

## **Project Description:**

The Desert Managers Group (DMG) was established as a forum for government land management agencies to address and discuss issues of common concern. The DMG sphere of influence is the California desert region comprising an area of 25 million acres, and its service mandate is to bring these agencies together in a shared mission to pursue their various goals according to a plan which helps them all uphold the highest conservation ethics in their work. In 2005 (DMG) created the Desert Tortoise Information and Outreach Program. The program has one GS-11 term employee, the Desert Tortoise Outreach Coordinator (DTOC), and staff support from the Department of Interior, Department Defense, and the State of California. The outreach project commissioned a public knowledge survey that was recently completed by the Colorado State University Department of Natural Resources Recreation and Tourism. Results from the survey will guide media and educational efforts. The DMG strategy includes a follow up survey in four years to assess what impact information and education efforts have had on the public knowledge and attitudes about the desert tortoise and tortoise recovery.

As California's population increases, off highway activities and desert recreation will also increase. How OHV vehicles are ridden and what riders do in the desert will have an impact on desert tortoises and their habitat. Many scientific studies about the tortoise are underway to gather data about this long-lived creature. However, one certainty is their numbers are declining. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service lists the Desert Tortoise as threatened. Our intent is to assist OHV users in forming safe and environmentally conscious riding habits. By reaching out to the public at large and student populations we hope riders will learn to enjoy, protect, and respect the desert.

## **Education:**

Desert tortoise education kits “**tortoise trunks**” have been developed to support California's grade school social studies and science curricula. Teacher may schedule the trunks for classroom use. Teacher training workshops on how to teach desert ethics are also being developed for the DMG by the Education staff at Joshua Tree National Park. The workshops will begin fall, 2007. The Joshua Tree National Park Environmental Education program reaches over 21,000 students annually. The Desert Tortoise Outreach Coordinator and the park's environmental education staff are members of California Science Teachers Association (CSTA) and will participate in the **California Science Teachers Convention** fall of 2007. At the convention the tortoise trunks will be on display. Brochures about the desert tortoise and invitations to enroll students in the Mojave Max Emergence Contest will be distributed at the CSTA convention. Thousands of California science teachers attend this annual event.

**The Mojave Max Emergence Contest** ([www.mojavemax.com](http://www.mojavemax.com)) has successfully concluded its second year in California, and will begin again in January of 2008. Students may go on-line and register a guess when Mojave Max, a live desert tortoise, will emerge from his burrow for the first time in 2008. As the contest matures into a regional awareness campaign, it will increase opportunities for people of all ages to learn about the desert environment. We hope the contest, as it gains popularity; will rival

Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil and the annual Groundhog Day media event. News stories and press releases about Mojave Max have been written and released. Each year the contest gains more student participation and teacher support.

The desert tortoise coordinator will hold **volunteer training workshops** in spring of 2008. The volunteers will be recruited to assist with desert tortoise events and public presentations.

In 2008 we are plan to **attend** (with volunteers) at least **10 OHV events** in Southern California. We will work with DMG partners to provide staff contact, OHV safety information and tortoise brochures at these events. There are also several OHV events sponsored by Cal4Wheel, Corva and CalPals (run through the Police Activity League) especially for youths. We have funds to purchase a **desert tortoise costume** this year (2007). A desert tortoise costumed volunteer will hand out a variety of promotional items at these events.

We have partnered with the Natural Science Collaborative and will be a participant in the April **2008 California Desert Nature Festival**. The festival will be held at the Palm Desert campus of California State University San Bernardino. There are also a variety of other festivals, fairs and expo we will attend with the costumed mascot as staff and time allow.

### **Signage and Brochures**

There is a great need for a desert tortoise **trail panels** to be developed. We propose working with different agencies (primarily BLM) to develop a basic graphic design that can be use desert wide. The trail panel would be a flat color graphic with easy to read text about OHV safety and the desert tortoise. The panel will be designed in a way that can accommodate various agency standards. It will also be designed to carry site specific information. The panel will also be translated into Spanish. The panels would be located on OHV trails, roads or located in high travel areas. We will work with agencies as needed to assist with panel production, location or technical problems.

In 2005 Defenders of Wildlife designed a brochure ***You're In Desert Tortoise Country***. Over 50,000 have been printed and distributed by government offices and OHV groups. The brochure has been successful. In 2008 we will need to **update and reprint** this brochure.

### **Media Outreach**

In 2008, we will contract with a professional writer to research and write **three stories** for print news media. These stories will be distributed with press packets and sent to Southern California news outlets.

**Two issues of *Tortoise Times*** desert tortoise news letter will be written, produced, and distributed.

We will **write and distribute six (6) new radio public service announcements** with a focus on issues of interest to the OHV community and OHV recreation users.

**Television PSAs** produced in 2007 & 2008 will be marketed to regional stations for broadcast across southern California viewing markets.

One **media event** will be planned and conducted to highlight OHV recreation and its relationship to desert tortoise conservation issues in California.