



# Tortoise Tracks



The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Spring 2015 35:1

## *The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee 41st Annual Banquet and General Meeting*

*Article and photos by Mosheh Wolf*



On January 24, 2015, the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee hosted their 41st Annual Meeting and Banquet at the Elks Lodge in Lancaster, California.

The annual meeting began with a presentation by the **Carl Symons**, Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Ridgecrest on existing and upcoming projects. The DTPC Board of



Trustees' President, **Ron Berger**, gave a Bob Dylan inspired speech about the risk the new Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan poses to desert tortoises in general and the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area in particular; the DTPC Treasurer, **Laura Stockton**, presented the Treasurer's Report on finances; **Jun Lee** of Lee Law Firm provided an overview of recent land acquisitions and mitigation; and **Mosheh Wolf**, the DTPC Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator, presented the Year in Review, which included preserve management activities, research projects, educational outreach programs, and goals for the coming year. **Tim Shields** then presented a novel way to disperse ravens – lasers. Desert tortoise management has truly entered the future!

Following the annual meeting, banquet attendees enjoyed a social hour and had the opportunity to partici-

pate in a raffle that lasted throughout the evening. The raffle included several beautiful donations from DTPC members.

During the annual awards large photo plaques were presented to **Dr. Larry LaPre**, Center for Biological Diversity, and **Mary Logan**. **Lisa LaVelle**, **Tom Mull**, and **Bob Wilson** received Small Photo Plaques. **Jun Lee** was recognized for his continued contribution to the DTPC.

This year's Annual Banquet featured a talk by **Dr. Brian Cypher** from the Endangered Species Recovery Program. Dr. Cypher spoke about "*Desert Tortoises and Desert Canids: Coexistence and Conflicts.*" It was fascinating, and the attendees enjoyed it immensely.

(Videos from the annual meeting can be found at <https://vimeo.com/119267474> and <https://vimeo.com/119267476>).



# DTPC Captures Senator Feinstein's Attention

*Article and Photo by Ron Berger*

On November 6, 2014, Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) spoke at an event held at the Whitewater Preserve to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act which she had pushed the Senate to pass. During the luncheon, Feinstein proposed establishing two new national monuments on more than one million acres across the California desert. Among those attending the event was our President, **Ron Berger**.



*In this photo by Ron, Senator Feinstein is studying the DTPC letter!*

Seizing an opportunity, Ron approached Senator Feinstein, presenting her with a letter from the DTPC describing our concerns with the proposed Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), and its potentially very damaging alternatives. After a brief discussion, the Senator said she would study it carefully – which she began doing at lunch.

In our letter, we asked her not only to work to insure our concerns were addressed in the final DRECP, but also that she work to obtain permanent legal conservation status for the DTRNA, protecting it from vehicle use, mining, grazing, leasing for oil, gas, renewable energy and any other use. Ron has since discussed these matters in detail with the Senator's staff and we are cautiously optimistic.



Preserve Manager & Conservation Coordinator

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## The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc.

Founded 1974

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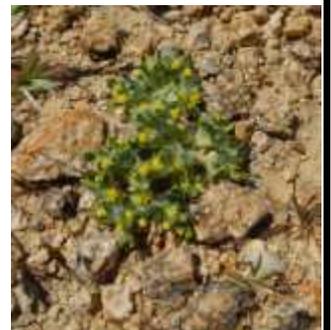


## Spring has Sprung! *Wildflowers at the Natural Area!*

This is the year to see a profusion of flowers at the [Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area](#). The desert is “greening up” and promises a colorful display of flowers, at least in some areas! Already some late winter flowers are blooming, including desert candles, a favorite of ours. Depending on when you visit and what part of the Natural Area, there may be an abundance of alkali goldfields, lacy-leaved phacelias, Fremont phacelias, desert dandelions, evening primroses, woolly sunflowers and woolly daisies, blazing stars, cotton rose, Keysia, Fremont pincushions, Bigelow coreopsis, snake’s head, desert stars, desert chicorys, common fiddlenecks, purple mats, and many of the little forget-me-nots and comb-burs, yellow tansy mustards, pepper grass, and thread plants. While walking the nature trails, look for Layne’s locoweed and woody bottlewashers in the small washes and drainages. These are favored foods of the desert tortoises. On the surfaces of small rises are stiff-haired lotus, keel beak, and small loco-weeds—also favorites of the tortoises. The tortoises eat lupines, and several species of lupine are common at the Natural Area—the bajada lupine, wide-bannered lupine, royal desert lupine, and Shockley lupine. Tortoises like flowers and leaves of the wishbone bush and members of the Mallow family—the white mallow and apricot mallow.

This year, there will be a Naturalist at the interpretive center seven days a week, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Watch for announcements about the status of wildflowers on the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee’s website, [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org).

Earlier this year, **W. Bryan Jennings** and **Kristin Berry** published a research paper on food habitats of tortoises at the Natural Area in the journal PLOS One. The title is, “Desert tortoises (*Gopherus agassizii*) are selective herbivores that track the flowering phenology of their preferred food plants.” Bryan Jennings was once a Naturalist at the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area’s Interpretive Center, where he became interested in tortoise food habits. The detailed field study of tortoise food plants in a year of wildflower abundance revealed that the tortoises prefer succulent green plants and only eat dried plants in late spring. They have different preferences depending on the month during spring and what is available; many of the plants they prefer are rare in the environment. Tortoises appeared to know locations of their favored food plants. You can go online on the worldwide web for this article at doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0116716 (<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0116716>) or you can ask Kristin Berry for a pdf by contacting her through email at [kristin\\_berry@usgs.gov](mailto:kristin_berry@usgs.gov).



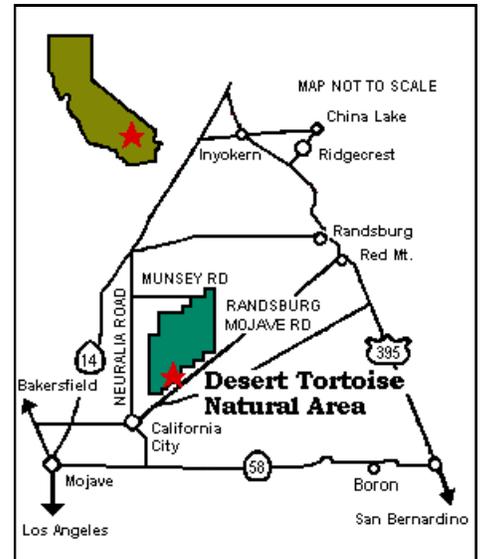
*Please join us for the*  
**Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee  
Annual Spring Work Party!  
April 11 & 12, 2015**

Saturday, April 11, from 9 AM to 2 PM  
at the  
Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area

&

**Sunday, April 12 at Pilot Knob**

Activities will include signing  
conservation lands, trash removal,  
and property monitoring training.



Help out with valuable  
stewardship projects while learning  
more about the  
desert ecosystem and the desert  
tortoise!

**If you are interested in  
participating on one or both  
days, please call  
(951) 683-3872 or email  
DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org**

## Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee, Inc. News Release

For Immediate Release: March 2, 2015

Contact: (951-683-3872) or [DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org](mailto:DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org)

### **THE DTPC INVITES PUBLIC COMMENTS ON OHV GRANT APPLICATION**

The Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee (DTPC) invites public comments on its preliminary grant application to the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division.

The DTPC is requesting funding to support a restoration project in the Expansion Areas of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, adjacent to authorized OHV routes managed by the Bureau of Land Management and California city Police Department. The purpose of the Restoration Grants Program, as defined by the OHMVR Division, is to provide Ecological Restoration or Repair to habitat damaged by authorized or unauthorized OHV use. The DTPC seeks restoration funds to prevent continued habitat degradation related to unauthorized OHV activity on approximately 4,400 acres of conservation lands and to begin the restoration process on disturbed areas by protective fencing. The DTPC will provide some matching dollars to the project. If funded, the DTPC will install wildlife-friendly fencing around areas of contiguous conservation lands, followed by trash removal and control of invasive plant infestations. Where fencing is not feasible, unauthorized routes will be camouflaged to discourage unauthorized use. Additionally, if conditions allow, the DTPC will begin collecting native seed for future revegetation projects

The DTPC would appreciate your comments on this project. You can review the grant application, along with those from other agencies, local governments, and non-profits, on-line at [www.ohv.parks.ca.gov](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov). The public comment period is open from Tuesday, March 3, 2015 to Monday, April 6, 2015. Comments should be sent directly to the OHMVR Division at [ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov](mailto:ohvinfo@parks.ca.gov) and to the DTPC at [dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org](mailto:dtpc@tortoise-tracks.org). Late comments will be forwarded to the division separately. Final grant applications are due May 5, 2014.

For more information about the proposed restoration project, please contact the DTPC office at (951) 683-3872 or [DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org](mailto:DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org)

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## **PROTECTION BENEFITS DESERT TORTOISE (*GOPHERUS AGASSIZII*) ABUNDANCE: THE INFLUENCE OF THREE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ON A THREATENED SPECIES**

KRISTIN H. BERRY, LISA M. LYREN, JULIE L. YEE, AND TRACY Y. BAILEY

**ABSTRACT:** We surveyed an area of 260 km<sup>2</sup> in the western Mojave Desert to evaluate relationships between condition of Agassiz's Desert Tortoise populations (*Gopherus agassizii*) and habitat on lands that have experienced three different levels of management and protection. We established 240 1-ha plots using random sampling, with 80 plots on each of the three types of managed lands. We conducted surveys in spring 2011 and collected data on live tortoises, shell-skeletal remains, other signs of tortoises, perennial vegetation, predators, and evidence of human use. Throughout the study area and regardless of management area, tortoise abundance was positively associated with one of the more diverse associations of perennial vegetation. The management area with the longest history of protection, a fence, and legal exclusion of livestock and vehicles had significantly more live tortoises and lower death rates than the other two areas. Tortoise presence and abundance in this protected area had no significant positive or negative associations with predators or human-related impacts. In contrast, the management area with a more recent exclusion of livestock, limited vehicular traffic, and with a recent, partial fence had lower tortoise densities and high death rates. Tortoise abundance here was negatively associated with vehicle tracks and positively associated with mammalian predators and debris from firearms. The management area with the least protection—unfenced, with uncontrolled vehicle use, sheep grazing, and high trash counts—also had low tortoise densities and high death rates. Tortoise abundance was negatively associated with sheep grazing and positively associated with trash and mammalian predator scat.

Download the entire publication at: <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/ProductDetails.aspx?ID=5134>

**LA Times****BLM rejects application for Silurian Valley energy project**

By JULIE CART November 20, 2014

The BLM's California director rejects a Silurian Valley energy project as 'not in the public interest' Mojave Desert energy project's backer hasn't decided whether to appeal the BLM's rejection

The Bureau of Land Management on Thursday denied a Spanish company's application to build a controversial renewable energy facility in the Mojave Desert's remote Silurian Valley, deciding the sprawling project "would not be in the public interest." The closely watched decision is considered a bellwether for how the federal agency will handle future requests to develop renewable energy projects outside established development areas. The company had planned a side-by-side wind and solar facility. Thursday's decision applies only to the solar portion of the project. The wind energy aspect is still in the planning stages.

Jim Kenna, the BLM's California director, made the decision, finding that Iberdrola Renewables' proposal would have industrialized 24 square miles of "a largely undisturbed valley that supports wildlife, an important piece of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, and recreational and scenic values." Kenna said he had been discussing the matter for weeks with field personnel and found the evidence "pretty persuasive." He cited concerns that the project would degrade the quality of the wilderness surrounding the site, located between two national parks. He also noted potential hazards to the desert tortoise and other impacts that could not be mitigated. "It was fairly clear to me," he said.

Iberdrola Renewables had sought permission to build its project using a "variance" process. Had it been approved, it would have been the first major exception to federal land managers' "guided development" approach across more than 22 million acres of California desert. Under the policy, companies are encouraged to develop in areas that have been preapproved for projects, where there would be less environmental or wildlife conflict.

Kenna said the variance process was intended to be rigorous. In denying the application, no other message was intended other than the specific project was unsuitable for the specific site, he said.

Iberdrola began the application process three years ago and had envisioned completing construction by December. In a statement, Iberdrola said it was weighing whether to appeal the decision to the U. S. Department of Interior.

"It is unfortunate that the variance process is enabling unsubstantiated discretion in advance of a proper National Environmental Policy Act review that should be based on clear and understandable predictable requirements," the statement said. But the BLM decided that the project would have "too great of an impact on the resources." Among the specific concerns the BLM noted were that the facility would disrupt migration corridors critical to bighorn sheep and other wildlife.

"We are quite pleased that the BLM made this decision," said Kim Delfino, the California program director for Defenders of Wildlife. "It's encouraging that they are taking those criteria seriously."

The wind and solar plants that Iberdrola proposed would have been encircled by protected lands. The entire project site that the company proposed sits atop the Old Spanish Trail, a historic trail managed by the National Park Service, which opposed the project. In its application, Iberdrola said the plants would create 300 construction jobs and generate about 400 megawatts of power.

The BLM is under pressure to meet the administration's goal of generating 20,000 megawatts of power from federal land by 2020. There have been 460 applications for renewable-energy-related projects in California since 2007, Kenna said. The BLM has approved 18 applications.

To read the entire article, visit: <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-1121-silurian-rejection-20141121-story.html>

## DTPC Calendar of Events

- **April 11 & 12, 2015: Annual Spring Work Party, [DTRNA](#), California City, CA**

### The DTPC would like to thank the following volunteers:

<i>Ron Berger</i>	<i>Bob Wood</i>	<i>Kolene Dearmore</i>	<i>Jun Lee</i>
<i>Dr. Kristin Berry</i>	<i>Rachel Woodard</i>	<i>Allen Eggleton</i>	<i>Mary Logan</i>
<i>Chuck Hemingway</i>	<i>Dave Zantiny</i>	<i>Chuck Hemingway</i>	<i>Tom Mull</i>
<i>Greg Lathrop</i>	<i>Bonny Ahern</i>	<i>Marlene Ishii</i>	<i>Carl Symons</i>
<i>Jun Lee</i>	<i>Richard Anderson</i>	<i>Steve Ishii</i>	<i>Bob Wilson</i>
<i>Freya Reder</i>	<i>Craig Bansmer</i>	<i>Dr. Larry LaPre</i>	
<i>Laura Stockton</i>	<i>Dr. Brian Cypher</i>	<i>Lisa LaVelle</i>	

For more information call (951) 683-3872 or send an email to [DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org](mailto:DTPC@tortoise-tracks.org), or check out the DTPC's website [www.tortoise-tracks.org](http://www.tortoise-tracks.org) and Facebook page [www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc](http://www.facebook.com/dtpc.inc).

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Individual membership	\$ 20 annually [ ]
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Life	\$500

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 Riverside, CA 92501

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All contributors receive the quarterly newsletter *Tortoise Tracks*.

Membership and donor information are kept confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties.

#### I WANT TO VOLUNTEER

My area of interest/expertise is:

\_\_\_\_\_

My E-mail address is:

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# Tortoise Tracks

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**When visiting the desert, always remember to  
check under your vehicle for wildlife.**

