

Recommendations to Improve the Effectiveness of the DMG
June 11, 2001

“The game has been scheduled; we are here to play; we might as well win.”
—Bill Russell, Head Coach, Boston Celtic

Introduction

The White Paper includes recommendations for (a) the DMG to coordinate recovery efforts for the desert tortoise, and (b) involving the public in DMG activities. The ability of the DMG to carry out these recommendations (and achieve other goals in the 5-Year Plan) depends on the effectiveness of the DMG and the commitment of the participating agencies to its success. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the current state of the DMG and provide recommendations for improving its effectiveness. These recommendations are provided to stimulate discussion among the DMG and DMG Work Groups.

The DMG has been a useful forum for managers and staffs to meet, exchange information, and design and implement cooperative interagency projects. Most of the DMG's major accomplishments (see Table 2 of the White Paper) have several common characteristics:

- **Leadership and Direction-** e.g., Russ Kaldenberg provided the vision and leadership for the Millenium Conference; Dick Martin and Mel Essington the leadership for the DMG water initiative; John Key the vision and leadership for the illegal dump program.
- **Staff support** – e.g., the staff support provided by of Julie Smith and Russell Scofield have been critical to the success of the illegal dump program. Likewise, Phil Medica is the catalyst for the desert tortoise monitoring program; and Dave Sjaastad, Chris Stubbs and Doug Threloff planned, organized and carried out the burro management program. The DMG Water training would not have occurred without the staff support provided by Greg Lines, Tom Egan and Jeff Foisy.
- **Funding** – Adequate funding has been a key element of the DMG's major accomplishments, including GIS data base development, dump clean up, website development, millenium conference, burro management, and tortoise monitoring.

In summary, success requires vision and leadership and the resources (staff and \$\$) to make the vision a reality. Unfortunately, these ingredients are not present in all of the DMG's activities. Approximately one third of the activities in the DMG 5-Year Plan are behind schedule. Several of the Work Groups (Wilderness, Restoration, Law Enforcement, Science, DIRT) are floundering (i.e., they meet infrequently, there's inconsistent attendance, and no clear sense of direction). Overall, enthusiasm and support for the DMG seems to be waning.

Following are some possible explanations for this situation. (Note: these are general conclusions-- exceptions do exist).

1. Managers and staff are often expected to complete DMG work in their spare time. However, Managers and staff are generally fully committed to achieving the agency mission. DMG work appears to be a lower priority than agency work, and does not appear to be considered or given priority in an office's annual work plan or staff work load/assignments.
2. There do not appear to be incentives or strong encouragement to actively participate in the DMG/Work Groups or to use existing resources to attain DMG goals.
3. Managers approve of Work Group/Coordinator recommendations but then fail to make staff or funds available to carry out the recommendations (e.g., spring/wetland monitoring and assessment, entering data into the dump database).
4. Agency executives are not actively engaged in the DMG. Regional managers seldom attend DMG meetings or discuss the DMG among themselves. Except for FWS, the DOI agencies Washington offices have not actively supported DMG funding initiatives. In summary, all levels of Agency management (Field, Regional and Washington) do not appear to be aligned with or committed to the success of the DMG.
5. Managers do not actively participate in establishing the agenda for the DMG or identify issues or opportunities to bring to the table. Many managers simply come to a meeting every three months and, following the meeting, place the DMG on the back burner until the next meeting.

Some of the reasons cited for a lack of enthusiastic support of the DMG or participation in DMG activities include:

- Managers/staff do not have the time available to devote to DMG activities.
- DMG work is lower priority than agency work.
- Funding is not available to support Agency involvement in DMG activities.
- DMG/Work Group recommendations are not implemented in a timely manner.
- Too much discussion; not enough action.
- The DMG is too political and the agencies too turf conscious.
- The DMG is too large to be effective.
- DMG meetings are not fun any longer.
- Members do not consistently attend DMG/Work Group meetings.
- Too many people sit on the sidelines; there is not enough leadership from within the Group.
- There's little in the DMG that helps me.
- DMG is not working on high priority/high profile issues.
- DMG is not a high agency priority

Recommendations

Following are a number of actions that could be taken to address these issues and improve the vitality and effectiveness of the DMG. The efficacy of these actions depends on how much emphasis the participating agency's place on achieving the vision, mission, and goals of the DMG.

Leadership and Direction:

- 1. The DMG 5-Year Plan should be reviewed to focus on high priority issues and resolve important interagency problems, consistent with available resources.** DMG participants should review the DMG 5-Year Plan and identify goals that are a high priority and can be accomplished with available resources. The review should include the "buy in" of the Regional Executives and key Washington Office staff. The resources (\$\$ and staff) needed to achieve the goals should be identified and made an agency/office priority.
- 2. Agency Managers should actively lead the DMG.** The relevance of and ownership in the DMG would increase if managers had a greater commitment for leading the Group. Managers should Chair the DMG on a rotating basis and take a more active role in setting DMG goals, setting the meeting agenda, bringing issues/opportunities to the table, and providing direction to work groups. (This recommendation assumes that managers are willing to commit the time needed to fulfill these responsibilities). The DMG Coordinators should provide staff support to the Managers in this role.
- 3. Regional Executives should get more actively involved in the DMG.** For regional collaborative efforts like the DMG to have any chance of success, the participating regional executives must stand solidly behind the effort. If regional executives endorse the collaborative effort, and if they reinforce this support with active dialogue and involvement, their support will lend more long-term stability and importance to the collaborative effort at the field level. Without the interaction and approval of the regional executives, the role of the field manager and the coordinators is tenuous.
- 4. Reenergize the Group.** Involvement by regional executives would do a lot to reenergize the group. In addition, the Agency directors and/or the Regional Executives should formally express support for the DMG and define its relationship to agency mission.

To rebuild enthusiasm and improve knowledge and skills of the managers and Work Groups, the DMG should sponsor the training class offered by the National Conservation Training Center: Collaboration in Resource Management—an interagency approach. This class is designed to give land and resource managers and senior staff the knowledge and skills that will better equip them to deal with problems requiring collaborative management. An overview of the course is attached. Participation in the class should be mandatory for all Managers, Work Group Chair and key agency staff involved with the DMG.

Staff Support:

5. **The DMG organization (work groups, coordination staff, etc.) should be reviewed and aligned to achieve priority goals.** Each work group should be evaluated and reconstituted, as appropriate, to achieve the high priority goals identified in (1), above. The DMG should provide clear direction to the work groups and hold them accountable for producing quality products in a timely manner. Upper level staff with good leadership skills should be identified to Chair the Work Groups. Manager and staff assignments to the work groups should be identified or reaffirmed. The assistance needed to complete work group assignments should be identified and staff should be assigned to provide the assistance. Work Groups should operate according to DMG approved guidelines and procedures. Work Groups that do not have clear assignments/direction should be disbanded/mothballed.
6. **Incentives should be provided to Managers and staff to accomplish DMG goals.** Budget or performance incentives should be established for managers/staff to participate in and Chair the DMG and DMG Work Groups, and carry out the priority goals. Managers and staff should be given adequate time as part of their normal workload to complete DMG projects. An interagency team of managers should be established to identify performance and budget incentives for managers and staff who implement DMG goals.
7. **Hire/Assign DMG Coordination Staff.** Additional staff are needed to coordinate implementation of several major DMG initiatives and to provide staff support to the DMG Work Groups. Existing agency staff is fully committed to their current job and implementation of the DMG approved staffing plan should be a top priority. The plan call for four program coordination positions be filled:
 - Natural Resource Restoration Coordinator (BLM)
 - Public Outreach and Education Coordinator (NPS/State)
 - Research and Monitoring Coordinator(GS)
 - Desert Tortoise Coordinators (FWS)The Desert Tortoise Coordinator was hired by FWS in FY 2000 and the Natural Resource Restoration Coordinator position will be advertised in the Spring of 2001. DOI and other DMG agencies should pool resources and fill the remaining positions on a priority basis.
8. **Evaluate the DOI Coordinator position.** The role and responsibilities of the DOI Coordinator should be reevaluated. The current scope and complexity of the DMG program does not warrant a full-time Department level coordinator. The duties and responsibilities of the current coordinator could be expanded. Alternatively, a mid-level BLM/NPS staff person that answers to the Chair of the DMG could coordinate DOI involvement in the DMG and the management or policy responsibilities of the current DOI Coordinator (Congressional outreach, budget development, etc) could become the responsibility of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Group.

Funding

9. **Align Existing Agency Programs with DMG Goals.** Each agency/office should evaluate its current programs to determine if/how existing resources (\$\$ and staff) and programs could be aligned with DMG priorities and recommendations. For example, many of the DMG participants (NPS, BLM, and DOD) are currently developing inventory and monitoring programs for their lands. Options to combine and share resources to hire a DMG Monitoring Coordinator and develop consistent protocols should be fully evaluated.
10. **Develop an effective budget process for DMG initiatives:** Early on, the DMG concluded that funding would be needed to follow through on many of the DMG goals. Existing staff and funds were largely committed to dealing with agency programs and issues, and little flexibility exists to take on major new interagency initiatives.

Beginning in FY 2000, the Department of the Interior agencies involved in the DMG prepared a coordinated budget request for several new or expanded initiatives included in the DMG's 5-Year Plan, including burro management, habitat restoration, ESA support, ecological monitoring, tortoise monitoring and illegal dump clean up. Of the \$7.2 million requested in the President' budget, Congress provided \$1.2M to BLM and \$770K to FWS. No funding was provided to the NPS or GS.

In conclusion, success of the DMG will depend on each agency having sufficient resources to carry out its responsibilities identified in the 5-Year Plan. However, no new funding was requested for DMG in FY 02 or FY 03 and the DMG has no strategy for securing funds to implement the 5-Year Plan. Each agency needs to evaluate the best strategy for funding their participation in DMG initiatives. The DMG should discuss these finding and determine how best to secure funding in a coordinated manner.