

## **FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

# **FEATURED PROJECT: PUBLIC OUTREACH FOR DESERT CONSERVATION PROGRAM (FENCING)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT:**

This project incorporates public participation and public education and information outreach programs with the physical installation of 36,000 feet of retrofit desert tortoise fencing along I-15 across Mormon Mesa, beginning at exit 100, the Carp/Elgin exit, and proceeding west along both north and south sides of the freeway towards the western edge of Mormon Mesa and towards the community of Moapa, Nevada.

Additional components of this project include monitoring tortoise habitats and assisting the MSHCP on approved tortoise protection projects, developing and administering safety meetings with associated handouts, developing and administering training sessions (for the installation of retrofit tortoise fencing) with associated handouts and presentations, developing and administering an educational component with associated handouts and incorporating the educational component into the training sessions, developing and administering appropriate presentations to rural organizations and especially youth organizations, scheduling and coordinating all associated events and activities, collecting data relative to volunteer participation, analyzing and summarizing data collected, and reporting, at a minimum, quarterly, in the MSHCP database.

#### **BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT:**

The need for this project is described in Condition N of Permit TE034927-0, "Highway and Road Fencing. The Permittees will continue to retrofit, repair, and construct desert tortoise proof fencing along highways and roads within Clark County in accordance with section 2.8.3.7 of the MSHCP." Section 2.8.3.7 further states, "As part of the initial goals of the long-term DCP, Clark County has placed a high priority on the installation of barriers to protect the desert tortoise and other wildlife." The need is obvious given tortoise proof fencing is a permit condition.

Additional need for public participation is described in the Clark County DCP, Progress Report, Implementation Plan and Budget, July 1997-June 1999, page 33, "...to provide outreach services, with respect to conservation, in outlying areas such as Moapa, Moapa Valley, ....The program has moved slowly so far ....It has been a long and ongoing struggle to bring the rural communities into the DCP process...."

Partners In Conservation's unique pairing of actual 'common-sense' conservation projects and rural organizations provides double benefits to the MSHCP as retrofit tortoise fencing is being installed along I-15 with an ACEC on the northern side, while at the same time, rural residents, by installing the tortoise fence, are gaining an understanding of the conservation action, developing ownership of the project, and learning about the desert tortoise and some aspects of the MSHCP.

## **MANAGEMENT ACTIONS ADDRESSED:**

### **Special Permit Condition N of Permit TE034927-0**

#### **2.8.3.4 Public Information and Education**

#### **2.8.3.7 Construction of Barriers along Linear Features**

#### **2.8.3.9 Participation in and Funding of Local Rehabilitation Enhancement Programs**

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT:**

- \* Installation of 36, 000 feet of retrofit desert tortoise fencing
- \* Active involvement of rural residents by installing tortoise fencing as a conservation action
- \* Ownership in project by rural residents and youth
- \* Rural teenagers will be the focus group as rural youth organizations will be actively recruited
- \* The desert tortoise will gain much needed additional habitat as tortoise proof fencing will provide safe tortoise habitat right next to the busy I-15 freeway
- \* Rural residents and youth will understand the need for conservation actions to protect the threatened tortoise and will understand the specific need for tortoise proof fencing

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

The rolls of fencing and the hog rings to secure the retrofit fencing to existing fencing were provided by the MSHCP. Partners In Conservation provided hog ring pliers, aprons, delivery of all materials, first aid materials, all instructions and training necessary to successfully install tortoise fencing to an exact standard, all scheduling, administrating, facilitating, and coordinating necessary for successful completion of project. Each organization provided shovels, picks, rakes, gloves, and all other necessary hand tools needed to adequately install their section of tortoise fencing. The method used in this project was:

1. Contact and subsequent scheduling of initial presentation of overall project
2. Presentation of overall project, question and answer session
3. Scheduling of training/education session and safety meeting
4. Presentation of training and education session
5. Presentation of safety meeting
6. Scheduling of actual installation date
7. Delivery of materials
8. Hands-on assistance and help during actual installation
9. Installation of pre-determined section of tortoise fencing in 1,000 foot increments
10. Inspection of finished section of fencing (if needed, scheduling of additional work to meet installation standards)
11. Invoice Process
12. Scheduling of presentation
13. Presentation of 'donation to organization' check for volunteer work they performed in the installation of retrofit tortoise fencing
14. Articles in local papers, PR presentations and publications as appropriate to supplement project and to keep project current and visible in rural communities

## **RESULTS AND EVIDENCE OF THE RESULTS**

The results are the actual installation of the tortoise fencing where no tortoise fencing existed before. Results of a successful public information and education program and of a successful PR public outreach program can be realized in the widespread knowledge throughout the rural communities of PIC's fencing project. Among participants, and to an extent their families and friends, it is common knowledge that the fencing project keeps tortoises off the freeways and keeps the tortoises from being killed by high-speed traffic. It is common knowledge that the fencing makes living next to the freeway 'safe' for the tortoise. This project is a great project for the rural communities and especially the rural youth as it is a common-sense conservation project. The implications of not doing this project are easily understood. The positive results for the tortoise of doing this project are easily understood. Additionally, many participants understand that the tortoise fees paid per each acre of land developed help to finance this project and that money 'comes back to them' to some extent when they receive contributions to their organizations for the work they volunteered to do, that of installing tortoise fencing.

Evidence of the results of this project are many, from the training session sign-in sheets, from the documented number of participants, from the digital photographs of each organization's installation work, from the documented presentations to the organizations, from the articles in local papers, from the reports at the various town boards and city councils. Additional verification of this project's successful results can be obtained by personal interviews. PIC would provide group contact names and phone numbers if that is required.

## **EVALUATION/DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

Approximately 85-90% of groups that have previously done fencing, contact PIC to do more fencing. It is a very popular project. About the only groups that have not wanted to do repeat fencing know someone at one of the casinos in Mesquite and can get money donated to their organization without 'working' for it. There is no denying that hand installing of tortoise fencing is hard work. The dirt is almost caliche packed with many rocks; the main part of tortoise fence installation involves digging with shovels. No one 'likes' to do that, but the project is quite popular IN SPITE of the hard physical work involved. Leaders and parents like the project as it teaches youth to work together as a team, to improvise and help each other out. It also teaches, indirectly, the importance of getting an education so that 'you don't have to dig ditches as a job when you grow up'. Parents are actually happy that their kids have had to 'do a hard day's work'. Kids take a great deal of pride in 'their fencing' once it is done; it makes them proud to have worked hard and have something to show for it. Many people have commented that when they drive across the mesa, their kids can point out EXACTLY where they installed tortoise fencing.

This project has no downside. The MSHCP receives two distinct benefits from this project, first, the actual installation of tortoise fencing, and second, public outreach and information and education about the MSHCP reaching the rural residents and especially the rural teenagers. Individual participants inherently gain ownership over the project; additionally, knowledge about the tortoise is learned at a personal, active level, and a sense of pride and a feeling of doing something good are instilled in individuals. Organizations gain money for their group; this money is needed badly—rural organizations, especially youth organizations, are dedicated to keeping kids busy and active in wholesome worthwhile projects and activities. These cost money. Installing tortoise fencing is a great way for groups to earn money for summer camp, Boy Scout supplies—from flags to camping equipment, money for the FFA to travel and enter national competitions—likewise the jazz band, the French Club, the boxing club, etc.

More and more groups hear about the fencing project and contact PIC; PIC has never had to find groups to do the work; there is always more groups signed up than there is actual fencing to install. That in and of itself is the most significant example of why this project is successful.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it is worth repeating, that this project has no downside. It is a win-win situation for all involved. The MSHCP gains double benefits through the physical installation of tortoise fencing and the public outreach and education and information dissemination that accompanies the fencing installation. Individuals gain; organizations gain; the entire community gains through this active participation in a worthwhile common-sense conservation project. The rural communities of Moapa Valley and Virgin Valley have long felt like the unwanted, or more appropriately, ignored step-children of Clark County. Las Vegas and her sibling cities of North Las Vegas, Henderson, and Boulder City keep Clark County focused on the 'Vegas Valley' and all its problems and potentials. This fencing project is one small example of the rural communities actually being 'part' of something—it is a positive opportunity to contribute and to be an active part of a program; a controversial program from the rural community's perspective, but a program that isn't going away. Because it isn't going away, there is a begrudged acceptance, a 'we have no choice, we have to live with it' attitude. This tortoise fencing project brings a positive experience to that begrudged acceptance—that helps and anything that can help bring the rural communities into the process in a positive way has to be good. It is a win-win for everybody.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Partners In Conservation recommends allowing more fencing to be installed along Mormon Mesa by PIC and the rural organizations of Moapa Valley and Virgin Valley. PIC recommends the MSHCP acknowledging to the rural communities their positive contributions to this project and hence, the overall program. An acknowledgement of positive contributions is a small but important step on the long road to improved relationships between the MSHCP, the County, the federal agencies and the rural communities.