Subj: DESERT MANAGERS GROUP MEETING SUMMARY, THE LIVING

DESERT, PALM DESERT CALIFORNIA 6 – 7 NOV 2024

1. The Desert Managers Group held its Fall semiannual meeting 6–7 November 2024 at the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, Palm Desert, California hosted by the Living Desert Staff. A copy of the agenda is available, and the presentations given at the DMG have been distributed to the distro list but are also available upon request. Attendees included representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Park Service (NPS) with Mojave National Preserve, Death Valley National Park, and Joshua Tree National Park; US Geological Survey; Department of Defense which included representation from NAWS China Lake, NTC Fort Irwin, MCIWEST-MCB Camp Pendleton, MCLB Barstow and MCAGCC Twentynine Palms in addition to several Conservation agencies, the Coachella Valley Area Government and Council members from the Quechan Tribe.

2. Dr. Luis Ramirez Yanez provided welcome and opening comments as well as an overview of the **Living Desert Zoo and Gardens**. The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens has been an institution in Southern California for over 50 years. The facility is an Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredited zoo and botanical garden, representing the desert environments of North America, Australia, and Africa with more than 150 species, 1,200 protected acres, and miles of hiking trails. The Living Desert though is much more than just a zoo and gardens, they have over 60 conservation initiatives in 12 countries involving over 80 partner organizations involving international field conservation efforts, local habitat restoration, and on-site initiatives. Many of these actions are focused on the deserts of Southern California and include ongoing conservation actions for the Mexican Wolf, Peninsular and Sonoran Pronghorn Antelope, Desert Tortoise, Desert Pupfish, as well as desert habitat restoration actions, Tamarisk removal, education and outreach on proper trash disposal (to prevent unintended Raven supplement) at [www.CoverYourTrash.org](http://www.CoverYourTrash.org). The Center has also developed a Desert Plant Conservation Center in addition to providing a variety of ongoing education activities and outreach.

3. **US Fish and Wildlife Service Office, Palm Springs** representatives Brian Croft Assistant Field Supervisor, Peter Sanzenbacher Mojave Desert Division Supervisor, and Vincent James Colorado Desert Division Supervisor provided the updates on the following:

**Renewable Energy and other Regulatory Updates.**

These included Solar, Geothermal, Transmission, and Energy Storage projects

Solar projects with BLM (all within BLM Development Focus Areas)

1. Easley, Sapphire, Perkins (East Mesa) Redonda

Solar projects on private lands (HCPs)

1. Argenta, Desert Breeze, Overnight, Galaxy

Geothermal (all near the Salton Sea)

1. Black Rock Elmore North, and Morton Bay

Other energy projects

1. Willow Rock (Gem) Energy Storage Project

Transmission

1. Western Bounty, CalCity Substation, Ivanpah-Control

**Non-Energy Regulatory Projects**

-Indian Valley Wells Groundwater Authority Pipeline (Ridgecrest BLM)

-BNSF Barstow International Gateway (Barstow BLM) Rail Yard expansion

-CalPortland Oro Grande Cement Mine HCP

-Mojave Precious Minerals Exploratory Drilling Project (Ridgecrest BLM).

**Salton Sea initiatives**

-System Conservation Implementation Agreement (SCIA)

-Water conservation program designed to conserve water use from the Colorado River

-Species Conservation Habitat Projects (SCH) working to reduce exposed lakebed thereby reducing windblown dust, with creation of habitat ponds and wetlands.

**Desert Tortoise Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP)** program was awarded funding in FY 2024 and is preparing to post funding opportunities for FY2025.

The USFWS has also developed a General Conservation Plan (GCP) to address permitting of incidental take of desert tortoise on nonfederal land. The plan would provide a streamlined mechanism for applicants engaged in covered activities to meet permit requirements while promoting conservation of the desert tortoise across its range in California. Covered activities could include commercial projects (e.g., renewable energy), agricultural, residential, industrial, infrastructure projects, and non-federal rights-of-ways. The USFWS conducted scoping in 2023 and a Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on 17 July 2023 for development of an environmental impact statement. The Notice of Availability for the draft documents was published 11 October 2024.

The 6th annual Desert Tortoise Week Partnering with Living Desert Zoo, BLM, and other organizations was recently completed. Additionally, approximately 30 miles of tortoise exclusion fence was completed in conjunction with Caltrans along the I-10 and the DT population augmentation site near Chuckwalla Mountains is nearing completion.

**Mohave Ground Squirrel** Coordinating with Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council on proposed research and survey efforts including translocation, captive propagation, and drone surveys. The species is being considered for the RASP Program.

**Inyo rock daisy.** USFWS continuing to work with BLM State Office and the Ridgecrest Field Office to conducting surveys for the plant in the area of a proposed exploratory drilling project. A conservation strategy for the species is in development and the Palms Springs FWO has received a notice of intent to sue from the Center for Biological Diversity to ensure the plant is further protected.

**Inyo California towhee** (RASP species)

-Completed range-wide surveys in 2024 Population numbers look good

(~575 birds)

-Funding secured for 2025 and 2026 surveys

-Inter-agency conservation agreement ready for approvals

**Amargosa vole**

-Continued work on ‘big marsh’

-Shoshone volunteer work

**Mohave tui chub**

-Ups and downs in 2024…

-Morning Star Mine Survey – team effort!

**Raven Management**

**Cima Road property acquisition**

**INRMP coordination and reviews**

**Conservation bank review/approval**

**California condor conservation plans**

**Petitions in review – 90-day findings**

-Mohave ground squirrel

-Tecopa birds’ beak

**12-month findings and species status assessments – FY24 and FY25**

1. monarch butterfly

**Proposed listing rule status updates**

1. northwestern/southwestern pond turtle
2. California spotted owl
3. Joshua tree

**Proposed critical habitat rule status updates**

1. northwestern/southwestern pond turtle

**FY26 Work plan and beyond**

1. Mojave poppy, little brown bat, Inyo rock daisy, white-margined penstemon,
2. hoary bat, pinyon jay

4. Phil Murray, MCAGCC provided updates on the ongoing planning for the **Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape (MDSL)**. The MDSL was selected as a Sentinel Landscape 15 May 2024. The Sentinel Landscape program was founded in 2013 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Defense (DOD), and Department of the Interior (DOI) in order to strengthen military readiness, conserve natural resources, bolster agricultural and forestry economies, increase public access to outdoor recreation, and enhance resilience to climate change. The MDSL covers approximately 3.5 million acres of the western Mojave Desert including 5 DoD Installations, multi-mission public lands managed predominantly by BLM, and 5 National Parks and Monuments. The designated area includes over 40 endangered and threatened species, all under increasing pressure from development and climate change and include the Mojave desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, Tui chub, Inyo California towhee, and western Joshua tree are found within and around the MDSL. The MDSL partnership brings together a diverse assemblage of state, federal, tribal, county, local, and NGO partners to address encroachment from sprawl, incompatible development (including air space), wildfires, climate change, Federally listed species, and the desert ecosystem’s vulnerable soil and water resources, native vegetation, and working lands. Efforts to further protect these lands is beneficial for both on and off-installation resources.

5. **Joshua Tree Conservation Efforts** brief was given by Julie Simonsen, US Fish and Wildlife Service Office, Carlsbad, CA. The goal of the Joshua Tree Conservation Agreement is to provide proactive conservation through a framework that ameliorates threats and manages sufficient habitat to maintain self-sustaining populations and avoid listing. Joshua Trees face a variety of impacts to include loss of habitat, drought with increased herbivory and predation, higher temperatures, climate change with fewer but often more intense precipitation, as well as invasive grasses and an increase in wildfires.

In 2015 the Western Joshua Tree was petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act, however in 2019 a determination of not warranted was made which led to follow on litigation. A revised Species Status Assessment (SSA) for both Western and Eastern Joshua Trees was conducted in 2023 but again it was found to be not warranted for listing. Further litigation is now underway and expected to extend through to 2025.

A Joshua Tree Biological Working Group has been established with representatives from BLM, DOD, USGS, FWS, NPS, and State Wildlife Agencies from California, Arizona, and Nevada. A conservation agreement framework has been established, similar to the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Agreement Rangewide Management Strategy (2003). The agreement establishes management units, identifies high priority areas for conservation, works to develop strategies for ameliorating threats, standardizes avoidance, sets minimization measures, establishes a mitigation strategy, implement Monitoring and Restoration (seed collection and outplanting).

6. Kelly Herbinson Executive Director Mojave Desert Land Trust, provided an overview on the **Mojave Desert Land Trust** as well as an update on the **Joshua Tree Coalition**.

**a. Mojave Desert Land Trust** was established in 2006 by a group of concerned citizens from the Morongo Basin and began to acquire private inholdings in the three California desert national parks and 72 California desert federal wilderness areas. The Mojave Desert Land Trust has cultivated a multi-faceted conservation strategy that uses land acquisition, restoration, stewardship, plant cultivation, and education to ensure the long-term preservation of the California desert. Their service area now spans nearly 26 million acres that include the Colorado Desert and the entire California portion of the Mojave Desert. Since their founding the MDLT has protected approximately 120,000 acres ofecologically significant land and grown over 120,000 native plants for restoration and community use. MDLT has also developed and maintains a large Mojave Desert Native Plant Nursery and Seed Bank and continues to expand each year.

## Other highlights from the brief included an overview of ‘The planetary boundaries concept’ from the Stockholm Resilience Centre. This is a theory that presents a set of nine planetary boundaries within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come. Completed in In September 2023, a team of scientists quantified, for the first time, all nine processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system. Unfortunately to date, six out of nine Planetary Boundaries have been breached.

[Planetary boundaries - Stockholm Resilience Centre](https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html).

Kelly also highlighted some findings on **How Has the Desert Changed in One Century?**

-3.6 degrees warmer

-10-20% reduction in precipitation

-Significant increase in wildfire

-Significant habitat loss or conversion

And other **Current Biodiversity Declines in the Desert**

-Avian abundance and diversity have declined by 40-46%

-Desert tortoise has declined by 90%; many populations unviable

-Suitable habitat for western Joshua trees is expected to decline by 90-99% in JTNP by

2099.

An overview of the **WISDOM** Program – Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave (WISDOM) is an MDLT internship that provides women from underrepresented communities with opportunities to engage in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields by gaining experience and conducting scientific research. Established in 2019, the program fosters an environment of mentorship and career exploration by connecting female students with researchers and professionals, helping to develop the next generation of scientists. WISDOM is supported by the Conservation Lands Foundation and is a collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management.

[Women In Science Discovering Our Mojave — Mojave Desert Land Trust](https://www.mdlt.org/wisdom/)

b. **Joshua Tree Coalition.** This presentation highlighted the threats to the Western Joshua Tree as presented in the previous brief and also predicted a reduction in Joshua Tree National Park suitable habitat would only be about 0.02% of current area by 2099 if modeling remains consistent. The Joshua Tree Coalition evolved from a petition for CESA listing in 2022 that revealed a need for coordination—especially around research and monitoring. In 2023 the Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) requested $5M written into state budget for western Joshua tree conservation. In 2024 the California Wildlife Conservation Board approve a grant for the MDLT to focus on monitoring efforts and Coalition coordination and to the Native American Land Conservancy for tribal engagement.

The goals of the Coalition include coordinated research and monitoring, conservation planning, incorporation of best practices and information sharing, Tribal engagement, and Education and outreach. In addition to developing a Steering Committee with members from BLM, NPS, USFWS, USGS, CDFW, Native American Land Conservancy (NALC), and the MDLT, the Coalition is also working to expand to a range-wide, multi-state approach. They are establishing goals, governance, structure, etc.; in the process of forming working groups to focus on specific goals; and exploring what other agencies and organizations have shared interests and their potential role in the Coalition.

Looking ahead the Joshua Tree Coalition is hosting a summit 18-19 Nov 2024 to establish working groups and develop a charter and governance structure. The Coalition will continue to engage other agencies and organizations for ideas and solicit membership with an intermediate goal of eventually hiring a full time coordinator.

7. Dr. Clay Noss, Mojave Desert Land Trust RASP Coordinator, gave an update for the ongoing **Desert Tortoise Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP)**. The Recovery and Sustainment Partnership Initiative (RASP) builds on years of collaboration and innovation with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) between the Department of Defense and the Department of the Interior (DOI). The RASP partnership was formalized in 2018 to develop and promote species conservation while promoting increased flexibility for military mission activities. The RASP was established to better address the dynamic relationship between species needs and mission activities and demonstrates how collaborative partnerships can achieve real-world successes for both military readiness and species conservation. [Recovery and Sustainment Partnership Initiative – Natural Resources (osd.mil)](https://www.denix.osd.mil/nr/focus-areas/partnerships/rasp/).

The Mojave Desert Tortoise is listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) as ‘Threatened’ due to a variety of factors including massive human sprawl and the destruction and subsequent continued encroachment on remaining species habitat. Currently there are 6.45 million acres designated as critical habitat for the Tortoise within the Desert with 24% of this area located in the West Mojave. In addition to the ‘Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP), there are also ‘Species Action Plan’, and ‘Recovery Implementation Plan’ in place for the Desert Tortoise.

8. An update on **Amargosa Vole** status and ongoing conservation actions was not able to be presented. [The Amargosa vole is a desert subspecies of the California vole.](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=6de58c15ac26c35c939ccd9b0202e579a9d562029ba051655b350f5c4dd09b01JmltdHM9MTczMDQxOTIwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3403f614-e41f-6974-048d-e30be59b68ed&psq=amargosa+vole&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYW1hcmdvc2Fjb25zZXJ2YW5jeS5vcmcvYW1hcmdvc2Etdm9sZS8&ntb=1)Amargosa voles are highly specialized small rodents that live only in small patches of habitat in the otherwise inhospitable Amargosa Valley of the central Mojave Desert in highly localized and isolated marshes and wetlands formed around natural springs and pools in the extreme corner of southeastern Inyo County. The vole was listed as an endangered species by the state of California in the 1980s and in 1984 was listed as endangered by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. [They are one of the most endangered mammals in North America and are protected under the Endangered Species Act](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=cebd88f521ffb30667cec5d1334c18e1299e5287eca6aaa75b230adb49d2322bJmltdHM9MTczMDQxOTIwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=3403f614-e41f-6974-048d-e30be59b68ed&psq=amargosa+vole&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9mb2xleWxhYi52ZXRtZWQudWNkYXZpcy5lZHUvYW1hcmdvc2Etdm9sZQ&ntb=1).

9. **Mojave Colorado Desert Biosphere Region (MCDBR)** presentation and summary was provided by Jaime Purinton, Communications & Marketing Director for Anza-Borrego Foundation & MCDBR Steering Committee Chair.

The Biosphere Program is from the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) founded in 1971 to promote harmony between humans and nature. Globally there are 738 designated biosphere reserves in 134 countries. These reserves are honorary and non-regulatory, and participation is voluntary. MAB focuses on three main goals:

-Conservation: Protecting biodiversity and cultural diversity.

-Economic Development: Encouraging sustainable livelihoods.

-Logistic Support: Promoting research, monitoring, and education.

In the United States, there are 28 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, recognized for their ecological richness and potential to support sustainable communities. These reserves include both protected areas and private lands where people live and work, highlighting the balance between conservation and human activity.

The Mojave and Colorado Deserts Biosphere Region (MCDBR) was established in 1984 and includes a vast area of 25 million acres, home to around 1 million residents. Spanning from the Mexico border to Death Valley National Park, this region is characterized by two distinct desert ecosystems known for their extreme conditions. Over time, plants and animals have evolved to survive in these challenging environments. The region also supports a diverse range of human communities, including gateway towns to national and state parks, military bases, agricultural areas, and indigenous lands.

Despite its natural beauty, the region faces shared challenges like climate change, renewable energy development, urbanization, invasive species, off-road vehicle use, and water scarcity. These issues are central to the work of the MCDBR, which seeks to address them through collaborative, sustainable approaches.

In 2023, an intern, Emma Rosenau, played a pivotal role in advancing the MCDBR initiative by organizing workshops and communications. This effort culminated in a November 2023 workshop where stakeholders from across the region gathered to discuss regional challenges, share knowledge, and develop strategies for future collaboration.

The Anza-Borrego Foundation (ABF), aligned with its mission to protect and preserve desert landscapes, agreed to lead the MCDBR initiative. This leadership role further supports ABF's commitment to conserving the natural and cultural heritage of the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park and surrounding areas.

Key projects under MCDBR’s management include:

-National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Technical Assistance Grant: This NPS-supported project aims to develop a collaborative strategic plan to conserve biodiversity and connect people to the desert region.

-Scientist in the Park Intern (SIP) Program: A 36-week initiative hosted by Joshua Tree National Park, SIP focuses on destination stewardship and raising awareness about responsible desert use.

MCDBR’s Next Steps

-Strategic Planning: Continue developing the MCDBR strategic plan with stakeholder input, focusing on conservation, sustainable development, and education. This includes finalizing the vision, mission, and actionable goals for the region.

-Database of Conservation-based Organizations in Region

-Destination Stewardship Strategy: Awareness for Responsible Use and Enjoyment of Desert Resources

-Communications Plan (Informed by Strategic Plan), Branding, & Website

10. An overview of actions and plans for **Lithium Extraction Operations** and the **Lithium Valley Planned Development** in the vicinity of the Salton Sea were provided by Bari Bean, Deputy CEO-Natural Resources, County of Imperial, California. The County often referred to as the Imperial Valley, is located in Southeast California, bordering Arizona to the east and Mexico to the south. It is home to approximately 180,000 residents and is known for being the winter produce basket of America with its’ thriving agricultural industry producing over $2.6 Billion dollars annually. The County is also recognized as being the 2nd largest in renewable generation by County in the State of California. A Lawrence Berkely National Lab study conducted in partnership with the US Department of Energy in 2023 found that there is 17 million plus metric tons of lithium available in the geothermal brine in the region. The area has since been coined with the name ‘Lithium Valley’.

Lithium recovered from geothermal brine does not involve any mining or other extraction that is detrimental to the environment and is a very sustainable operation. The plant(s) will have very small footprints, no evaporation ponds, and the geothermally heated water will be reinjected back into the aquifers. Current estimates show the potential for the sustainable extraction of over 17 Million metric ton of Lithium from geothermal brine in the county while the geothermal plant simultaneously produce renewable energy.

Lithium extraction continues to be a Federal and State Priority and has been the subject of a Blue Ribbon Panel, is part of the California Blueprint. The actions are also supported by SB 125 which is designed to bring engagement and excise taxes to benefit the region. The County has been working to streamline efforts for future developments that include the County’s permitting actions. Currently the County has completed a baseline report and an infrastructure assessment in February 2024, and is concurrently working on a ‘Lithium Valley (LV)’ Specific Draft Plan scheduled for completion in early 2025, a Health Assessment of the Overall Effort scheduled to be complete in December 2024, and a Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) to be complete in early 2025. Currently three major corporate groups to include Berkshire Hathaway Energy (BHE) Renewables in conjunction with partners, Controlled Thermal Resources (CTR), and Energy Source Minerals are planning on operation in the Valley.

In addition to Geothermal and Lithium Extraction efforts, several other businesses and endeavors to include battery manufacturing, material processing, data centers, hydrogen production, auto manufacturing, battery storage facilities, logistics hubs, and the development of business services as well as providing funds for community spaces and community groups are envisioned as part of the overall Lithium Valley plan. Additionally increased opportunities for the community will include education, employment, improved infrastructure, as well as excise taxes will benefit the community and the region.

11. An update on the **Kw’tsán National Monument** proposal was given by Tribal Council Members of the Quechan Tribe, Don Medart and Jonathan Koteen. The proposed Kw’tsán National Monument is a 390,000 acre area of land in the Sonoran Desert that is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). It includes important areas such as Indian Pass Area, Picacho Peak Wilderness Area and the Chocolate Mountains. The proposed monument area also shares a border with the Colorado River, an essential water source. Designating this area as a national monument would permanently protect this crucial water supply and the long term health of the river ecosystem and the communities that rely on it.

This landscape is also critical habitat for countless birds, animals, insects, and other species. These species include the woodhouse toad, desert tortoise, and the Yuma kingsnake. Designating this area as a National Monument would provide the necessary protections to ensure that these species are able to continue to thrive in this diverse and unique environment. The designation would safeguard the habitat that many plant species rely on such as the desert agave, desert milkweed, yellow palo verde, saguaro cactus and countless others all contributing to a unique and important role in maintaining the ecological well-being of the landscape. Designating the Kw’tsán National Monument supports the Quechan Tribe’s longstanding efforts to preserve their ancestral homelands and ensure that future generations are able to carry on the Tribe’s cultural traditions.

12. **Southwest Innovation Landscapes Network** overview was presented by Carolyn Enquist, USGS and Jesse Ross, Department of the Navy. Following web links provide more information: [National Innovation Landscape Network](https://demo.serdp-estcp.mil/page/2f56eefb-d19d-4a36-a7fd-90a4251afd49) and [Innovation Landscapes Network (serdp-estcp.mil)](https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fserdp-estcp.mil%2Fpage%2F38f0be40-b397-446f-bf1f-a401fe12423f&data=05%7C02%7Ccenquist%40usgs.gov%7C4ebc08c05e954f23680808dccd306a3a%7C0693b5ba4b184d7b9341f32f400a5494%7C0%7C0%7C638610855029731245%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=kFzqMt1e3KYUFpl0eXL0JNf0NRTmdaLRb%2FefIu270uw%3D&reserved=0).

The DoD established the National Innovation Landscape Network (NILN) with the US Geological Survey and other partner research and land management agencies to increase the pace of innovation in conservation management, reduce duplicative efforts, and transfer new technologies across representative federal landscapes.

The current regional landscape sites are located in Alaska to address permafrost degradation, the Eastern U.S. to address prescribed fire planning needs, and the Southwestern U.S. to address a combination of ecological threats.

The NILN has the following objectives:

a. Establishes a co-production relationship between the research community and natural resource managers in technology development

b. Facilitates a collaborative network where validated technologies and practices are scaled across federal landscapes

c. Curates feedback loops for information flow among the research community, natural resource managers, and policymakers

d. Builds synergy among federal agency land and resource management priorities

13. The DMG F**ield Trip** was a tour and walkthrough of the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens hosted by Dr. Luis Ramirez Yanez. The trip included overviews of the facility and the many uses and management of these areas. The trip was a great opportunity to see and facilitate discussions that highlighted ongoing Desert Tortoise management efforts and also included discussions on pupfish and other species conservation topics.

14. Roundtable notes and updates from the attendees:

a. **BLM Barstow Field Office**

-BLM Field Office has several upcoming OHV events on the calendar.

-There continues to be a long list of renewable energy projects.

-Working on NEPA for ongoing public lands restoration.

-Desert Tortoise fencing on I-40 and I-15 complete.

-BLM Barstow Field Office continues to work on filling vacancies for several positions in the office.

b. **Death Valley National Park**

-All roads in the park now open. Boardwalk reconstruction at Salt Creek has been awarded.

-The suspicious death of eleven Wild Burro’s is under investigation.

-Wild Horse and Burro management and removal efforts received $500K for continued Mojave and Death Valley efforts.

-Water and sewer infrastructure upgrades continue in the park.

-Spring Devil Hole Pupfish population count had good news, with population up 20% from previous survey of 212 to an increase of 263 per latest survey in 2024. Continued good news for the species since its’ survey low of 35 fish in 2013.

-The Summer of 2024 which season ends in October was the hottest summer recorded on record.

c. **NTC Fort Irwin**

-NTC INRMP is complete and pending signature.

-In fall of 2024, National Training Center (NTC) and Fort Irwin started the desert tortoise translocation in the Western Training Area(WTA).  NTC and Fort Irwin are estimating to be complete with the translocation in Spring of 2025.

-NTC and Fort Irwin has started construction of two new communication in the Western Training Area.  The towers will provide reliable military communications in the WTA and increase cellular phone coverage south of the installation.

-NTC and Fort Irwin filed an application with Bureau of Land Management for extension for the withdrawal created by Public Law 107-107 Section 2901 for an additional 25-year term.  The current land withdrawal expires on 27 December 2026, unless extend by Congress.

d. **MCAGCC Twentynine Palms**

-MCAGCC continuing to work with FAA on the 2509 Airspace designation over Johnson Valley.

-Working on several Installation resilience projects.

-MCAGCC has a REPI Challenge proposal with Preservation Ranch submitted.

-Working with King of the Hammers for upcoming event in February 2025.

-Desert Tortoise RASP continues to go well as planned.

-MCAGCC has a Change of Command scheduled for November 2024.

e. **Preservation Ranch**

-Has completed the treatment/restoration of 14 defensible polygon areas. Will continue to monitor for regrowth and non intrusion.

-Seed planting in Victory Valley.

-Employees have taken de-escalation training in an attempt minimize encounters in the field. They are also working on incident reporting.

-Preservation Ranch has submitted a REPI Challenge project in conjunction and support of MCAGCC.

f. **NAWS China Lake**

-Natural Resource Staff is now finally fully staffed.

-The Installation has a new Commanding Officer.

-Litigation for China Lake aquifer continues with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) court actions ongoing.

-Range REVA compliance actions completed.

-Wild Horse and Burro roundup/removal scheduled for October 2024 has been delayed until next year October.

-Mojave Tui-Chub survey conducted 15-17 October and counted 321 fish.

g. **Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG)**

-They have received restoration funding for burrowing owl.

-Continuing to study underpass proposals per the 30x30 Initiative.

-Several wildlife cameras have been vandalized.

h. **Mojave Desert Land Trust**

-Working on several landscape restoration projects.

-MDLT is also conducting a vegetation mapping effort.

-Work on ongoing seed bank and collection efforts and their annual plan sale went very well.

i. **CALWILD.** Continues to monitor Chuckwalla National Monument. Currently the monument may be designated by Executive Order.

j. **NAVFAC/DoD REC IX.** REC Office continuing to work on climate vulnerability studies and regulatory actions in support of climate permitting actions, in support of climate resilience.

k. **US Geological Survey (USGS)**

-Announced from the Water Science Center, information available to the public updated monthly, water balance and basin characterization model at 250 meter resolution covering both surface and ground water.

-Western Ecological Research Center (WERC) is continuing to work on Desert Tortoise and Joshua Tree studies.

-Southwest Biological Science Center is working on native seed collection.

-USGS has completed mapping seismic faults for Salton Sea.

-Working on nature based solutions and there was a feature story with Laura Norman.

[The science that transformed a dry streambed into an oasis | U.S. Geological Survey](https://www.usgs.gov/news/featured-story/science-transformed-a-dry-streambed-oasis).

l. **MCIWEST** provided an update and overview of the ongoing **Off Installation Transit and Training Activities (OITTA)** initiative. This initiative and the training requirements have been in development for over 8 years and the initiative has been briefed to the DMG in the past. The need to train both ‘on and off’ of DoD Installations has been a historic, current, and remains a future requirement and the goal of the action is to develop and build on an existing catalog of off-installation sites/events/activities. The opportunity to use air and ground space off of DoD Controlled and managed lands provides realism and diversity that on-installation training alone cannot replicate. Currently MCIWEST as the Marine Corps proponent is working on a NEPA Environmental Assessment (EA) to cover the actions which will ultimately streamline administrative requirements. The EA is intended to provide the overall need and purpose for off-installation training; describe the types/frequency/intensity of proposed training and numbers of personnel/vehicles/aircraft; determine site-specific analysis for the first round of priority sites (approximately 92 sites and linear features) in the DMG Area of Interest; and provide mitigation/conservation measures along with standard operating procedures (SOPs) that could be applied broadly across a range of identified sites/movement corridors. A reminder in the brief stated that the proposal for these actions would only utilize corridor routes and areas that that are open to the public. Additionally, a request was made to the DMG members to solicit their interest in being either a cooperating agency or stakeholder in the OITTA NEPA process.

15. The next DMG Meeting is scheduled for 7-8 May 2025, location TBD.

16. Copies of handouts, questions, and/or additional information can be obtained by clicking on the contact page on the Desert Managers’ website at [Desert Managers Group](https://www.denix.osd.mil/dmg/).

C. M. Hamilton