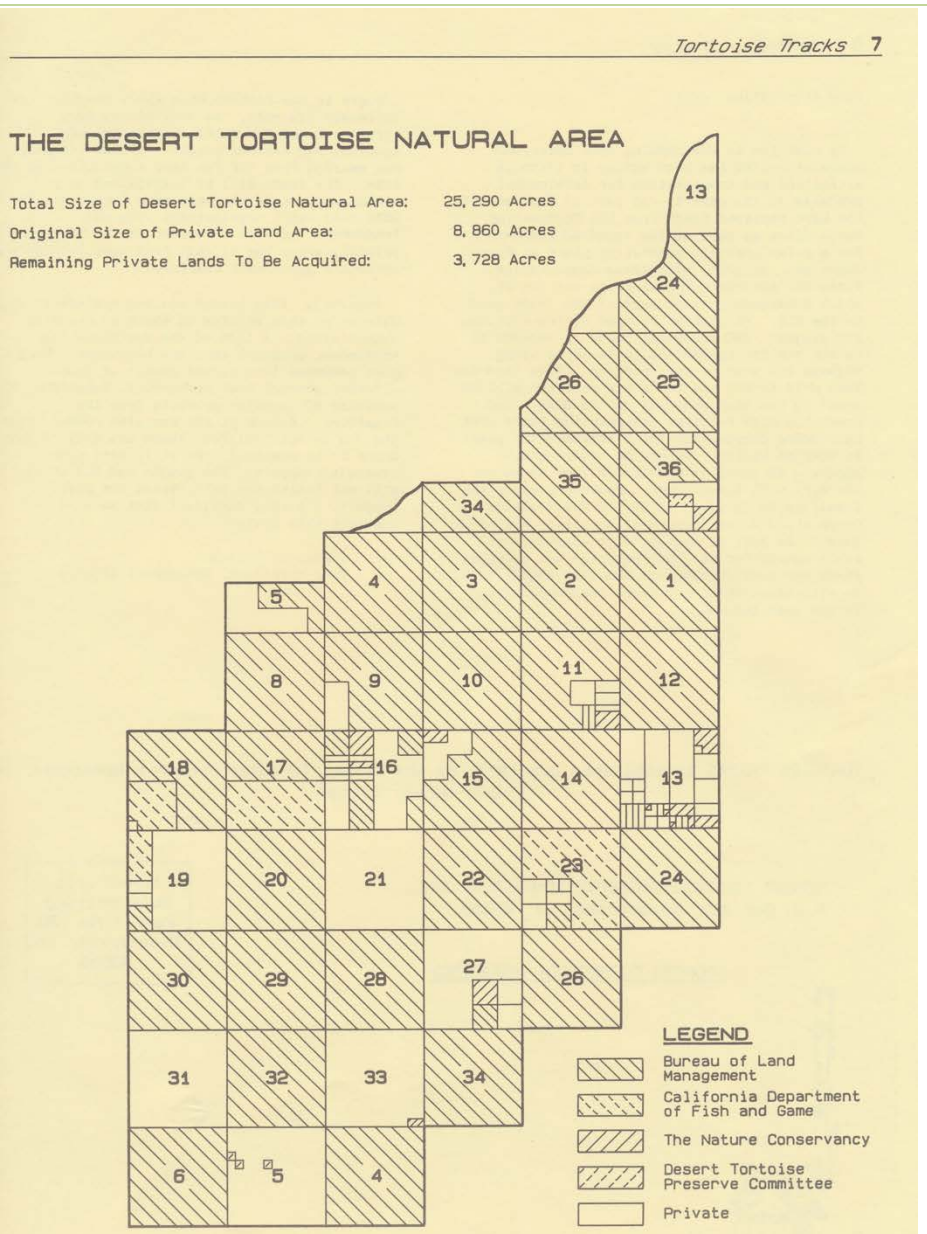
Summary of Private Lands Acquired To Protect Desert Tortoise Habitat In The Desert Tortoise Natural Area

Year	Acres	Year	Acres
1977	160	1985	10
1978	1,280	1986	978
1980	1,580	1987	20
1981	40	1988	534
1984	68	1989	462

Total Lands Acquired: 5,132 Acres

After experiencing the slow acquisition pace of the early 80's, we realized that it would take an unacceptably long time to complete purchase of the in-holdings. In an executive level meeting with TNC, we agreed to renew our collective efforts at fund raising to regain the momentum of the earlier years. We had a big success in 1986 when the DTPC joined with TNC and the Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to buy 948 acres in Sections 17, 18, and 23, the largest holding in single ownership. All the remaining parcels are much smaller. Also in 1986 we received two land gifts, a 10 acre parcel in Section 11, and a 20 acre parcel in Section 27. In a 1987 tax sale the DTPC bought another 20 acres in Section 36.

Archives: Land Ownership Map of the DTRNA, Tortoise Tracks, Fall 1989, Vol 10, No. 3



Archives: Land Ownership Map of the DTRNA, Tortoise Tracks, Fall 1989, Vol 10, No. 3.

The 1980's also involved a significant increase in public-private land acquisition efforts at the DTRNA including:

In 1988: The State Wildlife Conservation Board acquisition of 480 acres, a \$100,000 grant to the DTPC for land acquisition from the Environmental License Plate Fund, and a \$500,000 Congressional appropriation to the BLM for DTRNA land acquisitions.

In 1989: BLM receives \$1 million from Congress for DTRNA land acquisitions.

By the end of the 1980s, the DTPC's funding of The Nature Conservancy's land acquisitions totaled 3.55 square miles.



Archive Photo: Lisa LaVelle, our long-time Part-time Naturalist and friends at the DTRNA entrance, Spring 2022.

## Protecting the Natural Area

**January 28, 1980:** Secretary of Interior signed the withdrawal of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area from mineral entry and for formal designation of the area. Published in the Federal Register on February 5, 1980.

**1980:** Publication of the 20-year plan, *The California Desert Conservation Area Plan, 1980*, by the US Bureau of Land Management. The Desert Tortoise Research Area was identified as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

**1980-1981:** Tom Campbell, California Department of Fish and Game Naturalist, reports fence breaks and cuts from dirt bikers and trespass by sheep. And in **1981-1983:** California Department of Fish and Game naturalist Curt Uptain reports more fence breaks and cuts by recreation vehicle users.

**August 1981:** BLM altered fenced boundary to fence out Sections 5 and 13 in response to complaints from private landowners and the Pacific Land Foundation.

**October 1983:** BLM releases plan for West Rand ACEC. This Plan emphasizes recreational vehicle use, not protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. The West Rand ACEC abuts on the northeastern boundary of the DTRNA.

**1987:** John Kalish becomes first BLM ranger for patrolling and patrolling the Natural Area. BLM State Director Ed Hastey tours the Natural Area. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee proposes expansion of protection with 2-mile buffer and protection in the Rand ACEC and Fremont Valley.

**1989:** Jeff Howland hired as first Naturalist at the Natural Area. BLM and team burn Russian thistle along perimeter fence.



## Environmental Education

**1980:** The interpretive center and facilities, including the kiosk, one vault toilet, and four nature trails, were completed.

**1979, 1980, 1981:** The DTPC coordinated and co-sponsored “Field Study of the Desert Tortoise”, a course offered by the University of California, Santa Barbara Extension

**1983:** During the first 9 years of its existence, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee raised \$150,000 from sale of tortoise-related products and from donations. The funds were raised first for the fence, and then focused on land acquisition after BLM obtained funds for the boundary fence.

**Spring 1983:** DTPC develops three slide programs for the public.

**Summer 1983:** Large sign erected at Natural Area regarding take of wild tortoises and not to leave captive tortoises.

**Fall 1986:** The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee wins a national Chevron Conservation Award

**1989:** Helen Drake donates \$2,500 for the Tortoise Discovery Center (motorhome)

## From Our Archives: Hodel visits tortoise preserve, makes award [1988]

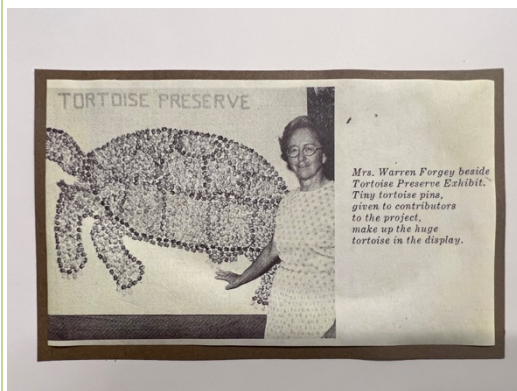
U.S. Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel visited the Desert Tortoise Preserve Tuesday near California City on the last leg of his California trip. During his visit, he met several desert tortoises firsthand, and was advised that the plight of the reptile is worsening, with a decline in the population over the last seven years of 50 percent. The purpose of the visit, according to Hodel, was to get “firsthand information about what going on out here,” and to illustrate that the California Desert Plan is working... While at the Preserve Hodel presented an award to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee for their work in helping to save the tortoise. The award was presented to George Moncsko, president of the committee. The Enterprise, June 22, 1988.

## Library holding two children’s programs [1983]

The Ridgecrest Branch, Kern County Library will offer two special programs. Leo and Gloria Nowak, nationally known desert tortoise experts, will present slide shows for kindergarteners through third graders and fourth graders and above Tuesday, March 29 [1983] at 2 p.m. The Nowaks will answer questions on care and legal adoption of tortoises and display a live tortoise to their audiences... The Daily Independent, March 31, 1983.



Leo Nowak was the man of the hour and had all of the children's attention Tuesday at the Kern County Library. Leo and Gloria, the wife, are on a desert tortoise slide show at Ridgecrest Branch, Kern County Library.



Mrs. Warren Forgey beside Tortoise Preserve Exhibit. Tiny tortoise pins, given to contributors to the project, make up the huge tortoise in the display.

In the beginning, the DTPC raised funds by selling \$1.00 plastic desert tortoise pins and later “I may be slow, but I get there” t-shirts at local fundraisers. This photo shows Betty Forgey, a founding board member, in front of a display of the organization’s desert tortoise pins fundraising panel.

Grassroots fundraising has always been a vital source of resources to protect the tortoise. Prior to the pin sales, for example, 5<sup>th</sup> graders at the West Boron sold seeds and donated the proceeds to the DTPC.

## Stewardship

**March 16, 1982:** The DTPC filed a lawsuit against the State Lands Commission for failure to adopt mitigations to protect the tortoise and the Natural Area

**Winter 1983:** First clean up party in area adjacent to the Natural Area; first fence repair party; clean-up and fence-repair work parties follow, twice annually in spring and fall.

**1988:** The first plaques honoring those who made substantial contributions to the Natural Area installed at the Interpretive Kiosk.

**1987:** First coordination meeting among the BLM, The Nature Conservancy and the DTPC.

**1987:** The Cantil Race Track is proposed, abutting the northwest boundary of the Natural Area. The Harper Lake transmission line and associate project is proposed.

**Summer 1987:** State Lands Commissions lawsuit regarding right of surface entry is dismissed.

**1988:** Tortoises with signs of respiratory disease were observed at the Natural Area.

**1988-1989:** DTPC participates in planning government Pilot Program to Control Ravens.

## Special Recognitions

**April 26, 1980:** Official dedication of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area with representatives from the U.S. Congress and the Secretary of Interior's Office in attendance

**1986:** The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee wins a national Chevron Conservation Award

**1987:** DTPC receives award from Secretary of the Interior for >10 years of protecting the tortoise

**1989:** DTPC accepted as an associate member of the Environmental Federation of California

**1988:** DTPC receives \$7,500 grant from Chevron Corporation

## From Our Archives: Quarantine Closes Desert Tortoise Natural Area [1989]

*Moving to respond to calls for further action to protect the desert tortoise in the face of the spreading disease epidemic and other threats, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced on September 12 [1989] that part of the Rand Plan critical tortoise habitat area would be quarantined for up to one year, beginning October 1 [1989]. Public land in the quarantined area, which includes the Desert Tortoise Natural Area and an additional 12,700 acres adjoining it to the northeast, will be closed to public entrance without special permission from BLM.*

*"We are facing drastic declines in desert tortoise populations in this critical habitat area," explained BLM California Desert District Director, Gerald Hillier. "There are some indications that current activities within the area may be raising the level of stress in the tortoises, thus making them more susceptible to disease. Since there are so many unknowns right now regarding the upper respiratory disease syndrome, we are taking this unusual action on a temporary basis while we seek additional answers.*

*The quarantine was first proposed by the Rand Mountains/Fremont Valley Technical Review Team, who members include Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee Trustee George Moncsko.*

*Tortoise Tracks, Fall 1989, Vol. 10, No. 3*

## Save the Dates:

Please email [DTPC@TORTOISE-TRACKS.ORG](mailto:DTPC@TORTOISE-TRACKS.ORG) or call (442)294-4258 to participate in two exciting events:

**DTPC ANNUAL MEETING:** Please join us virtually via Zoom on **SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2023 AT 10:00 A.M.** to meet our Board of Directors, view presentations about the progress we have made in 2022 and hear from various speakers including: Ileene Anderson, Public Lands Deserts Director, Senior Scientist, Center for Biological Diversity, who will provide an update on the Center's major initiatives in the Mojave desert, Tom Bickauskas, Associate Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, who will present the BLM's conservation plans in support of the desert tortoise, and our staff and Board members.

### CALL-IN INSTRUCTIONS:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86864390862?pwd=U0tRZXVycm1GWjVnUk1nN3F3VE93dz09>

Meeting ID: 868 6439 0862

Passcode: 707724

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**50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE DTRNA:** Celebrate with us for this in-person event on **SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2023 AT 9 A.M. AT THE DTRNA.** You will be able to experience: presentations by elected officials, government agency partners, and our non-profit partners and land trusts. This is a great opportunity to view our recently installed interpretative panels at the DTRNA Interpretive Kiosk and experience walking tours of the DTRNA nature trails.

## Updates:

**Fall Work Party:** A special thank you to Ron and Carol Berger, Allan Eggleton, Walter and Jenghiz VanPatten, Jun and Fred Lee, and Laura Stockton for cleaning the new Interpretive Kiosk panels, cleaning the nature trails, organizing our storage unit, and monitoring the perimeter fence at the DTRNA on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. We are also grateful for Bob and Christine Young who toured the DTRNA after viewing their recently installed Founder's Plaque at the DTRNA Interpretive Kiosk.

**Desert Tortoise Endangered Species Petition:** The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's desert tortoise status review is in process and it expects to deliver a report to the Fish and Game Commission at their February or April 2023 meeting.

**Desert Tortoise Endangered Species Petition:** The California Fish and Game Commission postponed a decision to list the western Joshua tree as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Members voted unanimously on October 12 to continue their vote on the petition at their February 2023 meeting, allowing time for additional deliberation and tribal consultation.



Desert Tortoise  
Preserve Committee, Inc.

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.**

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# Tortoise Tracks

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## 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:

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

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Let's grow the Permanent Endowment!

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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. Contributions and/or annual membership dues are tax-deductible, to the extent allowable by law. Contributor information is kept confidential and is not disclosed to third parties.

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