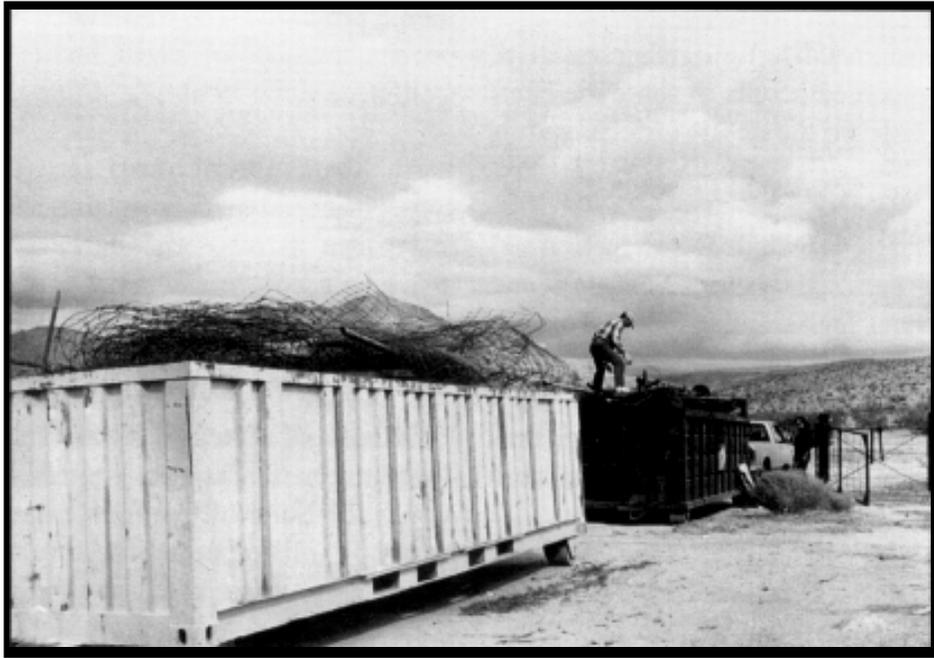

Tortoise Tracks

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Summer/Fall 2000 20:2



Volunteers remove metal debris and trash from Blackwater Well at the Fall 2000 Work Party
Photograph by Karen Spangenberg

PROFESSOR KENNETH NAGY TO SPEAK AT ANNUAL BANQUET

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee will hold its 26th Annual General Meeting and Banquet on Saturday, January 20, 2001 at the Holiday Inn in Palmdale, California. The banquet will feature renowned UCLA biologist and world traveler Professor Kenneth Nagy as dinner speaker.

Professor Nagy's talk is entitled "*The fast-forward/pause life of the Uzbek tortoise.*"

Besides his impeccable academic standing, Professor Nagy is well known for his entertaining presentations, and this talk should be no exception. In addition to fascinating slides of the Asian deserts Professor Nagy will be showing his wonderful video footage of the often very animated Uzbek tortoise, filmed in the field while he was doing research in Uzbekistan.

Professor Nagy is a graduate of UC Riverside and has worked at UCLA since 1971. In January 2000, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee awarded Professor Nagy the Golden Tortoise Award for his outstanding contributions to the study of tortoise physiology and biology.

The banquet will begin at 6:00 p.m. following a no-host social from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. You are encouraged to attend the Annual Meeting beginning at 2:00 p.m. The DTPC Board of Trustees and Staff will present reports on the Committee's ongoing programs, successes and future plans. Elections will be held for new members to the Board of Trustees.

Look for the banquet reservation form and further information on the Annual General Meeting on page 3.

DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM

The Desert Tortoise Council will hold its 26th Annual Meeting and Symposium on March 16-19, 2001 at the InnSuites Hotel and Resort in Tucson, Arizona.

This annual symposium will bring together scientists, managers, and concerned people to share the latest information available on the desert tortoise and its management.

Paper and poster sessions include Reproduction and Physiology, International Issues, Foraging and Nutrition, Techniques for Sampling Desert Tortoise Populations, and Health and Diseases of Tortoises.

Field trips will take place on March 19. Field trips are being planned into Ironwood Forest National Monument and Saguaro National Monument.

The InnSuites Hotel and Resort is centrally located in the heart of Tucson's Art and Historic downtown district. The 11 acre tranquil resort atmosphere promises to "ease your soul while the accessible surrounding activities will stimulate your mind." The hotel was the venue for the 1998 Symposium.

Visit the Desert Tortoise Council Web Site for more registration information. The website address is: <<http://www.deserttortoise.org>>.

EARTH SHARE OF CALIFORNIA

Did you know that you can donate to the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee through your workplace giving program? The Committee has been a member of Earth Share of California since 1992.



Earth Share of California is a federation of 87 conservation and environmental organizations that works to broaden its members' financial support base by obtaining access to and coordinating participation in corporate and governmental workplace fundraising campaigns.

Efficient and effective, Earth Share of California coordinates workplace fundraising campaigns across the State of California. Last year it raised nearly \$2 million to help restore habitat, preserve wilderness areas and open space, protect our drinking water, and educate children about the magic of their environment. The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee receives about \$30,000 annually.

Visit Earth Share at: <<http://www.earthshareca.org>> for more information. If Earth Share is not included among your company's current workplace giving options contact the DTPC office at (909) 683-3872 and we will work with you to help change this.



Telephone: (909) 683-3872
Fax: (909) 683-6949
e-mail: <dtpc@pacbell.net>
<http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

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DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & BANQUET

The Desert tortoise Preserve Committee will hold its 26th Annual Meeting and Banquet **Saturday, January 20, 2001** at the Holiday Inn, 38630 Fifth Street West, Palmdale, California. The Annual Banquet speaker will be renowned UCLA biologist Professor Ken Nagy who will give a multimedia presentation on “*The fast-forward/pause life of the Uzbek tortoise.*”

Saturday January 20, 2001 – Agenda

- Annual Meeting 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- No-host Social Hour 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Banquet Program 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

Los Angeles: Take the 405 N to the 5 N to the 14, continue N on 14 to Palmdale Blvd., turn left (west) to 5th St. West.

San Bernardino: Take the 15 N to 138, continue W on 138, it turns into Palmdale Blvd., continue on Palmdale Blvd. to 5th St. West, turn Right.

Mojave: Take the 14 S to Palmdale Blvd. Exit Palmdale Blvd., go west to 5th St. West, turn Right.

If you want to stay overnight after the banquet, call the Holiday Inn, Palmdale at (661) 947-8055 for room reservations.



CHECKS AND RESERVATION FORMS MUST BE RECEIVED BY JANUARY 12, 2001

*Questions? Please call Michael Connor at (909) 683-3872 or email <dtpc@pacbell.net>
Or visit our website at <http://www.tortoise-tracks.org>*



___ Dinner reservations at \$20 each: \$ _____

Optional tax-deductible donation: \$ _____

Enclosed is my check for a total of: \$ _____

Name(s): _____

Phone Number: (____) _____ - _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Organizational Affiliation (if any) _____

I (we) plan to attend the afternoon business meeting: Yes _____ No _____

Make checks payable to DTPC and mail to:

DTPC Annual Banquet, 4067 Mission Inn Blvd, Riverside, CA 92501

DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE LAUNCHES MOJAVE DESERT DISCOVERY CENTERS

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION KIOSKS FEATURE MULTI-MEDIA PROGRAMMING FOR MOJAVE DESERT VISITORS

11/17/00 Riverside: Today, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc., a nonprofit environmental organization based in Riverside, California, launched a Mojave Desert-wide outreach program called the Mojave Desert Discovery Centers (MDDC).

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers feature an interactive CD-Rom web site, videotape presentations about the desert and its wildlife, and customized maps and brochures to guide visitors to featured desert attractions.

The first phase of this innovative approach to environmental education involved opening Mojave Desert Discovery Center kiosks at two locations in California:

- California Welcome Center
Tanger Outlet Mall, Barstow
- Cottonwood Visitor Center
Joshua Tree National Park

Implementation of the Mojave Desert Discovery Centers culminates five years of work and study. The initial concept of a traditional educational visitor center evolved into a new approach of using several multimedia interpretive kiosks located at high traffic areas that effectively allow the Committee to reach more desert users.

“The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers offer a unique way for the Committee to fulfill one of its major goals: to provide information and education to the public on the threatened tortoise and its habitat, and on the associated plants and animals that share its desert ecosystem,” says Executive Director, Michael J. Connor.

“The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee has leveraged technology to reach out to diverse audiences throughout the Mojave Desert,” says MDDC Project Manager Jun Y. Lee. “Unlike traditional visitor center concepts, the Discovery Centers are mobile and can be deployed in areas where recreational visitors congregate.”

“We estimate that more than 500,000 people per year will interact with the Discovery Centers at the initial locations,” says Min Yang, AIA, of the design firm Project: Architecture.

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers program was made possible by a significant contribution from the late Joan Leslie Kelly and the generous support of members of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee.



MOJAVE DESERT DISCOVERY CENTERS HONOR ROLL

The Mojave Desert Discovery Centers Were Made Possible by Your Generous Support

In memory of Joan Leslie Kelly	Pamela J. Gates
Elizabeth (Betty) Forgey	Ronald R. & Carole A. Burnett
California Turtle & Tortoise Club in memory of Evelyn Ackermann	Richard Shilling
Anonymous	Norma E. Rugg
Kathleen Barry	William A. Nilsson
Pearl Seidman	Kathy Brody
Richards K. Farnham in memory of Carolyn B. Farnham	Jeff, Penny, Todd & Becky Dumas
In memory of Michael A. Shepherd	In memory of Roland (Jack) Dyer
Ms. Frances A. Velay	Alan & Joan Woodman
Kristin H. Berry	Marc D. Graff, M.D.
Mr. & Mrs. Rex A. Mason	Carol A. Lawson
Dr. Helen L. Hammer	Curtis & Alma Newman
James & Jo Ann Dodson	Anonymous
Marie Starkey	Darrell & Mary Anne MacDonald
Mike & Pam Coffeen	Marie Koonce in memory of Ora Lee Craig
Ariel B. Appleton	In memory of Judy (1963-1986) & Ralph (1984-1996)
W. J. & Ellen Werback	Anonymous
Pat Woolley & Family	Mr. & Mrs. C. P. Donovan in honor of Alexandra Lewicki
In memory of Marion E. Murphy	Anonymous
Alice C. Katzung	Emily M. Chaloff
Betty Harrison	Kathe Anderson & Gary Dunks
Bonnie J. Douglas	Frederick Turner
Brian & Melva Simmons	Brooks-Cohen, Inc.
Olive Dibben Kemp	T. K. Kirkpatrick & "Zacatecas"
Anonymous	Linda Van Loon
Ellen Kuniyuki	Jim & Peggy Scanlan
Nan E. Kaesar	Larry H. Thompson
Rick Hunter Khoury	Bert & Leanna Clark
Walter Allen	Ken Nagy
Nigel & Lynette Homer	In memory of Harriet Waltzer Sheridan
Mr. & Mrs. Michael A. Henstra	Dean Webb
In memory of John L. J. Hannon	George & Gayle Nichols
Anonymous	In honor of "Ms. T", "Elda", "Sage" & "Muska"
Aurora S. Larson	In recognition of "Sam" & "Scooter"
In memory of "Professor" & "Mrs. Magoo"	Suzanne M. Gartz
Dr. C. Kenneth Dodd Jr. & Ms. Marian Griffey	Reno Tur-Toise Club
Marilyn R. Dewitt	In memory of Chuck "Zeke" Reddan
Ann Cierley	In honor of "Turd" DuBois, beloved turtle
Nicholas K. Cates	Constance Crawford
Arlene Bernholtz	Elizabeth Maury in memory of Inez Halloran Maury
In memory of Norman Edmonston	Marcia Rybak
Tomiko Saita	Cactus Wren Garden Club
In honor of "Buck", "Hopper", "Iniki" & "Joker" Rittschof	Earl B. Schuman
Bab Agnes Jenkins	Blanche B. Lower
Anonymous	Vigil Vineyard Winery
Mary Plauson & Skip McRoberts	Irene Desonie
In memory of Harry A. Mills	Alice E. Manipella
In recognition of Miss Ursula Mayer	Anonymous
John R. Silliman	Georgette Theotig
Susanne & Wally Wahlquist	Barbara Blair Pixley
Rosemary Wedderburn	Harold & Laura Riensche
Sidney Mondschein	Dixie L. Cox

NEW FORT IRWIN EXPANSION PROPOSAL THREATENS DESERT TORTOISE

Michael J. Connor

The desert tortoise was listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act in 1989 following a major population decline attributed to habitat degradation, disease, vandalism, raven predation, and illegal collection. Despite being listed as threatened for 10 years, its habitat continues to be lost or damaged from mining, livestock grazing, agriculture, subdivisions, highways, industrial uses, military exercises, and off-road vehicle use. The tortoise population continues to deteriorate particularly in California where this most political of animals faces an increasingly uncertain future. The situation is getting so bad that growing numbers of biologists are calling for the desert tortoise's status to be upgraded from "threatened" to "endangered."

Now, a new danger threatens the remaining tortoise populations in California's western and central Mojave Desert in the form of Federal legislation that would implement a planned massive expansion of the Army's Fort Irwin National Training Center. Military installations already cover over 30% of the western Mojave. The latest proposed expansion would add 110,000 acres to Fort Irwin's current 642,000 acres.

The 110,000 acre expansion area includes 66,000 acres of desert designated in 1994 as desert tortoise critical habitat. Additionally, the Army would work with the Department of Interior to allow training on 21,000 acres of designated critical habitat located on Fort Irwin where maneuvers are currently not allowed. This amounts to a potential loss of 87,000 acres or 136 square miles of critical habitat.

Under the latest proposal, Congressional action would expand Fort Irwin southwest into the Superior Valley, southeast to the powerline corridor and east to the Avawatz Range. The expansion would destroy hundreds of square miles of designated critical habitat, potentially take thousands of tortoises, effectively wreck the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's yet to be fully implemented 1994 Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan, and severely constrain the Bureau of Land Management's West Mojave planning effort.

The Army has long coveted the proposed expansion area. In 1991, the Army proposed a similar expansion plan that actually included less critical habitat than the 1999 proposal. In response to the 1991 proposal, the USFWS issued *Draft Jeopardy Biological Opinion On the Proposed Expansion of the National Training Center*

at Fort Irwin, California (1-6-91-F-41). The 1991 Draft Jeopardy Opinion also pointed out that 50% of the desert tortoises that are still found on the Fort Irwin lands occur in the southwestern area where training activity has been constrained. These constrained areas would be opened up and disturbed if the proposed expansion occurs leading to further loss in habitat and an increased take of tortoises.

In April 1999, the Army floated a new expansion proposal that would add 159,950 acres to Fort Irwin. Recognizing that any proposed expansion in this area would likely result in a jeopardy biological opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Interior initially opposed the 1999 proposal. The Army's response was to promote the legislation anyway. In July 2000, the Secretary of the Army submitted legislation language authorizing the expansion to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Because the Department of Interior (which includes both the BLM and USFWS) had not signed on, OMB rejected this legislation.

In disregard of accepted protocol, the Army then handed the proposed legislation over to Congress where it was taken up by Representative Jerry Lewis (California, 41st district). Besides annoying Department of Interior and OMB, this chain of events also upset the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). In an August 22, 2000 letter CEQ complains "We are very concerned about this breach of the OMB process and the lack of coordination with the other executive branches in doing so." The letter outlines steps CEQ considers appropriate to move the process forward including obtaining "additional information on the Army's training needs and whether they can be fulfilled by utilization of adjacent military lands." A few days later, in a September 7 letter to Representative Jerry Lewis, Senator Feinstein echoed this and wrote that she could not support Lewis' latest proposal and suggested that joint use of China Lake might be a viable alternative.

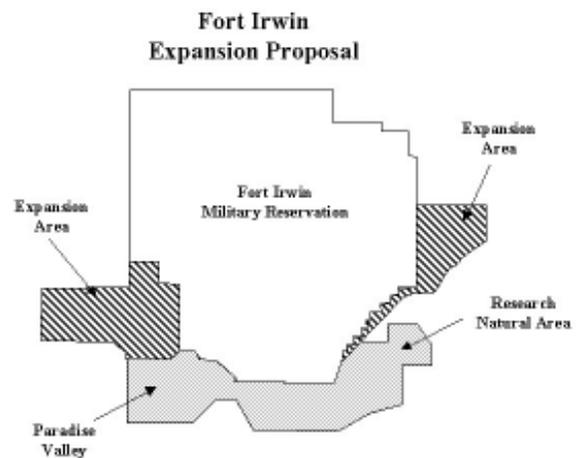
In an October 3, 2000 letter mailed to all West Mojave planning effort participants, Representative Jerry Lewis said that he would work to block congressional approval of any West Mojave plan unless it considers the Fort Irwin expansion on the grounds that it threatens national security! The West Mojave planning effort has been under way for 11 years. In its present incarnation as the West Mojave Habitat Conservation Plan, it will promote tortoise recovery by implementing the recommendations of the *Desert*

Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan made back in 1994. Modifying the West Mojave plan to include the April, 1999 Fort Irwin expansion proposal would have effectively turned this on its head. Instead of implementing recovery such a modified West Mojave HCP would have put the tortoise in jeopardy.

By mid-October, the Department of Interior had sent Henri Bisson, a high-ranking BLM bureaucrat, to California to negotiate a deal with the Army and new high level meetings between Interior and Defense began in earnest in Washington. On October 26, Senator Feinstein and Congressman Lewis each issued press releases announcing that such an agreement had been reached, and that draft legislation would be proposed before Congress recessed.

The politicians' spin was that the new agreement was a "win/win" situation for both the Army and the tortoise, apparently because the draft legislation orders the Departments of Interior and Defense to produce a plan that complies with the National Environmental Policy Act and with the Endangered Species Act. However, under the proposal, the Army gains 131,000 acres to train on. The tortoise loses 66,000 acres of designated critical habitat off base and 22,000 acres of critical habitat on base. Additionally an entire species of plant, the Lane Mountain Milk-vetch, that only occurs in the area will be placed in jeopardy. While clearly a "win" for the Army, the politicians and possibly the Department of Interior this is a severe and potentially devastating loss for the desert tortoise and other affected species.

Why is this particular habitat so important to the tortoise? The expansion area lies in the proposed Superior-Cronese Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA). Tortoises persist in some numbers here because it is remote and is one of the least disturbed parts of the Western Mojave Desert. It also includes the largest region of contiguous public land sections of any DWMA and so would be the most manageable. Surveys conducted for the West Mojave Plan suggest the Superior Valley holds some of the highest density tortoise populations left in the West Mojave and may include as many as 20% of the surviving tortoises. Given the political realities of the California desert, the Superior-Cronese DWMA is the only DWMA in the state that is likely to support the Recovery Plan target of 10 female tortoises per square mile. Additionally, the Superior-Cronese DWMA serves as a bridge between tortoise populations in the east and west Mojave Desert. Stripping off the Superior Valley would gut the Superior-Cronese DWMA and severely hamper tortoise recovery in the West Mojave.



Map Showing Proposed Fort Irwin Expansion

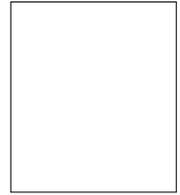
Source - U.S. Department of Interior press release

This spring, another major tortoise die-off was detected in the eastern Mojave's Fenner Valley judging from preliminary reports of a survey conducted by Dr. Kristin Berry and her team at the Bureau of Land Management's long-term desert tortoise Goffs Study Plot. Dr. Berry found 88 live tortoises per square mile compared to 447 tortoises per square mile in 1994 when the site was last surveyed – a massive 80% decrease in tortoise numbers. The tortoise population at Goffs was considered stable in 1994 and was treated as the "gold standard" for a healthy tortoise population in California. Cattle are grazed at Goffs but otherwise the habitat is relatively undisturbed. The cause of the decline is unclear, but may involve a shell disease that was first seen 11 years ago.

The only effective remedy available to land managers to counter outbreaks of disease in wild tortoises is to minimize stress on surviving animals by reducing the impact of known threats in their habitat. Unfortunately, the three regional desert plans (West Mojave, NECO and NEMO) that are supposed to do this in California by implementing the recommendations of the *Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan* still remain in a bureaucratic and political limbo. Dominated by the concerns of multiple use groups that favor the status quo, none of the three planning efforts seeks full implementation of the Recovery Plan – despite recognition that the situation for the tortoise is now far worse than in 1994. If the Fort Irwin expansion goes through on a Congressional rider, the loss of critical habitat will accelerate the extinction of a key desert species and an animal much liked by the general public. Even worse, it may set precedents that threaten the Endangered Species Act itself.



Tortoise Tracks



**THE DESERT TORTOISE PRESERVE COMMITTEE
4067 MISSION INN AVENUE
RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92501**

DTPC MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Committee invites you or your organization to help support its work by making a tax-deductible donation or by becoming a member. Memberships include the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks* and are renewable annually, with the exception of life memberships.

Membership Contribution Levels

- \$ 15.00Individual
- \$ 20.00Family
- \$ 30.00Sponsor
- \$ 75.00Benefactor
- \$100.00.....Patron
- \$500.00.....Life

Make checks payable to:
Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

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4067 Mission Inn Avenue
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