



## **Desert Tortoise Information and Education Project**

**Background:** The Mojave population of the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. In 1994, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) designated critical habitat covering 6.4 million acres of the desert tortoises range. Approximately, 4.8 million acres or 75 percent of the critical habitat occurs in the State of California, primarily on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Department of Defense. In addition to Federal protection, the desert tortoise (DT) is the California State reptile and listed as a threatened species under the State's Endangered Species Act.

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. For example, predation by common ravens and free roaming/feral dogs on desert tortoise has increased in the desert with increased human populations. In addition, illegal or unauthorized off road vehicle use in the desert, often associated with residential development, is widely regarded as a serious impact to tortoises and tortoise habitat in many areas. People also commonly collect tortoises as pets which directly reduces the number of tortoises in the wild. Pet tortoises may serve as vectors for diseases when they are released back into the wild.

An educated public that appreciates the value of the desert tortoise and understands how human activities and other factors are contributing to its decline is fundamental to a successful recovery effort. However, 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 an information and education program about the desert tortoise to build public support for, and involvement in, its recovery.

### **Priority Messages**

1. Desert tortoises are an important and valuable part of the Mojave Desert ecosystem and are worth saving.
2. Individuals can help conserve and protect desert tortoise by:
  - a. Disposing of trash properly
  - b. Staying on open roads and trails

- c. Keeping hands off –i.e., not picking 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

**Mojave Max Campaign:** The desert tortoise outreach and education program will be built around Mojave Max, a popular cartoon desert tortoise that is the spokes tortoise for the Clark County (Nevada) 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:

1. Radio and television public service announcements
2. Brochures targeted at desert tortoise pet owners
3. Curriculum-based education programs for use in California schools (K-12)
4. A proposed desert tortoise documentary for broadcast on public television via KCET-TV Los Angeles PBS, or through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
5. Expansion of the Mojave Max annual emergence media event into the southern California media market
6. Use of Mojave Max mascot at fairs and community events in conjunction with DMG-sponsored educational programming
7. Articles to appear in agency-sponsored publications such as newsletters, newspapers, and other free literature distributed to desert recreation users and the general public.
8. 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).

9. Use of Max in a limited program of product development designed to raise tortoise awareness and generate funds for additional education and outreach ventures.
10. Establishment of a resident California Mojave Max/Maxine around which to focus California desert tortoise education and outreach initiatives.

**Proposed Course of Action:** The following course of action will be implemented over a three year period. The schedule and budget for implementing the actions are attached. This work plan will be adjusted annually based on an evaluation each year's work activities and the results of the DT Public Attitude Survey (Item 7 below).

1. **Desert Tortoise Media Campaign:** A multi-faceted campaign will be implemented to get key messages related o 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 PSAs per year for broad distribution to radio stations throughout the desert. PSAs are inexpensive to produce and afford the opportunity to reach a large audience. The PSAs will address a variety of topics related to desert tortoise, general desert appreciation, recreation opportunities and agency/DMG efforts to recover the desert tortoise. The DMG will explore a possible partnership with the Clark County media center to produce the PSA's.
  - b. **Desert Tortoise Media Kit.** A desert tortoise media kit will be designed, developed and disseminated. The kit will include information such as:
    - desert tortoise life history, population status, and recovery efforts,
    - answers to commonly asked questions about the desert tortoise,
    - a digital photo disk of desert tortoise images, maps, etc.,
    - contact information,
    - Mojave Max literature.
  - c. **Desert Tortoise News Releases.** The DMG in cooperation with the Joshua Tree National Park Association, will be produce and disseminate a minimum of 6 news releases per year on newsworthy events and information.
  - d. **Desert Tortoise Television PSA/Programs.** The DMG will explore and implement the production of television PSAs and programs related to the desert tortoise. A series of 30- to 60- second television spots will be produced for broadcast on regional television stations in the Palm Springs and Los Angeles/San Diego markets. 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 desert tortoise—this opportunity will be explored. An appropriate celebrity will also be approached to act as the media spokesperson for the desert tortoise.
  - e. **Desert Tortoise Summit:** In concert with the release of the new desert tortoise Recovery Plan by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the DMG, in coordination with other DT recovery efforts will host a desert tortoise summit to:
    - Create awareness of the status of the desert tortoise population, 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 desert tortoise field activities (e.g., annual population monitoring) at several locations/media markets in the desert. The purpose will be to establish a working relationship with the media and promote positive stories about the desert tortoise and desert tortoise recovery efforts.
2. **Desert tortoise 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 will be designed to comply with State educational standards.
    - a. Create four trunks containing a variety of educational materials and a curriculum guide. The trunks will be designed to travel to various locations throughout the desert and will be mailed out to teachers upon request. (2000 students per trunk per year)
    - b. Publicize the availability of education materials/workshops through PSAs and mass mailings/emails to teachers and school districts.
    - c. Conduct teacher workshop throughout the desert region and sponsor a booth and conduct a workshop at California Science Teachers Association annual meeting.
    - d. Translate the curriculum guide from the trunk into Spanish through the Spanish Colonial Research Center of the National Park Service. Share information with Mexico educators through the Border Environmental Education Resource Group.
    - e. Develop and produce a curriculum-based educator CD that includes the curriculum guide, video clips and interviews with experts, stories, activities, games, handouts, etc, that teachers can use to teach students about tortoises. Explore partnerships with the San Diego Zoo Education Department.
    - f. Work with teachers to review and test the materials on the CD for their effectiveness, ease of use and age appropriateness in the classroom.
    - g. Place the CD on the website and make it available as a free download for teachers. Publicize the availability of the education materials/CD through PSAs, mass mailing and emails to teachers and school districts.
  3. **Desert Tortoise Newsletter.** Produce one-two desert tortoise Newsletters annually to provide objective and timely information on desert tortoise recovery activities and progress. The newsletter will be targeted at decision makers, stakeholders, opinion makers, and community groups. The newsletter will be composed of news releases and other off-the-shelf material and include interesting/objective articles related to desert tortoise recovery actions, life history, population status, threats, agency profile, researcher/ conservationist profiles, desert tortoise events, etc. A high quality printed newsletter will be distributed via mail and an electronic version will be available via the DMG desert tortoise web site.

4. **DT Color Brochure.** A color DT brochure will be developed to promote tortoise awareness and appreciation among desert recreation users and the general public.
5. **Desert Tortoise Pet Owner Brochure.** A brochure about tortoise diseases and about responsible tortoise ownership will be developed for distribution through veterinarian offices, pet stores, animal shelters, and tortoise clubs/rescue groups. The brochure will identify sites where the public can take sick, unwanted or rescued tortoises.
6. **Desert Tortoise Webpage:** An expanded or new desert tortoise web page will be developed that will be a repository and clearinghouse for all information developed through the Information and Education Project. Existing resources at the Department of Defense and/or the University of Redlands will be used 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 DOD/UR to develop, host and maintain the site.
7. **Desert Tortoise Public Attitude and Outreach Effectiveness Study.** A contract will be issued to conduct a sociological study to generate baseline data on public attitudes, perceptions, and values about the desert tortoise, about tortoise recovery efforts, and about broader California desert conservation and appreciation. The survey would be used to help design effective public outreach messages and strategies. A follow-up survey will be conducted at the end of the 3 year project to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach and education efforts.
8. **Desert Tortoise Sale Items.** In cooperation with non-profit cooperating associations, a merchandise plan will be developed for low-cost, high impact sales items related to the desert tortoise, i.e. bumper stickers, decals, patches, t-shirts. The plan will determine products, quantities, pricing, shipping, and billing agreements, inventory management, and retail and wholesale sales outlets. A DMG representative(s) will be identified to work directly with the non-profit partner in the development/approval process. Product could be developed and distributed among the DMG agencies in two ways:
  - Cooperating association may develop products with their vendors and sell at a wholesale cost to other agencies or their non-profit organizations.
  - Two or more cooperating associations may share in the purchase of new product in order to meet the minimum purchase of that product. The vendor would bill and ship to each association separately.
9. **Desert Tortoise Outreach Coordinator.** Past experience has shown that a Coordinator is needed to directly facilitate day-to-day implementation and coordination of the Program among the many partners involved in the effort. Accordingly, a full time Desert Tortoise Information and Education Coordinator will be hired by one of the land/resource management agencies to coordinate and facilitate implementation of the project. Project oversight and assistance will be provided by the DMG and the DMG Information and Education Work Group. Major responsibilities of the Coordinator will include:

- reviewing and providing quality control for Radio and TV PSA's, press releases, information and education products, etc
- writing and assembling the media kit
- organizing a desert tortoise summit
- distribution of PSA's and news releases to the media
- administering contracts for the development of various products (brochures, education materials, effectiveness survey, etc)
- organizing media field days
- working with the non profit cooperating associations to develop and implement an appropriate DT merchandising program.
- assisting with the design and implementation of a desert tortoise web page.
- organizing and providing staff support to the DMG DT Information and Education Work Group that will provide general technical oversight over the Program
- assisting with the design of the DT effectiveness survey and evaluation
- monitoring progress and providing quarterly reports to the DMG
- coordinating with various partners in the Program
- seeking grants to implement various aspect of the Program
- tracking expenditures and accounting for contributions for various agency and partners

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**Budget and Schedule**  
**DMG Desert Tortoise Information and Education Project**

	<b>Phase 1</b> <b><u>10/04-10/05</u></b>	<b>Phase 2</b> <b><u>10/05-10/06</u></b>	<b>Phase 3</b> <b><u>10/06-10/07</u></b>	<b>Phase 4</b> <b><u>10/07-10/08</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
<b><u>NFWF</u></b>					
1. Media campaign					
a. Radio PSAs	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,200		\$3,200
b. Media Kit		\$7,500	\$2,000		\$9,500
c. News releases	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000		\$6,000
d. Television PSAs/Programming		\$2,500	\$2,500		\$5,000
e. Desert Tortoise Summit		\$15,000			\$15,000
f. Media Field Days	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$2,000		\$5,000
2. Desert Tortoise Education Component	\$14,000	\$20,000	\$13,300		\$47,300
3. Desert Tortoise Newsletter	\$4,000	\$8,000	\$8,000		\$20,000
4. Desert Tortoise Color Brochure	\$6,500		\$5,000		\$11,500
5. Desert Tortoise Pet Owners Brochure		\$6,500	\$3,000		\$9,500
6. Public Attitude and effectiveness study	<u>\$40,000</u>			<u>\$20,000</u>	<u>\$60,000</u>
<b>Total NFWF</b>	<b><u>\$68,500</u></b>	<b><u>\$64,500</u></b>	<b><u>\$39,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$20,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$192,000</u></b>
<b><u>Other</u></b>					
7. Desert Tortoise Web Site	\$5,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$1,000	\$12,000
8. Desert Tortoise Merchandise Program	No Cost	No Cost	No Cost	No Cost	--
9. Tortoise Outreach Coordinator (includes support costs)	<u>\$75,000</u>	<u>\$80,000</u>	<u>\$64,000</u>	<u>\$21,000</u>	<u>\$240,000</u>
<b>Total Other</b>	<b><u>\$80,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$83,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$67,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$22,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$252,000</u></b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b><u>\$148,500</u></b>	<b><u>\$147,500</u></b>	<b><u>\$106,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$42,000</u></b>	<b><u>\$444,000</u></b>