



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Arizona State Office

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January 26, 2011

In Reply Refer To:
6840 (9320)

Ms. Greta Anderson
Arizona Director
Western Watersheds Project
PO Box 2264
Tucson, Arizona 85702

Dear Ms. Anderson:

As you know, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published the Notice of 12-Month Petition Finding on the Sonoran desert tortoise on December 14, 2010. The USFWS found that listing of the Sonoran population of the desert tortoise to be warranted, but precluded by higher priority actions.

In your letter dated January 7, 2011, you requested information regarding what the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) intends to do to address conservation of the Sonoran desert tortoise in response to the change in status, and what specific directions the BLM Arizona State Office will be providing to the Field Offices with respect to livestock grazing in Sonoran desert tortoise habitat. This letter responds to these two questions.

With regards to the change in status of the desert tortoise, the Sonoran desert tortoise has been considered a BLM-sensitive species for more than two decades and the BLM will continue to manage it as a special status species. BLM Manual Section 6840, Special Status Species Management, directs us to conserve designated candidate species as BLM-sensitive species. Protective BLM policies have been and will continue to be implemented. Desert tortoise management policies are continuously reviewed and will be modified as needed to reduce or eliminate new or evolving threats, focusing on those threats where the USFWS determined that existing BLM management is inadequate, and focusing on quantification of those potential threats where effects are unknown.

BLM has a number of policy guidance documents that address conservation of the Sonoran desert tortoise. General guidance is described in *Desert Tortoise Habitat Management on the Public Lands – A Rangeland Plan* (1988). This plan set criteria for identifying and managing

tortoise habitat based on three categories. The *Strategy for Desert Tortoise Habitat Management on Public Lands in Arizona*, Instruction Memorandum (IM) No. AZ-91-16 (1990), described objectives and management actions to be implemented. In a report prepared for and approved by the Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group, *Compensation for the Desert Tortoise* (1991), a compensation policy was established. In 2009, Arizona BLM reissued the *Desert Tortoise Mitigation Policy*, IM No. 2009-010, which articulates mitigation policy and compensation for the Sonoran desert tortoise and its habitat on public lands in Arizona. The BLM has implemented these Sonoran desert tortoise policies in Arizona by including land use allocations, management objectives, and management actions in eight Resource Management Plans.

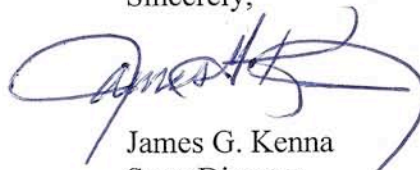
With regards to what the BLM Arizona State Office guidance to the Field Offices may be with respect to livestock grazing in desert tortoise habitat, we concur with the USFWS conclusion that livestock grazing effects to the Sonoran desert tortoise in the United States are likely limited in severity and scope due in part to the BLM's existing management. Therefore, we intend to continue to diligently manage livestock grazing in a manner consistent with existing desert tortoise policies and management objectives.

Administration of livestock grazing in Arizona is carried out according to the 43 Code of Federal Regulations 4100 and implementation of the *Arizona Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Administration* (1997). Land Health Allotment Evaluation Reports are produced to document whether land health standards are achieved in each grazing allotment. These Evaluation Reports address special status species habitat requirements and management objectives as required under Standard 3 for each allotment.

The BLM is committed to conserving habitat for the Sonoran desert tortoise on public lands in Arizona. The above Sonoran desert tortoise management policies will continue to be implemented, frequently reviewed, and modified as needed to reduce or eliminate new or evolving threats. Specific efforts will focus on those threats where the USFWS's 12-Month finding determined that existing BLM management is inadequate.

If you have any questions regarding the BLM's ongoing efforts to conserve the Sonoran desert tortoise in Arizona, please contact Tim Hughes, Endangered Species Coordinator, at 602-417-9356.

Sincerely,



James G. Kenna
State Director

cc: Mr. Michael J. Conner, Ph.D.
California Director
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