

**MOHAVE GROUND SQUIRREL TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP
BLM RIDGECREST FIELD OFFICE
CONFERENCE ROOM**

M E E T I N G N O T E S

START TIME: 10:05 am

END TIME: 3:22 pm

ATTENDEES

Linda Connolly	California Department of Fish and Game
Don Mitchell	ECORP Consulting
Eric Weiss	California Department of Fish and Game
David Delaney	USACEFL
Shelley Ellis	Bureau of Land Management
Ryan Young	Phoenix Consulting
Kelly Schmoker	California Department of Fish and Game
Scott Harris	California Department of Fish and Game
Colleen Brock	Coso Geothermal
Martha Heath	Independent
Becky Jones	California Department of Fish and Game
Phil Leitner	CSU Stanislaus
Jeff Johnson	Independent
Denise LaBerteaux	Eremico Biological Services
Melissa Nicholson	Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee
Kathy Simon	Independent
Phil Brylski	Independent
Dave Hacker	California Department of Fish and Game
Tom Campbell	U.S. Navy

INTRODUCTIONS

TRENDS

- Eric Weiss discussed the large number of in-fill projects that are occurring, especially in the area of Phelan. In his opinion, these in-fill projects are better than mass expansion throughout the desert.
- Eric Weiss expressed a concern that counties are directing in the way of “No Effect” determinations. This has created a log jam of paperwork. He has been working with San Bernardino County to try and alleviate the marked increase of stresses. The purpose of these agreements is being lost in the flood of paperwork.
- There is a need to tie permits to construction time periods. Building should occur at the end of the commenting period. Linda Connolly said that although the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) can’t enforce these issues they can help inform counties. She offered to send a sample form letter to Eric Weiss that could be used to inform the counties of these issues.

- Scott Harris stated that CDFG is having the same issues in Region 5 (Los Angeles County). He suggested meshing planners with biologist earlier in the planning process and thinks that this will actually benefit clients. Becky Jones stated she had attempted to do this in San Bernardino County with little to no effect.
- Scott Harris' suggestion was to first approach the Director of Planning because the meeting would become part of the public record and therefore the counties would have some sort of liability as smaller projects can often cause large-scale problems. He also stated that regular meetings with the Director of Planning could be worth the effort over time.
- Phil Leitner stated his concern of a public relations backlash. He stated that petitions to de-list species could be much worse than working together with landowners.
- Becky Jones stated that this should not be an issue for either Burrowing owls or desert tortoises. She also suggested the development of training sessions for planners.

SURVEY RESULTS/EXPIRATION

- An individual who was not present at the meeting had previously submitted an inquiry regarding exploring alternatives to the one year expiration of survey results (this happens when projects are implemented years after the original EIR or EIS).
- Phil Leitner mentioned this would likely become an issue with the influx of large-scale solar and wind projects and that there may be a need to repeat large-scale surveys. It was suggested that the need for repeated trapping may encourage early ground breaking on particular projects. This is a risky proposition because many projects fall apart in the initial stages of construction. Becky Jones stated that survey results would not be valid for more than 365 days.
- Hector Villalobos discussed Solar Millennium's proposed Ridgecrest Solar Power Project. The proposed project is composed of two solar fields, one that occurs in a Mohave ground squirrel (MGS) Conservation Area and one that does not.
- There was some discussion of OptiSolar's proposal to study the effects of shading on 20,000 acres of land prior to the installation of solar panels with the goal of measuring the impacts of large scale shading. The project has been denied.

TRAPPING STATUS

- Phil Leitner will be trapping two sites at Coso in the end of March 2009.
- Phil Leitner will be trapping 8 sites at Ft. Irwin in the spring of 2009.
- Alternative detection methods are being used including: the use of scent dogs vs. trapping; vocalizations; and remote trail monitoring systems coordinating the use of video and photo monitoring.
- There are currently no known detection probabilities for MGS. Cameras may help determine the probability of detection and therefore improve the capabilities of grid trapping.
- Technical advances are changing the ways that MGS can be monitored. The older, automated telemetry systems only allow for MGS to be observed one at a time. A large-scale tower transmitter system would allow for simultaneous tracking of

multiple individuals. These technical advances, if implemented, may help remove the “observer effect” of monitoring studies.

- An upcoming report by Phil Leitner has new observations about home ranges between male and female MGS. The report indicates that female MGS establish their home ranges for an entire season. MGS males seem to have home ranges that shift throughout the season. Phil Leitner suggested that the movement patterns witnessed in males may be tied to varying testosterone levels throughout the season. This information also suggests that large land areas are needed for MGS conservation.

TRAPPING

- There is a real need to develop a more efficient and cost effective method of MGS monitoring on large-scale projects while still gathering the appropriate data for each project. Large-scale projects are defined in the CDFG protocol as larger than 180 acres. Phil Leitner stated that the real difference between small and large sites is that large sites are more likely to have a MGS.
- Suggestions for large-scale surveying included randomized cell selection within grids, Probability of Occupation (PAO) methodology, and by design (i.e. case by case evaluation). Small projects would follow established protocols. Medium projects would be differentiated by habitat type with grids in each habitat type. Large projects would rely on randomized PAO methodology.
- There is a huge cost differential between mitigation and surveying. It was suggested that different areas within a large-scale project area be subjected to different mitigation ratios. This may be too ambitious for a one year projects and could result in the net loss of land.
- Becky Jones stated that the Hyundai and Borax projects were the largest prior to 2003 and both were modified from existing protocol. The CDGF protocol does state that large-scale projects may call for extra trapping efforts. The primary question to be addressed is what percent trapping coverage is adequate. Each trapping grid covers about one third of 80 acres. A basis would be needed to reduce the comfort level of trapping success. Scott Harris (CDFG) mentioned the importance of intensifying MGS vocalization studies on this end.

CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

- Photovoltaic solar technology allows more habitat to be kept intact.
- There was more discussion of the research proposal made to CDFG by OptiSolar to study the impacts of shading on the desert ecosystem. Becky Jones stated that the CDFG does not accept research as mitigation. Eric Weiss (CDFG) stated that OptiSolar would need to permit the research project itself rather than seek to use the project as mitigation.
- Federal listing status of MGS is still being considered.
- During two trapping sessions no MGS were caught in the Spangler area.
- Off-highway vehicle (OHV) impacts seem to be increasing desert wide.

NEW BUSINESS

- A new proposal was submitted for trapping at Edwards Air Force Base (EDAFB) to compare the use of paired grid trapping versus webs.
- Twelve grids will be trapped along highway 247. There is no MGS data from this area.
- The large-scale trapping issue needs to be revisited.