

The Eradication of the Clark Mountain Burros



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The Clark Mountain Burros, one of the few remaining burro populations left in California, are scheduled for removal by the Bureau of Land Managements Needles Field Office beginning January 24. Only six herds will now remain under the BLMs “managed” stewardship of the burros territories, which were designated by Congress for protection in 1971. The BLM has deemed the appropriate population level for the State of California at 453 burros with the National target of 2,956 being considered “in balance with other uses”. (1)

The removal of the Clark Mountain Burros is a long and twisted story of government betrayal, bureaucracy, and strategic plans to authorize their permanent elimination after hundreds of years of survival.

It began with the Desert National Conservation Act that transferred the burros only spring to the National Park Service in efforts to protect the habitat of the Endangered Desert Tortoise. At the time of transfer, National Park Service agreed to allow the burros to continue using their centuries-old water source. But once the transfer was complete, they refused to honor their agreement, as well as refusing to allow volunteers to pipe the water back in.

The National Park Service claims it “doesn’t manage for burros” despite the fact that they too are under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthornes direction. The Secretary has been charged by Congress to protect wild horses and burros as “an integral part of the natural system of the public lands”.

There has been much public outcry regarding their removals, including a letter from California Senator Feinstein in September 2005 stating, “I oppose any efforts to remove such a population”. Yet Secretary Kempthorne is choosing to abdicate and ignore his responsibilities, turning a blind-eye to the issue he was charged with overseeing.

Even though the California Department of Fish and Game broke their own code (4600) which states the burros are protected under state law, the National Park Service broke their agreement for water access, the BLM found loop-holes in their mandates for protection, and a multitude of public laws have been circumvented, a meeting with Secretary Kempthorne only allowed “three minutes to hear and consider the case”.

The legal authority to remove the Clark Mountain Burros, the most genetically unique burro population on record, was decreed in a land-use plan that inaccurately reported the burros ranged on Endangered Desert Tortoise habitat and posed a potential threat to their recovery. Yet no studies have been found to significantly substantiate this claim. Arizona, where the burro population is one of the highest in the West, is also the only area where Desert Tortoise populations have been listed as stable. (2)

The total Desert Tortoises population is estimated from 10,000 to 1,000,000 but no true count is known. In 1995 Nevada Department of Wildlife estimated the population at 93,000 adults, however this figure is considered too low by many, as a study done in 2005 in Arizona’s Ironwood Forest National Monument estimated 17,997 tortoises just within the 76,800-acre study area. (3)

While the 100,000 Desert Tortoises have been listed Endangered with management strategies aiming for a goal of 50,000 adults per unit, the National target deemed by public land managers as “appropriate burro use” is under 3,000.

On January 16, the removal of the Clark Mountain Burros received its final approval, with no time allowed for a public appeal to stop the decision. Removal plans will be initiated with phase one by removing the burros via helicopter driving and will continue until 2012. Phase three of the removal plans include shooting the remaining burros to “achieve management objectives and goals”.

It is expected that security for the removals will be at an all-time high, resembling more of SWAT team than a burro round up, with no access granted to either the media or the public, while our public servants permanently eradicate this historic, beautiful and unique species from the face of the American West forever.

END-See References Below

Written by Cindy MacDonald

References

(1) BLM Fiscal Year 2006 National Herd Statistics, California Herd Statistics:

www.blm.gov, National Wild Horse & Burro Homepage

(2), (3), (4) provided by www.natureserve.org

Desert Tortoise/*Gopherus Agassizii*

Distribution/Conservation/Management Summary

Global Abundance: 10,000 to >1,000,000 individuals

Global Abundance Comments: Total population estimates range from 93,000 individuals (NDOW 1985) to several hundred thousand. However, the lower figure is too conservative. For example, on the 76,800-ha Ironwood Forest National Monument in Arizona, distance sampling methods produced an estimate of 17,997 tortoises (150 mm carapace length or larger) on the monument (Averill-Murray and Averill-Murray 2005).

(4) provided by www.tortoise-tracks.org

Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee

Proceedings: Conservation, Restoration, and Management of Tortoises and Turtles-An International Conference, pp. 430-440

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The Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan: An Ambitious Effort to Conserve Biodiversity in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts of the United States, KRISTIN H. BERRY

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