

## Briefing Statement

**Date:** February 24, 2003

**Title:** Stakeholder Participation/Support re: Desert Tortoise Recovery in California

**Issues:** There is no active constituency for agency efforts to recover the DT. Litigation as opposed to cooperation/collaboration is driving recovery efforts.

### Background/Status:

1. **OHV Challenge:** In July 2002, the Off Road Business Association issued a challenge to BLM and the environmental community to participate in funding an independent study of the population status of the DT and the threats and recovery actions identified in the DT Recovery Plan. As a result, several meetings were held with environmental and OHV interests to explore opportunities for working collaboratively to resolve DT issues. A framework for cooperation was drafted(Attached) However, environmental groups while expressing support implementation of the recovery actions identified in the framework were unwilling to meet to discuss the Framework for Cooperation. Off Road interests never took a position on the Framework.
2. **Bridging Committee:** A MOG Bridging Committee is evaluating opportunities to build “bridges” between scientists, managers, and stakeholders. These discussions suggest that stakeholders (and agencies) are confused about the role of the MOG vs. the role of the DMG in overseeing/coordinating DT recovery activities and are frustrated with how to effectively participate in the DT recovery process in California.
3. **Desert Tortoise Summit.** The MOG and the DMG endorsed a high level Desert Tortoise Summit to share information on the status of desert tortoise populations and recovery efforts, and build support for implementation of an effective and timely desert tortoise recovery effort. However, the Planning Group for the Summit concluded that holding a summit would be premature until the DT Recovery Plan is revised. Absent direction provided by a revised Recovery Plan, the Summit would likely focus on stakeholder issues and concerns and be counter productive. The group recommended the Summit be postponed until the fall of 2004.
4. **Cynicism is High; Trust is Low:** There is not a lot of confidence that agencies will effectively implement significant recovery efforts in a timely manner. Stakeholder are frustrated that important recovery efforts, such as raven management and feral dog management have been discussed for many years, but never been effectively implemented. In addition, trust levels among stakeholders and federal/state agencies are low. In general, there is a high degree of cynicism that collaborative/cooperative management will result in significant progress towards recovery or resolve issues related to DT recovery.

5. **Dissatisfaction with Current Direction:** Resource user groups (Off roaders, ranchers, etc) believe the current direction of the recovery program as specified in the Recovery Plan is fatally flawed. They believe the focus should shift from habitat protection to predation, disease management/ remediation, and artificial propagation/translocation. Environmental groups believe that BLM has failed to protect habitat by controlling grazing, OHV use, and other ground disturbing activities.
6. **Litigation Planned:** OHV interests have filed a notice of intent (NOI) to sue BLM and FWS for failing to address disease and predation as the primary factors contributing to the decline of tortoise populations. Environmental Groups have filed an NOI to sue BLM/FWS because recently completed BLM land Management Plans (NEMO and NECO) fail, in their opinion, to implement the DT Recovery Plan (particularly actions related to grazing and OHV use). DT related lawsuits are also being threatened against the NPS, Mojave National Preserve.

**Proposed Next Steps:**

1. DMG agencies can build credibility and trust with stakeholder by better performance at implementing priority recovery actions (e.g, disease management, predator control, monitoring).
2. Specific benchmarks should be established to provide for stakeholder to provide input on recovery actions/projects.
3. Stakeholder should be engaged in building a bipartisan political support for DMG DT initiatives.
4. The role/responsibilities of the MOG and the DMG in planning and implementing DT recovery, research, and monitoring activities should be more clearly defined. The role of stakeholders and stakeholder involvement should be defined as part of the process.
5. Stakeholders should continue to be invited to attend DMG and MOG meetings.
6. The DMG/MOG should continue to work towards a Desert Tortoise Summit following review/revision of the DT Recovery Plan.
7. There should be an outreach component for each of the major recovery initiatives to improve understanding, build support, and minimize opposition.