

May 2004

Dear Blunt-nosed Leopard Lizard Surveyor,

Attached is the revised survey methodology for the blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*). The protocol was developed by the San Joaquin Valley Southern Sierra Region (SVSSR) of the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) with input from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and various species experts. This protocol supercedes previous versions of DFG survey protocols for the blunt-nosed leopard lizard. The range-wide decline of population numbers in the past decade has provided the impetus for development of a more rigorous methodology to detect species presence. Additionally, since DFG is not able to issue any form of "take" permit for the blunt-nosed leopard lizard due to its status as a fully-protected animal under the California Fish and Game Code **§5050**, detection of species presence on a project site is crucial.

This standard methodology has been developed to provide consultants, local, state and federal agencies with minimum acceptable standards for surveys conducted to determine the status of this State and federally endangered species. The survey methods described within this protocol were designed to optimize the likelihood of detecting the presence of blunt-nosed leopard lizards should they occur on a project site.

When the presence of blunt-nosed leopard lizards is detected, we request that you notify the Department's local Permitting and Project Review staff for further instructions of what additional information will be needed to assess the project's potential impact on the species. This will assist in expediting the review of the project and help control the project sponsor's biological survey costs. Additionally, the USFWS should be contacted for further advice since this is also a federally-listed species. Use of this protocol and notification of the Department does not exempt you from consultation with the USFWS.

The Department is willing to cooperate with surveyors who have circumstances or needs not addressed by this protocol and who may wish to propose alternative methods to comply with State law prohibiting take of BNLL. If you have any questions or comments regarding this methodology or if you want to propose the use of a different methodology, please the SVSSR Habitat Conservation Planning staff at (559) 243-4014 (Fresno, Merced, Madera, Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties) or (805) 528-8670 (San Benito and San Luis Obispo Counties).

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

APPROVED SURVEY METHODOLOGY FOR THE BLUNT-NOSED LEOPARD LIZARD MAY 2004

Blunt-nosed leopard lizard, *Gambelia sila* = (*Gambelia silus*)

STATUS: SE, FE, DFG fully protected

This protocol has been developed to provide a minimum level of protection for blunt-nosed leopard lizards (BNLL) when projects or maintenance activities are scheduled to occur within potential BNLL habitat. Disturbing activities should not proceed until appropriate surveys are conducted to determine if the species is present on the site. Surveys conducted according to the following protocol by qualified researchers provide a reasonable, although not conclusive, indication of BNLL presence at a particular site and yield critical information needed to prevent mortality and minimize impacts to the species. Researchers conducting the surveys are expected to understand the basic biological requirements of the species and have the ability to recognize potential BNLL habitat. This protocol satisfies the Department of Fish and Game requirements when it is determined that formal BNLL surveys are needed. [Note: This protocol is appropriate for pre-project BNLL surveys, however, population monitoring over time on a site is best conducted using a permanent survey grid, such as described in Tollestrup (1976).]

METHODS:

A minimum of two researchers, walking in parallel on adjacent transects, should conduct a BNLL survey. Optimum BNLL activity periods occur when air temperature is between 25C-35C (77F-95F) (Tollestrup 1976; USFWS 1985, 1998). Surveys must be conducted when the air temperature falls within the optimal range. Surveys may begin after sunrise as soon as the minimum air temperature criterion is met, and must end by 1400 hours or when the maximum temperature is reached, whichever occurs first (Tollestrup 1976). Time of day and air temperature should be recorded at the start and end of each survey. Air temperature should be periodically checked to ensure that the maximum has not been exceeded. Air temperature should be measured at 1-2 cm above the ground over a surface most representative of the area being surveyed. The researcher must shade the thermometer from direct sunlight while taking the reading. Other factors that affect BNLL activity such as soil temperature (measured at 1cm below soil surface with a shaded thermometer) and weather conditions must be recorded at the start and end of each survey. Surveys should not be conducted on overcast days (cloud cover > 90%) or when sustained wind velocity exceeds 10 mph (force > 3 on Beaufort wind scale) (Montanucci 1965; Tollestrup 1976; J. Vance, pers. comm.).

Surveys must be conducted on foot, and researchers must survey all areas with potential BNLL habitat. BNLL are often difficult to detect, particularly in areas where shrubs are fairly numerous (>30% cover) and/or the herbaceous vegetation is tall (>30 cm). In such conditions, 10 meter wide transects should be walked at a slow pace. In areas with few shrubs and shorter herbaceous vegetation (<15 cm), transects as wide as 30 meters are acceptable. When feasible, transects should be walked in a north-south orientation to minimize glare from the sun. The surveyor should stop periodically and scan the transect for BNLL using close-focusing binoculars (minimum 7X35 magnification). In addition to recording the location of all BNLL observed (must provide UTM coordinates), the presence of habitat features important for BNLL (washes, playas, relative abundance of small mammal burrows) should also be recorded for each transect. Streambeds, washes, roads, etc., should be walked in addition to transect lines since BNLL are often seen in these areas.

TIMING AND LENGTH OF SURVEY:

Survey intensity should be commensurate with the anticipated level of disturbance to the BNLL habitat. The primary concern for BNLL when disturbance occurs during maintenance activities is direct mortality from equipment or personnel. Removal of intact BNLL habitat has a much greater potential for “take” due to direct impact on animals aboveground as well as any hibernating animals or eggs underground. A longer survey effort including both spring adult surveys and fall hatchling surveys is therefore required for activities that cause impacts to undisturbed BNLL habitat. The more intensive survey effort increases the chances of observing the species, even if the population is small. Once a BNLL has been observed, surveys may cease and consultation with the Department must begin regarding avoidance measures. If BNLL are observed incidentally while conducting surveys for other species, specific surveys for BNLL are not required. Surveys will be accepted for one year from the date of completion.

Disturbances for Maintenance Activities

Examples of maintenance activities include grading existing roads, grass mowing on roadsides, and maintaining existing structures. BNLL are active and above ground from April through September, but optimum activity periods for adults occur between April 15 and July 15 (Montanucci 1965; Tollestrup 1979; USFWS 1985, 1998). BNLL surveys should be conducted for a total of 8 days over the course of the 90-day time span. A minimum of 3 survey days should be conducted consecutively, with a maximum of 6 days completed within any 30-day time period. Fall hatchling surveys are not required for activities in this category.

Disturbances Leading to Habitat Removal

Examples of disturbances that impact intact habitat include establishment of new roads or structures, housing subdivisions, and changes in historic land use. BNLL surveys should be conducted for 12 days over the course of the 90-day

adult optimal survey period (April 15 to July 15), with a maximum of 4 survey days per week and 8 days within any 30-day time period. At least one survey session should be conducted for 4 consecutive days, weather permitting. BNLL hatchlings and subadults are most commonly observed from August 1 to September 15, along with a few adults that are still active above ground (Montanucci 1965; Tollestrup 1979; USFWS 1985, 1998). In addition to the 12 days of adult BNLL surveys required for activities in this category, 5 more survey days are required during the hatchling optimal survey period for a total of 17 survey days overall.

QUALIFICATIONS OF RESEARCHERS:

An acceptable BNLL survey crew should consist of no more than 3 Level I researchers for every Level II researcher. This restriction should reduce the number of incorrect/missed identifications. The names and affiliations of all researchers must be recorded for each survey day.

Level I: Researcher has demonstrated the ability to distinguish BNLL from other common lizard species that may inhabit the area;

Level II: Researcher has demonstrated the ability to distinguish BNLL from other common lizard species that may inhabit the area and has participated in at least 50 survey days for BNLL (or 25 survey days and a BNLL identification course recognized by/acceptable to the Department of Fish and Game). Researcher has made at least one confirmed* field sighting of a BNLL.

REPORTING

All BNLL observations should be reported to the California Natural Diversity Database within 30 days. A sample form is attached. Additional forms can be obtained at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/whdab/html/animals.html> .

SPECIAL REQUIREMENT FOR SURVEYS IN DFG CENTRAL COAST REGION (San Luis Obispo County)

Lands with potential BNLL habitat in the Department's Central Coast Region (CCR) have different conditions compared to the San Joaquin Valley Southern Sierra Region (SJVSSR). The sites with habitat in the CCR tend to be at higher elevations, where nighttime temperatures can remain low even though daytime temperatures meet minimum survey criteria. In such conditions, BNLL activity is likely to be low and surveys conducted at this time could result in non-detection of the species even though they are present. As such, an additional requirement of a visit to a known voucher site to check for BNLL activity applies to surveys conducted in this region. Once the species has been observed at the voucher site, formal surveys can begin. The Elkhorn Plain ER has been selected as the voucher site for the CCR.

LITERATURE CITED

Montanucci, R.R., 1965. Observations of the San Joaquin leopard lizard, *Crotaphytus wislizenii silus* Stejneger. *Herpetologica* 21(4): 270-283.

Tollestrup, K. 1976. A standardized method of obtaining an index of densities of blunt-nosed leopard lizards, *Crotaphytus silus*. Unpub. Rpt. U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento, CA. 11pp + Appendices.

Tollestrup, K. 1979. The ecology, social structure, and foraging behavior of two closely-related leopard lizards, *Gambelia silus* and *Gambelia wislizenii*. PhD Dissertation, University of California Berkeley.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1985. Revised blunt-nosed leopard lizard recovery plan. United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Region 1, Portland, OR. 85 pp.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 1998. Recovery plan for upland species of the San Joaquin Valley, California. United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Region 1, Portland, OR. 319 pp.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Julie Vance, California Department of Water Resources, San Joaquin District, 3374 E. Shields Ave, Fresno, California, 93726.

*A minimum of one confirmed field sighting must be documented for each Level II researcher and be available to the Department upon request. As with all BNLL sightings, it should also be submitted to the California Natural Diversity Database. Information to be included in documentation of BNLL sighting: Name of researcher, date of survey, location of survey, names of accompanying researchers who can confirm the sighting, and details of sighting (distance, BNLL activity, etc).

CONTACT INFORMATION

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