

Management of Army Acquired Mitigations Lands by BLM

As part of the Fort Irwin Land Expansion project, the U.S. Department of the Army (Army) acquired lands to mitigate the loss of desert tortoise habitat due to the expansion of military training areas within the installation. As previously agreed to by the Army and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the jurisdiction for management of those acquired lands, will be transferred to the BLM-Barstow Field Office as soon as all legislative and administrative procedural requirements are complete.

Public lands are managed by the BLM in conformance with relevant resource management plan(s) (RMP) plus other relevant laws, regulations and policies. The RMP in place for the lands acquired by the Army is the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan as amended, including the West Mojave Plan (March 2006). The West Mojave Plan (WMP) established four Desert Wildlife Management Areas (DWMAs).

These DWMAs are referred to as tortoise DWMAs because this name is consistent with the terminology used by the Desert Tortoise (Mojave Population) Recovery Plan, and has been adopted by other regional planning efforts throughout the listed range of the tortoise. DWMAs are managed as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for desert tortoise conservation, and implementation of specific controls over uses such as off-highway vehicles, grazing, and other commercial activities, to ensure that the following goals are achieved:

Goal 1: Sufficient habitat to ensure long-term tortoise population viability is provided.

Goal 2: Upward or stationary trend the tortoise population for at least 25 years.

Goal 3: Genetic connectivity among tortoise populations, both within the West Mojave Recovery Unit, and between this and other recovery units.

Goal 4: Tortoise mortality is reduced.

BLM has also developed a land zoning system that provides specific land management prescriptions to help effectively and consistently manage lands that BLM administers within the CDCA. Under this zoning strategy, lands are assigned one of four multiple-use classes. The multiple-use class assignment is based on the sensitivity of resources and kinds of uses occurring in each geographic area. The four multiple-use classes are Class C (Controlled Use), Class L (Limited Use), Class M (Moderate Use), and Class I (Intensive Use).

All four DWMAs have been classified as Class L. Lands within Class L include areas that are managed to provide for lower density, carefully controlled multiple uses of resources while ensuring that sensitive values are not significantly diminished.

The BLM will manage the acquired lands in conformance with WMP, and in particular with measures for the Superior Cronese, Fremont Kramer and the Ord Rodman DWMAs, including the 1% limitation on new ground disturbance. All but a de minimus amount of the lands being transferred are within established DWMAs. Because the land being acquired for the purpose of

conservation as mitigation for the Fort Irwin Maneuver Land Expansion, the BLM does not anticipate issuing an Opening Order to make the land open for entry. Regular monitoring and patrolling of DWMA's is part of BLM's commitment to ensure that desert tortoise goals are met. The continuous presence of law enforcement to deter unauthorized activities, and identify potentially adverse changes in DWMA's, is of utmost importance. To this end, Fort Irwin is helping to fund two new BLM law enforcement ranger positions for a maximum of ten years to patrol and monitor DWMA's.