

Meeting Minutes from MGS TAG, 3/5/2014

Members: [tbp]

Introductions

Report from the field 2013/2014

- Darrin [xxx] from CDFW reported that 6 grids were trapped for MGS near Mojave, and 2 grids near Adelanto – both with negative results.
- Camera traps from Red Rock Canyon on CDFW lands showed negative results.
- CDFW (Sherri) reported that she would be setting camera traps near California City in March 2014.

In general there is less trapping effort than it was last year. Consultants reported just few trapping efforts.

Dr P. Leitner presented results from 2013 trapping efforts and projections for new efforts in 2014. MGS trapping occurred in Coso and Cactus Peak, camera trapping occurred east of California City (7 locations) in 2013. Based on camera study MGS are present in Fremont Ecological Reserve.

Careful review of trapping efforts from 2012 showed that the camera sites 8 miles east of Kramer Junction had both MGS and RTGS present. This is the most western record for RTGS.

MGS Projects in 2014

- Dr P. Leitner would be setting camera traps in 8 locations west of California City, south of Mohave.
- Dr P. Leitner - Coso and Cactus Peak Long Term monitoring study.
- Ed La Ruge -LA County – trapping in Palmdale and Lancaster.

There are information gaps regarding localities of MGS in the desert portion of LA County. Ed La Ruge is in process of obtaining permits from City Parks in Lancaster and Palmdale to conduct MGS presence/absence trapping. Cities' Permits are valid for 10 years. The question is whether this year, given drought conditions, warrants the best time to trap and would provide credible results, or whether future years would be better.

- Dr P. Leither proposes to conduct genetic trapping between Hinckey and Kraemer Junction to verify the genetics of the squirrels. Genetic study conducted by one of his students revealed that one of the MGS look alike squirrel was in fact genetically a RTGS.
- Consultants' projections: 4 grids near Mohave, Fort Irvin.
- CDFW volunteer grids: there was a general consensus that the volunteer grid should occur early this year (not later than beginning of May) given drought conditions. Few areas on the desert received enough rainfall for MGS to potentially breed this year. CDFW would be looking for volunteers to conduct the trapping – no consensus regarding the areas and trapping grids was reached. Potential trapping areas include: where there was enough rainfall, the edges of the MGS range, Lone Pine/Hai-wee Dam?.

- Dr. Scott Osborn and Dr P.Leitner filed a State Grant Fund for next fall for MGS trapping, however there was no match funding. The grant will need to be re-applied. The concern is labor commitment.
- DCRP proposal to conduct Rangewide Monitoring Program for MGS.
- Energy Commission published Habitat Suitability Model for MGS. The model examines two future scenarios with Climate Change for years 2030 and 2080. It appears from the modeling that MGS suitable habitat would be likely moved north and west approximately 2 miles per year. Old habitat could be inhabited by RTGS.

MGS and Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan – Desert Energy (DRECP FEIS) presented by Amy Fesnock.

The Plan is a cooperative effort among: FWS, CDFW, and BLM and was prepared to respond to California renewable energy targets and climate change issues and focuses on the habitat connectivity. The Plan encompasses an area of 22.5 million acres and fills in the gaps from Solar Energy Study Zones which did not address wind energy. The Plan will not allow any development in DWMA's and ACECs. BLM sets up MGS Management Areas for the Plan. Public Draft is due in Spring 2014. MGS TAG individual members are encouraged to provide comments on the Plan. (MGS TAG will not provide a letter from the TAG group because of conflict of interests). Preferred Alternative would likely be a mix of all Alternatives thus the Plan reviewers are encouraged to provide comments and suggestions to all aspects of the Alternatives and not just one.

MGS Conservation Strategy – Marjorie Matoc. Presentation focused on the results of the MGS connectivity in Freemont Gulch (2002-2004) and projections to the future based on the 500 MGS generations for 1) existing conditions, 2) climate change scenario 2030, and 3) climate change scenario 2080. Genetic variation plays a key factor in sustaining viable MGS populations during climate change events.

Landscape Connectivity of MGS presented by Tom Dilts. The goals of the Plan are: 1) predict distribution and habitat changes to MGS, 2) address effects of Climate Change, land uses, renewable energy developments, 3) map strategic connectivity areas. The results show that there will be loss of MGS suitable habitat in the west side of the range and areas north of Palmdale and Ridgecrest. Climate Change has negative effects on MGS – under 2080 scenario 1) more habitat will become available in the north of Owens Valley, 2) Renewable Energy Projects would diminish the quality of the MGS range, 3) local habitat connectivity losses would continue to occur. (connectivity losses already occur from DTNA to Freeman Gulch.)

Wind Energy Project discussed by Larry LePre (BLM). Mr. LaPre briefly summarized the status of the POD for Wind Energy Project near Freeman Junction. The project is in its initial phases for about 6 years.

Reporting of Trapping Results (Dr. Scott Osborn)

- All trappers are highly encouraged to provide MGS occurrences to BIOS.
- All trappers should use the new trapping form that Dr. Scott Osborn sent last year.

MGS Conservation Strategy update (Margaret Mentor, CDFW, Habitat Conservation Branch, Sacramento)

- Renewable Energy branch was destaffed, and Randi Longston no longer works on MGS. Habitat Conservation/Planning Branch will likely assume the responsibilities to carry on the MGS Conservation Strategy.
- Draft Strategy will go to MGS TAG for review in Summer 2014, Public Review is scheduled in Fall 2014.
- MGS Conservation Priorities 1 page document was signed by TAG in December 2010, will continue to be used and at this time will not be updated.

Open Discussion

The discussion was mostly focused on drought and its effects on MGS. Local rainfall data should be provided in the reports since some areas of the desert received rain. Trapping should occur like in a normal year.

Volunteer Effort

There was a consensus that volunteer effort should be conducted earlier this year rather than later because of the drought. P. Leitner suggested trapping to be focused on east of Kramer Junction where hybridization occurs or China Lake but no specific trapping sites were agreed upon. CDFW will be looking for MGS volunteer trappers to manage and trap the grids. Volunteers to contact Dr. Osborn and Dr. P. Leitner.