

## **Information and Education**

**Background:** Declines in desert tortoise populations are attributed to a number of factors, many of which are directly related to the growth of human population in the desert. People commonly collect tortoises as pets. In addition to the direct impacts of collecting tortoises, pet tortoises may serve as vectors for the diseases when they are released back into the wild. Predation by common ravens and free roaming/feral dogs on DT has increased in the desert due to increase human populations. This predation has been identified as a serious threat to tortoise populations. Illegal or unauthorized off road use in the desert, often associated with residential development, is widely regarded as a serious impact to tortoises and tortoise habitat in many areas. In many localities, residents and recreation user groups regard tortoise as an impediment to human use and development in the desert.

Public appreciation and support for DT is fundamental to a successful recovery effort. There is presently no coordinated or comprehensive effort to communicate information about the desert tortoise to the public. There is also no comprehensive effort to provide objective, consistent information to stakeholders, decision makers and local communities about the factors responsible for tortoise declines and current activities to recover the desert tortoise.

**Goal:** Develop and implement a public education outreach program about the Desert Tortoise to build support for, and involvement in, its recovery.

### **Priority Messages**

1. DTs are an important and valuable part of the Mojave Desert ecosystem and are worth saving.
2. Individuals can help conserve and protect DT by:
  - a. Disposing of trash properly
  - b. Staying on open roads and trails
  - c. Keeping hands off – do not pick tortoises up unless they are in harms way
  - d. Not releasing pet tortoises into the wild
3. Agencies are working collaboratively to recovery the desert tortoise. Recovery efforts are based on sound science while accommodating human uses in the desert.

### **Priority markets:**

1. Coachella Valley
2. Morongo Basin
3. Barstow/Lenwood
4. Needles/Bullhead/Laughlin
5. Lancaster/Palmdale
6. Victorville/Hesperia/Apple Valley/Helendale
7. El Centro/Imperial Valley
8. Ridgecrest
9. Riverside/San Bernardino/Moreno Valley

## Priority Audiences

1. Residents
2. Desert recreation users
3. School children
4. Officials – decision makers, stakeholders
5. Tortoise pet owners
6. General public

**Proposed Course of Action:** The following course of action will be implemented over a three year period.

1. **Mojave Max Campaign:** The DMG DT outreach and education program will be built around Mojave Max, a popular cartoon desert tortoise that provides people with information about the desert tortoise and desert conservation in Southern Nevada. Currently Mojave Max is the spoketortoise for the Clark County Desert Conservation Program (the CCDCP). Mojave Max is also a real desert tortoise that lives in a special habitat at the Red Rock National Conservation Area in Clark County, Nevada. The DMG will enter into an agreement with the CCDCP for use of the Mojave Max image and trademark in California. The agreement will address use of the Mojave Max image in the following specific applications:
  - a. Radio and television public service announcements
  - b. Brochures targeted at desert tortoise pet owners
  - c. Curriculum-based education programs for use in California schools (K-12)
  - d. A proposed desert tortoise documentary for broadcast on public television via KCET-TV Los Angeles PBS, or through the Corporation of Public Broadcasting.
  - e. Expansion of the Mojave Max annual emergence media event into the southern California media market
  - f. Use of Mojave Max mascot at fairs and community events in conjunction with DMG-sponsored educational programming
  - g. Articles to appear in agency-sponsored publications such as newsletters, newspapers, and other free literature distributed to desert recreation users and the general public.
  - h. Use of Max image on agency-sponsored or agency-affiliated web sites such as [www.californiadesert.gov](http://www.californiadesert.gov), [www.dmg.gov](http://www.dmg.gov), [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov), or [www.joshuatree.org](http://www.joshuatree.org) (a non-profit partner).
  - i. Use of Max in a limited program of product development designed to raise tortoise awareness and generate funds for additional education and outreach ventures.
  - j. Establishment of a resident California Mojave Max/Maxine around which to focus California desert tortoise education and outreach initiatives.

2. **DT Media Campaign:** The DMG will implement a multi-faceted campaign to get key messages related to desert tortoise in the media. Elements of the media campaign will include:
  - a. **Radio Public Service Announcements (PSA)—The Mojave Minute:** The DMG will produce a minimum of 12 PSA per year for broad distribution to radio stations throughout the desert. PSA's are inexpensive to produce and afford the opportunity to reach a large audience. The PSA's address a variety of topics related to DT, general desert appreciation, recreation opportunities and agency/DMG efforts to recover the DT. The DMG will explore a possible partnership w/Clark County media center to produce PSA.
  - b. **DT Media Kit.** The DMG will design, develop and disseminate a desert tortoise media kit that includes information such as
    - DT life history, population status, and recovery efforts,
    - answers to commonly asked questions about the DT,
    - a digital photo disk of DT images, maps, etc.
    - contact information
    - Mojave Max literature.
  - c. **DT News Releases.** The DMG in cooperation with the Joshua Tree National Park Association will produce and disseminate 6-12 new release per year on newsworthy event and information.
  - d. **DT Television PSA/Programs.** The DMG will explore and implement opportunities to producing TV PSA and Programs related to the DT. A prospectus will be developed that outlines TV suitable events or subject matter. Partnerships with Clark County will be explored. Huell Howser (PBS) has indicated an interest in filming an episode of California Gold related to the DT. The DMG will also seek to find an appropriate celebrity such as Jeff Corwin or Steve Erwin to act as the media spokesperson for the desert tortoise.
  - e. **DT Summit:** In concert with the release of the new DT Recovery Plan, the DMG in coordination with the MOG will host a desert tortoise summit to:
    - Create awareness of the status of the desert tortoise populations, factors that are contributing to its decline, and efforts and accomplishments related to recovery of the desert tortoise.
    - Promote a dialogue and collaborative approach to resolving ESA (especially desert tortoise) issues among government, stakeholders, and business
    - Build support for implementation of an effective and timely desert tortoise recovery effort
  - f. **Media Field Day.** The DMG will host an annual media field day in conjunction with appropriate DT field activities (e.g., Line Distance Sampling) at several locations/media markets in the desert (Moreno and Coachella Valley, Victorville, Lancaster, etc). The purpose would be to establish a working relationship with the media and promote positive stories about the DT and DT recovery efforts.

3. **Desert Tortoise Webpage:** Develop an expanded DT web page targeted at the public, stakeholders, educators hosted on [www.californiadesert.gov](http://www.californiadesert.gov) or set up as a new/separate site e.g., [www.deserttortoise.gov](http://www.deserttortoise.gov). The site will be a repository for all information developed through the DMG Outreach and Education Program. The site will serve as a clearinghouse for DT online information and will include prominent links to other agency sites- USFWS, NPS, BLM, CA F&G, private sites, etc. Use existing resources at University of Redlands or MDEP to design, develop and host the site. The initial step will be to develop a plan for the site and a no cost agreement with MDEP/UR to develop, host and maintain the site.
4. **Implement DT curriculum in desert schools.** Incorporate a Mojave Max-based desert tortoise curriculum in desert schools (target 50,000 K-8 students over a three-year period). The curriculum would be designed to comply with State educational standards. Develop traveling trunks with educational materials (short term) and explore the development of computer based learning modules (long term). Conduct teacher workshops to show teachers how to use the traveling trunks. Aggressively publicize the curriculum to teachers through direct mailings and California Science Teacher Association Conference. Pilot an educational program at the Desert Discovery Center (Barstow) in FY 04.
5. **DT Newsletter.** Produce 2-4 DT Newsletters annually to provide objective and timely information on desert tortoise recovery activities and progress. The newsletter would be targeted at decision makers, stakeholders, opinion makers, and community groups. The newsletter would be composed of news releases and other off-the-shelf material and include interesting/objective articles related DT recovery actions, life history, population status, threats, agency profile, researcher/ conservationist profiles, DT events, etc. A high quality printed newsletter would be distributed via mail and an electronic (pdf) version would be available via the DMG desert tortoise web site.
6. **DT Pet Owner Brochure.** Develop a brochure about tortoise diseases and about responsible tortoise ownership targeted at pet owners for distribution through veterinarian offices, pet stores, animal shelters, and through tortoise rescue groups and tortoise clubs. Sites where the public can take sick, unwanted or rescued tortoises and points of contact need to be identified prior to developing the brochure.
7. **DT Power Point Presentation Tool Kit.** Develop a set of power point slides for use by managers and other interested parties in making presentations about DT.
8. **DT Sale Items.** In cooperation with non-profit cooperating associations or other private sector partners identify and develop low-cost, high impact sales items related to the desert tortoise, i.e., bumper stickers, patches, decals, t-shirts. Emphasis would be on developing tight, well-crafted messages to inform the public about the desert tortoise while also allowing for the generation of revenue to fund future tortoise outreach initiatives.