

**West Mojave Plan  
Task Group 1  
Green Tree Inn, Victorville  
May 15, 2002**

**Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
Ileene Anderson	CNPS	Gene Kulesza	TXI & MDMAC
Ray Bransfield	USFWS	Chuck LaBar	SNEI
Marie Brashear	CDC, WRA, SPCW	Laurie Lile	City of Palmdale
Dave Charlton	CHARIS	Brian Ludicke	City of Lancaster
Andrea Clark	Inyo County	David Matthews	Public
Bob Clark	Clark Enterprises	Tonya Moore	Caltrans
Paul D. Condon	Consultant	Will Moring	DVMC
Mike Connor	Tortoise interest grps.	Lou McNairy	Sapphos Env
Tom Dailor	LADWP	James McRea	City of Ridgecrest
Joe Decruyenece	LA Co. Reg. Planning	John Orr	Orr Co.
Karen Drewe	Caltrans Dist 7	Lorelei Oviatt	Kern County Planning
Clarence Everly	DOD	Doug Parham	WSBCLA
Jeri Ferguson	Cal 4-Wheel Drive	Karl Price	Caltrans Dist 7
Ken Foster	Pub Land/Pub Use	Randy Scott	SB Co./Planning
Martin Gill	CORDR	Debbie Stevens	AVTREC
Mark Hagan	Edwards AFB	Jack Stewart	California City
Gerald Hillier	SB County	Robert Strub	Trona
Harold Johnson	BLM - Barstow	Donna Thomas	RCDS
Manuel Joia	MCIB Barstow	Rocky Thompson	CDFG
Becky Jones	CDFG	Barbara Veale	PFUSA
Peter Kiriakos	Sierra Club	Hector Villalobos	BLM - Ridgecrest
Paul Kober	CORVA	Carol Watson	Sapphos Env
		Melinda Winney	SNEI

**West Mojave Team:** Bill Haigh, Larry LaPre, Ed LaRue, Valery Pilmer

**Introduction**

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 9:45 AM and introductions were made. Haigh noted that this would be the final meeting for Task Group 1. Haigh asked the group members to e-mail any changes to the April 16, 2002 Task Group 1 meeting notes to him. Doug Parham referenced page 11 of the meeting notes and asked to read a letter in regards to the El Mirage DWMA boundary adjustment. Haigh indicated that this could be discussed later in the meeting under "HCA Boundary Adjustments."

## **Tortoise DWMA Motorized Vehicle Access Network**

Les Weeks provided an overview of the route designation effort. He noted that the teams are using a standard set of questions in a “decision tree” to assure consistency in how the routes are designated. Weeks noted that each route is being evaluated individually, but that the potential cumulative effects (biological and socio-economic) are being considered as well. The following subregions have been completed: Red Mountain, Kramer, Fremont, Superior, and Newberry Rodman. The next subregions to be completed include Coyote, El Mirage, El Paso, Ridgecrest, Pinto, Juniper and Middle Knob. Weeks noted that staff is paying particular attention to areas identified as high quality tortoise habitat with high levels of disturbance. The following points were made during the discussion of this item:

- Martin Gill asked what percentage of routes is being closed. Les Weeks responded that the calculation has not been done, and indicated that more closures are occurring where the route inventory is the densest.
- Jeri Ferguson asked that the document reference the Back Country Discovery Trail, and that it be shown on the maps. Bill Haigh responded that there would be discussion of the trail in the Motorized Vehicle Access section of the HCP.
- Mike Connor asked how many miles of routes are in the inventory. Les Weeks responded that about 8,000 miles were surveyed in the 2001-2002 ground-truthing effort, with about 5-6,000 of those being in the DWMA's.
- Pete Kiriakos indicated he would like to see a comparison between the route inventory and the inventory known to exist in 1980.
- Ilene Anderson noted that the desert cymopterus locations are not shown on the Kramer map. She asked what resources were considered during the designation process. Bill Haigh indicated that Larry LaPre would be reviewing the proposed route networks for potential impacts to other species prior to finalization.
- Mike Connor asked which biologists are reviewing the routes. Les Weeks indicated the field office biologists are doing the review. Haigh added that West Mojave Team biologists would double check the network prior to finalizing the proposal.

## **Strategy for Making Maps Available**

Valery Pilmer indicated that staff met with GIS staff from the BLM, San Bernardino County, and the Mojave Desert Ecosystem Project (MDEP) to discuss how best to provide map products to the public. Pilmer noted that members of the public have different computer skill levels and needs. Staff is trying to tailor a map program that meets these varying needs, and is working on establishing the following program:

- JPEG or PDF files of primary maps will be posted on the West Mojave Plan web site.
- Hard copies of the primary maps will be available for viewing in BLM offices and other sites within the West Mojave Plan area (e.g. city and county offices, libraries, etc.)
- A system will be established so that public members can purchase West Mojave Plan maps

- from Riverside Blueprint, and/or other vendors.
- CD will be available containing the standardized set of West Mojave Plan maps.
- For custom map requests, San Bernardino GIMS program will be able to produce maps at a cost of about \$72 per hour, plus about \$3.00 per linear foot of paper.
- Basic data layers will be accessible through the MDEP website ([www.mojavedata.gov](http://www.mojavedata.gov)) which individuals can download to prepare their own map products.

James Essex from MDEP explained what will be available at the MDEP website. He noted the following:

- A West Mojave Plan icon will be on the website.
- Information for the site will be developed over the next month.
- Public will be able to access all data available for the area.
- Site will provide a high level of detail.
- Individuals will be able to change scale of maps. Data will be processed on the server at MDEP
- Site will also provide PDF format of all maps.
- Photography can be included as well as information about the photos. UTM coordinates can be attached to the photos.

The following discussion occurred:

- How much information is already in the system? Haigh indicated that it will be another 2-3 weeks before data is available.
- Are satellite maps available? Essex indicated that dynamic satellite data is not available, however older satellite information can be made available.
- Will a link be provided from the West Mojave Plan website? Haigh responded "yes."
- How can James Essex be contacted? Essex indicated that individuals could contact him at (760) 255-8898.
- Pete Kiriakos referenced Riverside County's format that enables the public to print an 11x17 version of the maps. Essex indicated that to do this, the West Mojave Plan maps would need to be reformatted.
- Jeri Ferguson asked whether the route designations for the ACECs and 1985-87 effort were available. Haigh indicated that this information is still being digitized and would be available when completed.

### **Proposed Livestock Grazing Strategy**

Ed LaRue noted that the proposed grazing strategy consists of the following recommendations:

26. Adopt Regional Standards and Guidelines for public land health.
2. Incorporate the terms and conditions from the biological opinion for cattle grazing.
3. Incorporate the terms and conditions from the biological opinion for sheep grazing.
4. Relinquish the Pilot Knob allotment.

5. Allow voluntary relinquishment of allotments.
6. Set utilization schedules for perennial and ephemeral forage.
7. Eliminate ephemeral grazing in DWMA's. LaRue noted that for ephemeral use, only production of biomass is measured, not utilization. Measurement of utilization is associated with perennial use only. Pete Kiriakos asked how good the measuring and monitoring of utilization is each year. Gail O'Neill responded that BLM has extensive records of utilization, and that generally speaking, staff has the time to do this. LaRue noted that rangeland health assessments have been done for several allotments, and that ecological range assessments would be completed within one year of plan adoption to use as a baseline. Once this is completed, consultation would occur on any problems and measures would be taken to correct any problems. This would be done every five years.
8. No temporary non-renewable permits.
9. Exclusion zones would be created within DWMA's where cattle would not be allowed if certain standards were not met.
10. Modify cattle guards to protect tortoises.
11. Remove sheep grazing from all DWMA's. It was noted that sheep allotments in DWMA's are not being used because of the 1991 BO.

The following discussion occurred:

- Dave Matthews asked how biomass is measured. Anthony Chavez, BLM Barstow, indicated that recognized and accepted methods are used including "clip and weigh."
- Ileene Anderson asked how grazing in HCA areas outside the DWMA's is being addressed. LaRue replied that he is asking Larry LaPre for input in those areas. LaRue noted that staff is looking at where the allotments occur and how they may affect other species. The section addressing this is currently incomplete.
- Ileene Anderson asked how the proposed strategy is different from current management. LaRue note the elimination of ephemeral grazing in DWMA's, not allowing T & R, and allowing for voluntary relinquishment as major differences.
- Andrea Clark asked whether the plan would address sheep grazing on private land. LaRue noted that there is no clear way to regulate sheep grazing on private land. Ray Bransfield indicated that in areas where private and public lands are intermingled (i.e. California City area), grazing on private lands could impact public lands. Bransfield said that this is an issue that needs to be looked at. Clark asked that Inyo County be advised and allowed to comment on the proposal if anything is added to the plan to address this issue. Laurie Lile asked for assurance that private lands outside the DWMA's are not to be looked at for grazing restrictions. LaRue noted that to date, the focus has been on public lands only.
- Mike Connor asked when the Ord EIS would be completed. Anthony Chavez indicated that he does not know. Connor noted that legally, analysis must be based on the best available science. He noted that he is hearing mostly "old" grazing stuff, and that 18 years is long enough to have developed information. Connor noted that this is a major issue for the Center for Biological Diversity and the tortoise groups.
- Jack Stewart asked which jurisdiction takes precedence if the BLM allows grazing and the

local jurisdiction does not. Hector Villalobos responded that the local jurisdiction requirements would take precedence on private land, but also indicated that fencing of the private land to prohibit trespass from public land was also required. Pete Kiriakos noted that BLM local jurisdictions must cooperate to develop solutions within the preserve areas where public and private lands are interspersed.

- Gerry Hillier requested an effort to get scientists together to agree on what the “best available science” is. He indicated that it is almost impossible to get agreement on this issue, but encouraged staff to try before wrapping up the recommendations. Hillier indicated that he has been told that since sheep grazing has been discontinued in critical habitat, there has not been monitoring to see what changes have occurred and to see if there has been any “bounce” in tortoise population. He indicated that absent an affect, it would be difficult to demonstrate that there is a connection. Mike Connor indicated that weed studies done in Pilot Knob after six years showed no change. Connor noted that it could take tens of years for the land to recover, making it difficult to assess recovery.
- Peter Kiriakos requested that a scientific study be done by the plan on exotic seed dispersal by livestock. He would like to see this mentioned as a specific requirement in the plan.

Bill Haigh asked that if group members have access to scientific studies on grazing, to provide those to Ed LaRue for review.

### **Lunch 12:10 - 1:35**

#### **Desert Tortoise Disease Management**

Ed LaRue noted that disease is one of the 22 threats to the desert tortoise that have been identified. LaRue indicated that the MOG would be looking at this issue. Becky Jones indicated that a workshop for researchers to discuss desert tortoise disease is being scheduled for the end of November. The workshop will include approximately 40 people including researchers from throughout the world. Proceedings of the meeting will be made available.

LaRue noted that clinical symptoms were seen in the tortoise in 1991; however, the pathogen was not known at that time.

Mike Connor presented a handout on tortoise disease management, and noted that there appear to be different microplasm with different strengths that are causing disease. Connor also noted that high levels of mercury are being found in some tortoises, and that heavy metals may be carried on dust from agricultural or mining operations. He noted the importance of finding the source of heavy metals affecting the tortoise. He indicated that quarantine protocols need to be developed, and that education is extremely important, since well-intentioned people move tortoises which helps spread disease. He indicated that the tortoise population is so reduced in some areas that there is concern regarding genetics. He also indicated that some tortoises seem to survive while some don't, and that the survivors need to be protected. Adequate nutrition affects the tortoise

immune system, so it is important to improve the quality of forage for the tortoise. Connor indicated that weeds take hold around roads and agricultural areas and spread from there to the DWMAs. The following discussion took place:

- Bill Haigh asked Chuck LaBar for any comments on this issue. LaBar noted that his firm handles 1400 tortoises per year for Clark County at a cost of about \$80,000 per year. Animals coming in are quarantined and inspected for disease. A system for testing for disease in the wild populations has not been established for Clark County.
- Gerry Hillier asked whether researchers are working on a vaccine for the disease. Mike Connor indicated that there is no evidence of passive immunity to the disease. Connor sees a vaccine as a last resort. Ray Bransfield added that a vaccine might not be feasible, but that education and monitoring are. Bransfield added that the disease issue is beyond the scope of what the West Mojave Plan will be able to accomplish, and that the issue needs to be addressed in a broader context. Becky Jones added that some diseases may be tied to toxicants, and that the plan can play a role in controlling that problem.
- Bob Strub asked that ravens be added as vectors (fleas).
- Dave Matthews would like to see relocated tortoises quarantined, tested, and if healthy, released back into the wild.
- Martin Gill asked whether any tortoises have recovered from the disease. Mike Connor responded that some have recovered, but that they can get it again.
- Mike Connor noted that URTD is not transmitted to hatchlings through the eggs, which means the cycle can be broken.
- Gerry Hillier asked how it was determined that dust is a factor in the disease. Mike Connor responded that dust exacerbates the clinical symptoms of the disease, and can spread other toxicants making the tortoise more susceptible to disease. Connor noted that the USGS has been trying to identify the sources of the toxicants.
- Jeri Ferguson asked what would be done with the document presented by Mike Connor. Bill Haigh responded that it would be handed back to Ed LaRue to consult with others on the proposal and determine what to include the plan. Haigh added that if others have thoughts on the matter, they should put them in writing and submit them to Ed LaRue for consideration.
- Martin Gill asked where the measures would apply. Mike Connor responded that the focus would be on the DWMAs.
- Debbie Stevens asked who would pay to implement the measures. Bill Haigh responded that the cost will need to be determined and if part of the plan, will be funded from plan sources.
- Chuck LaBar highlighted that Clark County's pick-up program helps to keep people from releasing potentially sick tortoises into the wild.
- Martin Gill asked what percentage of tortoises removed from the ITA in Clark County tested positive for the disease. Chuck LaBar replied approximately 35%.
- Gene Kulesza asked how it was determined that heavy metals are causing deaths and sicknesses in tortoises. Mike Connor responded that a high proportion of dead animals have these toxins in their livers. Connor added that the USGS looked at the possibility that

the toxins may have come from plants, but did not find evidence to support this.

Bill Haigh indicated that Ed LaRue would continue to work on this issue to develop an appropriate and affordable program.

### **HCA Boundary Adjustments**

Ed LaRue presented adjustments to the HCA. These include the following:

27. An expansion of the Pinto DWMA north to the highway.
28. An expansion north of Silverlakes.
29. An expansion north of Johnson Valley, between the DWMA and the Johnson Valley Open Area.
30. An exclusion at the north end of California City.
31. An exclusion north of Garlock Road.
32. An exclusion north and east of Red Mountain. (Note: Staff does not concur with this proposed exclusion.)
33. An exclusion at Shadow Mountain Road in El Mirage.
34. An exclusion of a developed area of private land north of Barstow.

The following discussion occurred:

- Mike Connor suggested that all critical habitat deleted from the DWMA's be added back in.
- Bob Strub identified a 1/8-mile wide adjustment near Trona.
- Mike Connor expressed concern about proposed actions to delete areas from the DWMA's. He asked how this would be addressed by the wildlife agencies and by staff. Ray Bransfield indicated that the smaller the DWMA, the stricter the management would need to be. Ed LaRue pointed out that the Pinto DWMA, when considered with Joshua Tree National Park, exceeds 1000 square miles, and that the other DWMA's are contiguous, providing for over 1700 square miles of contiguous DWMA. LaRue added that the critical habitat excluded to date been mostly private land.
- Gerry Hillier indicated that the DWMA's are about as large as possible to be politically acceptable. Hillier also asked that 480 acres south of the Barstow landfill where the county has acquired land to expand the landfill be excluded from the DWMA. Ilene Anderson noted that this would affect one square mile of monkeyflower area, and asked that if this is deleted, it be made up for elsewhere. Ray Bransfield indicated that the county consulted on this area already and that he has no problem with the removal. Bill Haigh asked Larry LaPre to consider the monkeyflower issue in this area.
- Mike Connor expressed concern about the deletion from the DWMA north of Garlock Road on the grounds that connectivity to the State Park is important. Paul Kober noted that the road provides a logical boundary for the DWMA, and that much of the area north of Garlock Road exceeds 20% slope. The alternative of including this area within the DWMA or not will be considered in the alternative analysis in the EIS.

- Ed LaRue pointed out that if substantial additions are made to the DWMA, the area subject to the 1% cap also increases.
- No comments were made regarding the Pinto or Silver Lake proposals.
- Martin Gill and Gerry Hillier questioned the Johnson Valley addition to the DWMA. Hillier indicated that if the DWMA abuts the open area, it would be more difficult to manage than a “gap” area between the two would be.
- No comments were made regarding the modification at California City.
- Doug Parham read a letter that supports inclusion of the area near Shadow Mountain Road in the DWMA. Laurie Lile clarified that single-family residences are not proposed to be exempt from fee payment within the HCA.

### **Miscellaneous Issues**

**Revised Species Scorecard:** Larry LaPre reviewed the West Mojave Plan Revised species Scorecard dated May 15, 2002. LaPre noted that species not “covered” by the plan would continue to be managed by the BLM. Jeri Ferguson asked whether species accounts for all species would be available prior to scoping. Bill Haigh indicated that accounts for the remaining species will be posted on the West Mojave Plan website. LaPre indicated that the missing accounts include three or four plant species in the Middle Knob area, and Lucy’s warbler. Becky Jones clarified that incidental take permits cannot be issued by CDFG for the Golden Eagle and Bighorn Sheep, as these are fully protected species.

**Carbonate Management Strategy:** LaPre indicated that the Carbonate Management Strategy is on its own separate track, and is being done jointly with the Forest Service. The Forest Service and the BLM solicitor are reviewing the strategy. Pete Kiriakos asked that items still being developed be posted on the West Mojave Plan website as soon as possible.

**Mohave Monkeyflower:** LaPre explained changes to the proposed strategy for the Mohave monkeyflower. He noted that the strategy includes an incentive area where surveys for the plant would be encouraged. If a landowner does not want to do the survey, then a compensation ratio of 2:1 will be required. If a survey is done, and no monkeyflowers are found, then a compensation ratio of 1:1 or ½: 1 would apply. If monkeyflowers are found on site, then the plants must be avoided and compensation of 5:1 would apply only to the area where the plant is found. He noted that all known occurrences are in the conservation area or mining area. LaPre asked whether this approach should be considered for other plant species. The following discussion occurred:

- Ray Bransfield asked that drought years be addressed in the strategy.
- Andrea Clark and Lorelei Oviatt asked that the strategy be carefully considered if there is the potential to expand it to other species. Clark expressed concern that the strategy “hints” as cumulative mitigation. LaPre noted that the group appears to prefer restricting the strategy to this location only.
- Mike Connor asked whether the conservation area would expand as land is acquired.

- Randy Scott noted that there is an additional Mohave monkeyflower HCA located further to the east.
- Becky Jones asked that Item #3 of the Mohave monkeyflower handout be revised to read as follows: “If the botanical survey detects Mohave monkeyflower and the plants are avoided by the ground disturbing activities, no additional mitigation will be required.” Larry LaPre indicated he would make the requested change.

Bill Haigh reminded the group that this would be the last Task Group 1 meeting. He also noted that the Notice of Intent is being reviewed in Washington, and that the scoping meetings will likely begin in June.