



**Western  
Watersheds  
Project**

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*Working to protect and restore Western Watersheds*

January 7, 2011

Corbin Newman, Regional Forester  
USDA Forest Service  
Southwestern Region  
333 Broadway SE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

**RE: Request for information regarding Forest Service intentions to protect Sonoran desert tortoise and its habitat on Arizona's public lands**

Dear Regional Forester Newman,

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recently determined that the Sonoran desert tortoise warrants listing under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>1</sup> They also determined that actual listing at this time was precluded due to higher priorities. The findings were made subsequent to a petition submitted by Western Watersheds Project and WildEarth Guardians in October 2008.

We are requesting that you explain in writing what the Region intends to do to address conservation of the Sonoran desert tortoise in response to this change in status, and what specific directions Region 3 will be providing to the Supervisors and District Rangers with respect to livestock grazing in Sonoran desert tortoise habitat.

The Service determined that the Sonoran desert tortoise "is in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range"<sup>2</sup> due, in part, to the inadequacies of management on its public land habitat, including Forest Service<sup>3</sup> lands. Specific threats include invasive and non-native plants, wildfire, habitat fragmentation, livestock grazing, overutilization and collection, climate change and environmental contamination, vehicle strikes, and an inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

Forest Service policy and regulations require the agency to minimize the likelihood of and need for listing of the species under the ESA. Because current management is not sufficient to protect this candidate species, the Forest Service must therefore act to address these inadequacies.

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<sup>1</sup> 75 FR 78094-78146, December 14, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* at 78139.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* at 78129.

We look forward to reading your response within 30 days. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either Ms. Anderson or Dr. Connor using the contact information provided below.

Yours sincerely,



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