



**Draft  
Meeting Summary  
July 27- 28, 2005, Ventura CA**

**July 27, 2005 --- open to stakeholders**

1. **FWS office activity overview presentation.** Ray Bransfield and Diane Noda provided an excellent overview of the mission, activities and operations of the Ventura FWS office (see attached power point)
2. **Desert tortoise education and outreach project update.** John Hamill provided an update on the accomplishments and planned activities associated with the Desert tortoise education and outreach project (see attached). Bob Wood suggested that DMG and DT outreach materials could be distributed at the Edwards AFB air show on October 22-23, 2005.
3. **Desert Tortoise Recovery Action Effectiveness report.** Dr. Bill Boarman summarized the finding, conclusions and recommendations resulting from his literature review concerning the effectiveness of DT recovery actions (see attached power point). In summary, Bill reported that there was little hard data available to assess the effectiveness of recovery actions taken to date. His presentations provided recommendations for the future. Roy Averill-Murray indicated that the revised DT Recovery Plan will include recommendations for evaluating the effectiveness of proposed recovery actions. Bill's final report should be published in the next several weeks.

Dr. Thomas Leuteritz (University of Redlands) demonstrated a new GIS software tool for searching a for DT studies stored on the web and on local databases. The tool and databases will be made accessible to the DMG and ultimately turned over to the FWS Desert Tortoise Recovery Office for maintenance and upkeep.

4. **Stakeholder input.** Gerry Hillier asked how the DMG DT outreach effort was being coordinated with the Mojave Max effort in Nevada. Hamill indicated that the DMG is coordinating with Clark County to use Mojave Max programs in California. Clark County will be attending the August 24 Work Group meeting to discuss terms for use of Max and determine which direction we will go. Gerry also commented that it is important to properly frame questions when addressing effectiveness monitoring and that there is a need to address effectiveness monitoring though the DT Line Distance Sampling effort.

5. **Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation/planning Work Group Report.** Hamill reported on the activities of the subject work group (attached). Hamill emphasized that:
  - a. Stakeholders will be involved in planning as well as in the implementation phase.
  - b. The Work Group charter still needs DMG approval – pending approval of the stakeholder involvement guidelines
  - c. The University of Redlands has met with Mojave Preserve and BLM in preparation for the first threats workshop focused on the East Mojave.
  
6. **Habitat Restoration Report.** Russell Scofield reported on the following habitat restoration activities (see attached):
  - a. **DMG/Cal Desert Riparian Challenge** – The Challenge identifies and prioritizes 15 watersheds/landscapes needing restoration actions and identifies restorations costs. Russell has grant applications pending with the Wildlife Conservation Board and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for priority projects.
  - b. **Sahara mustard workshop** is scheduled for Aug 30<sup>th</sup> in Barstow - 100 person capacity; planning on track; the scope of the workshop covers the entire southwest deserts. *Managers requested a briefing from Matt Brooks and/or Val Page on workshop findings/commendations at next DMG meeting (Oct 5-6, 2005).*
  - c. **Low Desert Weed Management Area** – The MOU to establish the WMA is about ready for signature.
  
7. **Mojave Desert Historical Resources GIS.** Wayne Donaldson reported that the State had awarded a contract to Gnomen Inc. to complete the database/system. A test version should be available by the end of 2005 with the final system completed by June 2006. At that time, the State will support the system on their computer. The system will allow for remote data entry, data verification by OHP, and remote user access, display and analysis. The DMG expressed its appreciation for Wayne's personal involvement and commitment to complete the project. *Wayne requested that the DMG establish a development review team consisting of agency representatives to review and comment on pieces of the project as they are completed by the vendor.*
  
8. **Stakeholders Input.** Gerry Hillier had several questions – To Russ Scofield: Why is the Imperial County agriculture commissioner reluctant to join the low desert WMA? Russ did not know. To John Hamill: Is the August 2 Desert Tortoise Work Group meeting still going to occur? Hamill replied that the meeting has been postponed until later in the month. Agenda topics will include threats workshop planning and stakeholder involvement. Gerry recommended utilizing the University of California cooperative extension in the DT recovery planning process as an unbiased resource for information and scientific expertise.
  
9. **Hazmat Work Group.** Russell Scofield reported that John Key resigned as the long-time Work Group Chair and the future direction and leadership of the group is uncertain. In the past, the WG has provided a central focus on dumping issues,

created networking opportunities, facilitated on the ground projects, and coordinated interagency training opportunities. Russ identified several options for the Work Group:

- continue the work group as a standing group;
- abolish the group and work on goals as ad hoc groups;
- no longer work on DMG Hazmat goals

Mary Martin opined that the Work Group has accomplished a lot, much remains to be done, and she wants the group to continue. Don Maben wants to see the group continue and committed to have someone from Kern County participate. Russell reported that Roxie Trost wants the group to continue but that another manager representative is needed. *Don Maben volunteered to serve with Roxie as manager rep; Dave Burdette, Mojave NPS was volunteered to serve as new group chair. At Linda Hansen's request, Russell agreed to check with Hector Villalobos to determine if Peter Graves was available to serve as a co-chair. The next Hazmat work group meeting will be September 15 at the BLM office in Barstow.*

10. **Fire in the desert.** Larry Whalon (NPS) provided a presentation of the 75,000 acre fire that occurred in the Mojave National Preserve in July 2006. Ron Wyochak (BLM) reported that because of heavy fuel loads and favorable weather there had been over 160 fires in the desert since May 4 and many more are expected as the prime fire season approaches. Ron reported that the interagency fire program is working well with excellent cooperation among Federal, State and County agencies. *Ron requested more active involvement by DOD bases in DOI fire management plans.* FWS provided a presentation (attached) which described Endangered Species Act compliance requirement associated with fire suppression. *Judy Hohman is the primary point of contact within FWS for ESA fire issues. Land managers were requested to call the Ventura FWS office to obtain assistance.*
11. **Stakeholder Input:** None provided
12. **Next meeting.** 5-6 Oct. Primm, NV. The meeting will be hosted by the Mojave National Preserve.
13. **Winter Meeting** – BLM will host the winter meeting in Palm Springs or Riverside on 18-19 January 2006.

#### **July 28, 2005—Closed to General Stakeholder Participation**

**Note: Item 1, below was a carryover from the first day and was open to stakeholders**

1. **Newberry Springs Sludge Disposal**– Maureen O'Reilly reported that she had been hired by the Community Services District to evaluate a proposal to establish a sewage sludge drying facility in Newberry Springs. Sludge would be trucked in from Orange County/LA County. The proposed contractor currently operates a facility in Adelanto but has been ordered to shut it down for compliance issues. The new facility would

ultimately host 75% of southern California sewage sludge and poses a serious public health and environment risk to the area.

2. **QuadState participation in Closed DMG Sessions.** Supervisor Leimgruber and Gerry Hillier outlined the basis for the request for QuadState to participate in closed portions of DMG meetings (a copy of Supervisor Leimgruber's June 23, 2005 letter (attached) was handed out at the meeting)
  - a. Not all counties have sufficient staff, expertise or time to participate in DMG meetings.
  - b. QuadState (Mr. Hillier) was very knowledgeable of desert issues and the desert. Counties that participate in QuadState value his input on all desert issues. As such, it was very important to have Mr. Hillier sit in on DMG closed session discussions.
  - c. The issues of greatest interest to the counties were frequently discussed during the closed portion of DMG meetings.
  - d. QuadState is able to represent counties when they are not able to attend and provide the counties with feedback on matters discussed at the DMG meeting.
  - e. QuadState is a public agency (not an advocacy group) that serves as a clearing house for member counties related to endangered species and other issues.

A lengthy discussion followed:

- a. Glenn Black, California Department of Fish and Game, asked what collaborative actions QuadState had been involved in that involved DMG member agencies other than the Colorado River MSHCP. Mr. Hillier stated QuadState has primarily been involved in desert tortoise recovery issues, RS2477 issues, and issues related to Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT). Mr. Hillier also stated that because desert tortoise critical habitat is primarily located on federal lands the counties have not had much involvement in actual recovery actions. Quad State has primarily been involved in reviewing agency land management plans, desert tortoise recovery/management plans, attending Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group meetings and providing feedback to QuadState member counties on desert tortoise issues. QuadState also hired a scientist to participate in the USFWS Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan Assessment Committee review of the current state of knowledge of the desert tortoise. This scientist, a statistician, contributed significantly to this process.
- b. Linda Hansen, BLM California Desert District Manager, stated she is a strong proponent of county involvement in DMG collaborative activities. She asked Supervisor Leimgruber why Imperial county felt better served by having QuadState represent them at DMG meetings rather than by a Supervisor or other county employee that is involved in day to day activities and has in depth knowledge of their policies, capabilities and issues. Supervisor Leimgruber replied that the counties that belong to QuadState look to Mr. Hillier as the expert to provide solutions to the issues and concerns they have.

Therefore, to understand the issues properly Quad State needs to be present at DMG meetings to listen to discussions and provide appropriate recommendations to the counties.

- c. Diane Noda, Manager USFWS Ventura Field Office, asked if the request by Imperial County was to have the QuadState become a member of the DMG or was the request for Mr. Hillier (or his representative) to represent Imperial County and other counties at DMG meetings. Supervisor Leimgruber stated the request was to have Quad State (Mr. Hillier or his representative) represent the Counties at DMG meetings.
- d. Kern County Supervisor Don Maben clarified that Kern County did not support Mr. Hillier's representation of Kern County at DMG meetings. Supervisor Maben stated Kern County will represent itself at DMG meetings. Supervisor Maben asked if Imperial County could contract with Mr. Hillier so that he could officially represent Imperial County as a county contract employee. Supervisor Leimgruber responded yes, that was a possibility.
- e. Glenn Black asked if QuadState member counties outside the DMG area of interest were interested in having representation at DMG meetings. Mr. Hillier stated there is little interest from QuadState member counties outside of California to have representation at DMG meetings. However, the other QuadState member counties had no problems with his attendance at DMG meetings.
- f. Diane Noda asked if Mr. Hillier or his representative could make decisions at DMG meeting on behalf of Imperial County. Mr. Hillier responded that he had no decision making authority on behalf of Imperial County and he would only provide feedback to the county on what occurred at the meeting. Supervisor Leimgruber stated Mr. Hillier would provide feedback to the county with an interpretation of discussions and recommended solutions/actions for the county.
- g. Linda Hansen stated that the purpose of DMG closed sessions is to allow member agency managers to go through the decision making process and move projects forward. If Mr. Hillier has no decisions making authority, what is gained by his attendance? The DMG needs someone from the counties to attend that can provide support or articulate rational why the county can not support a particular issue of interest. The value of the DMG is in the networking of agency individuals who can commit and move issues forward. The counties need to have supervisors present to move collaborative issues forward. That is the purpose for having high level agency managers present at DMG meetings – to make decisions and move issues forward. Supervisor Leimgruber responded that he tries hard to attend DMG meetings but can not always attend. He has offered what he feels is a compromise by asking that QuadState be allowed to represent his county at DMG meetings and report

back to him on discussions, issues, solutions and recommendations for county action.

- h. Robert Wood, Manager, Environmental Directorate, Edwards AFB, stated the purpose for DMG closed session meetings was for the Managers to have open and frank discussions about the issues that affected them all. Member agencies needed to have representatives attend DMG closed session meetings that could state their agencies position, commit to actions and allocate resources if necessary to further the issue under discussion. He pointed out that the DMG addresses a wide variety of goals that go beyond the scope of QuadState's charter (illegal dumping, visitor service/ education, raven management, law enforcement, fire etc). The DMG was looking for County government involvement on all these issues not just the ones that are being addressed by QuadState. If QuadState can not speak for and make commitments on behalf of the counties on the full range of activities being addressed by the DMG he saw no reason for them to attend closed session meetings. He had no objection to having QuadState attend as staff support to the Counties official DMG representative. His concern was having QuadState attend as a representative of the counties.
- i. J.T. Reynolds, Superintendent, Death Valley National Park, asked if another Imperial County Supervisor could represent the county if Supervisor Leimgruber could not attend a specific DMG meeting? He further asked if a County Supervisor of one county could represent other counties and make decisions on their behalf at DMG meetings. Supervisor Leimgruber stated that could be a solution but he would have to investigate the possibilities further. He pointed out that Imperial County was seriously understaffed and that all the County Supervisors were extremely busy. Several managers indicated that were in a similar situation, however, DMG activities are of sufficient importance that they make time to attend DMG meetings.
- j. Glenn Black stated he had concerns about the ability of Mr. Hillier to represent San Bernardino County. Based on his attempts to involve San Bernardino County in various DMG work groups he has had little to no success in getting a response or establishing a meaningful dialogue much less a commitment from anyone with San Bernardino County.
- k. John Hamill, DOI California Desert Coordinator, stated he has requested a DOI Solicitor's opinion on whether participation by Quad State in DMG closed sessions poses an issue with regard to the DMG's current exemption from the Federal Advisory Committee Act. He expected the Solicitor's opinion by September 15, 2005. He advised the DMG to withhold a decision to allow QuadState to attend closed sessions until the Solicitor's opinion is complete.

Following a short break, Clarence Everly, DoD DMG Coordinator, asked if any DMG member Managers were opposed to Imperial County hiring Mr. Hillier as a contract county employee to represent them at DMG meetings. No managers were opposed to this proposal. Supervisor Leimgruber stated he would have to present this option to the full Board of Supervisors. He stated, based on their current economic climate, this request would probably not be approved by the full board.

Based on the discussion above and the concerns/issues expressed by DMG Managers, Supervisor Leimgruber respectfully withdrew his request to have the Quad State represent Imperial County at DMG closed session meetings. He stated he would formalize this action in a letter to the DMG. Supervisor Leimgruber further rededicated himself to attending as many DMG meetings as possible.

The DMG recommended that DOI continue to pursue a Solicitor's opinion but to broaden the request to address participation by other quasi governmental entities.

**3. Charter and MOU update**

- a. **BIA membership request.** David Wooten outlined the request from BIA to join the DMG and sign the MOU. *The DMG supported BIA's request and welcomed him to the Group. Hamill and Everly will update the Charter and MOU to reflect BIA participation.*
- b. **DMG MOU/Charter Finalization.** Everly indicated that the MOU will be sent out for signature in late August. Separate copies will be mailed to all the signatories and compiled electronically onto a single copy.

**4. Desert Tortoise Planning and Implementation Work Group.** Roy Averill Murray indicated that after meeting with the Science Advisory Committee the DTRO was proposing changes to the threats workshops and recovery planning process. He also presented a revised Work Group Charter for DMG approval (attached). The DMG was unable to reach consensus on the recovery planning process or the Charter. It was agreed that the Work Group would meet on August 2 to discuss the issues in more detail. Roy also reported that The FWS DTRO and CDFG were prepared to take over as co-chairs of the Work Group

**5. Partnering and Streamlining**

- a. **Federal Amargosa Basin Coordination Process.** Hamill provided a PowerPoint presentation on the scope and objectives of the process that was established to coordinate DOI activities in the Amargosa basin (Attached). JT Reynolds indicated that Amargosa water issues were a top priority for NPS and that there were several major developments that posed an immediate threat to park resources.
- b. **Mojave Ground Squirrel.** Becky Jones presented a proposal to establish a DMG work Group to develop a MGS conservation strategy/plan that would avoid the need for Federal listing of the MGS. One of the priorities of the work group should be to develop a range-wide monitoring effort for MGS. *The DMG*

*supported formation of the ad hoc work group. DMG members who said they were interested in participating include CDFG, FWS, BLM, EAFB, NTC, NAWS, and Kern County. The first meeting was tentatively set for August 23, 2005 at the BLM office in Ridgecrest. Becky Jones will chair the meeting.*

- c. **USFWS conservation program.** Mary Root provided an overview of numerous partnership and grant programs available to support fish and wildlife conservation efforts (attached). Mary offered to assist the agencies pursue these partnering and grant programs/opportunities
  - d. **Santa Ana River Watershed Fuel Management Pilot Project.** Max Copenhagen (USFS) described a California Biodiversity Council project to improve the efficiency of planning and review of fuels management project in the Upper Santa Ana River Watershed (attached)
6. **Raven Management EA.** Amy Fesnock distributed an update on the Raven EA (attached) which described the range of alternatives and the impacts that will be addressed. *The Managers supported the direction of the EA as described in the Update.* She reported that a draft EA would be sent out to participants for review; Cal Fish and Game agreed to review the portion of the EA that addressed hunting; BIA will contact tribes one more time to insure there is no cultural issue.
7. **Scenic Byways.** Craig Mattson reported on the results of a meeting that was held to assess the feasibility of establishing scenic byways in the Cal desert (attached). The group was awaiting feedback from Supervisor Postmus on San Bernardino County's interest in supporting a scenic highway designation that would connect Death Valley NP, the Mojave National Preserve, and Joshua Tree NP.
8. **Roundtable Reports**
- a. Rest Areas (Hamill) – (see attached update). 17 Aug next Valley Wells work group meeting; The Boron rest area moving forward and will replicate the Valley Wells process; Caltrans has requested DMG input on the interpretive themes for other rest areas in the desert.
  - b. Bernie Weingart is new Regional Forester who will sign the DMG MOU (Copenhagen)
  - c. Matt Fuzie no longer Colorado desert superintendent; Mark Jorgenson is holding down fort for the moment
  - d. Edwards Air show is scheduled for October 22 – 23. Space is available for a DMG display. Individual DMG agencies are also welcome to set up displays

#### Attachments

1. FWS mission and activities (ppt)

2. DT education and Outreach update (brief)
3. DT effectiveness evaluation report (ppt)
4. DT Recovery Planning and Implementation Work Group Update (brief)
5. Habitat Restoration Update (brief)
6. MOJA fire (ppt)
7. ESA and fire (ppt)
8. Ouadstate letter re DMG participation (letter)
9. BIA membership request (letter)
10. Revised DT planning and implementation work group Charter
11. Amargosa Basin Coordination Process (ppt)
12. Mohave Ground Squirrel Partnership (ppt)
13. USFWS Conservation Programs (ppt)
14. Santa Ana Watershed Fuel Management Project (brief)
15. Raven EA update (brief)
16. Scenic byway Meeting Summary
17. Roadside Reset Area Update (brief)