



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, California 93003

IN REPLY REFER TO:
PAS 1231.1347.1797

February 10, 2006

Raymond H. Marler
Director, Strategic Programs
Department of the Army
Headquarters, National Training Center and Fort Irwin
Fort Irwin, California 92310-5000

Subject: Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan for Fort Irwin's Land Expansion
Program at the U. S. Army National Training Center and Fort Irwin

Dear Mr. Marler:

This letter is in reference to your request, dated August 8, 2005, for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) review and approval of the final Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan for Fort Irwin's Land Expansion Program at the U. S. Army's National Training Center (NTC) and Fort Irwin. We have reviewed the referenced desert tortoise translocation plan and find it to be scientifically sound and logistically feasible. The Service recognizes that this translocation plan will serve as a principal guiding document to ensure safe, humane, and successful translocation of desert tortoises from new training areas within the NTC to release sites. The translocation plan also provides a framework to study translocated, recipient, and control (those desert tortoises living near translocation areas, but whose home ranges do not overlap those of translocatees or recipients) animals to learn as much as possible about the ecology, conservation, and management of the desert tortoise. Finally, the translocation plan defines measures of success for translocation and provides metrics to evaluate success over multiple time scales, identified for both the short and long term.

We also acknowledge receipt of your request for initiation of formal consultation, pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), as amended, on the desert tortoise. The consultation concerns the potential effects of the creation and use of pens that will hold desert tortoises that test positive for antibodies to *Mycoplasma* sp. bacteria and the translocation of desert tortoises into areas with resident animals.

All information required of you to initiate consultation was either included with your request or is otherwise accessible for our consideration and reference. We have assigned log number 1-8-05-F-43 to this consultation. Please refer to that number in any future correspondence on this consultation. We recognize the time constraints under which the Army is operating and will attempt to complete the biological opinion in an expedient manner.

As a reminder, the Act requires that after initiation of formal consultation, the lead Federal agency may make no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources that could preclude the formulation or implementation of reasonable and prudent alternatives to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of endangered or threatened species or destroying or adversely modifying critical habitat. We understand that the U.S. Army does not intend to translocate any desert tortoises until the issuance of the biological opinion. Furthermore, we also acknowledge that adaptive management is an important component of the translocation plan; the translocation plan clearly states that procedures will be modified if the monitoring and research that are integral components of the plan indicate the need. Consequently, we are providing this letter to you at this time, in advance of the issuance of our biological opinion, to indicate that further refinement of the translocation plan is not necessary at this time, although the plan may be modified in the future, either as a result of our section 7(a)(2) review or in response to the needs of adaptive management.

If you have any questions about this consultation or the consultation process in general, please contact Ray Bransfield of my staff at (805) 644-1766, extension 317. You may direct questions regarding the translocation plan to Amy Salveter of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Office at (805) 644-1766, extension 244.

Sincerely,

/s/ Diane K. Noda

Diane K. Noda
Field Supervisor