



# Sonoran Desert Tortoise

Background and Potential  
Pinal County Actions

# What is the Sonoran Desert Tortoise (SDT)?

- Species that occurs in 2/3 of the state.  
Primarily in the desert areas
- Lives in rocky highlands, mountains and bajadas
- Sometimes travels to adjacent highlands

# Why is Pinal County Involved?

- Request from: Winkleman Natural Resource Conservation District (WNRCD)
  - \$255,000 for studies
  - Increased staffing
  - New regulations of development community

# Why is WNRCD Concerned?

- Preserve the Species
- Reduce Economic Impacts of a Species Listing
- Assist in the Management of Open Spaces
- In places where similar species were listed, Federal Government cancelled some grazing leases on BLM lands

# Why is WNRCD Concerned?

- Background on Listing:
  - US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS)
    - Bound by court decision
    - Determine if SDT is endangered, and should be protected
    - Decision: 9/2015, Potential Listing: 9/2016
  - USFWS studied in 2010
    - Focused on threats to SDT
    - Determined protection was warranted
    - Precluded by other species at greater risk

# How is WNRCD Addressing their Concerns?

- Best Management Plan for Grazing for SDT
- Requests to Pinal County

# What are the Threats to SDT?

## According to USFWS

- Invasion of Nonnative Grasses
  - Grassland wildfires consume plants that provide cover and food for SDT
  - Range continues to expand, primarily along roadways
- Roads and development preventing migration
- Population growth increasing interaction between SDT and people
- USFWS 2010 Report: Impacts of Grazing are likely limited in AZ
  - Do not share much habitat with SDT
  - Grazing managed by Resource Conservation Districts and Ranchers

# Proposed County Policy

- Lend our assistance to ongoing efforts to reduce threats to the SDT
  - Helping to maintain strong, stable populations
  - Resulting in preventing SDT from becoming endangered

# Implementing Proposed County Policy

- Cooperate with:
  - Federal and State Agencies
  - Resource Conservation Districts
  - State Land Department
  - Private Land Owners

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Invasion of Nonnative Grasses
- **Action:** Develop program to help contain nonnative grasses
  - Borrow the best and most cost effective ideas from sister Counties and Tonto National Forest

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Roads and development preventing migration
- **Action:** When new studies are available, refine our Comprehensive Plan
  - Consider moving or expanding wildlife corridors already in the Plan
  - Develop roadway design standards for corridor crossings

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Population growth increasing interaction between SDT and people
- **Actions:**
  - Implement Comprehensive Plan
    - Open Spaces shown on Plan correlate with SDT habitat
  - Develop Procedures for Staff and our Contractors
    - How to handle Tortoises if found
  - Develop Public Information
    - Leave Tortoises alone, move them off roads
  - Participate in Protection Planning already underway
    - Best Management Practices for Grazing
    - Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Population growth increasing interaction between SDT and people
- **Actions:**
  - Implement Comprehensive Plan
    - Open Spaces shown on Plan correlate with SDT habitat
  - Develop Procedures for Staff and our Contractors
    - How to handle Tortoises if found
  - Develop Public Information
    - Leave Tortoises alone, move them off roads
  - Participate in Protection Planning already underway
    - Best Management Practices for Grazing
    - Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Population growth increasing interaction between SDT and people
- **Actions:**
  - Implement Comprehensive Plan
    - Open Spaces shown on Plan correlate with SDT habitat
  - Develop Procedures for Staff and our Contractors
    - How to handle Tortoises if found
  - Develop Public Information
    - Leave Tortoises alone, move them off roads
  - Participate in Protection Planning already underway
    - Best Management Practices for Grazing
    - Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team

# Proposed County Actions

- **Threat:** Population growth increasing interaction between SDT and people
- **Actions:**
  - Implement Comprehensive Plan
    - Open Spaces shown on Plan correlate with SDT habitat
  - Develop Procedures for Staff and our Contractors
    - How to handle Tortoises if found
  - Develop Public Information
    - Leave Tortoises alone, move them off roads
  - Participate in Protection Planning already underway
    - Best Management Practices for Grazing
    - Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team

# Request from WNRCD

From Letter Received October 2013

- Literature review: \$10,000
- Create a habitat based population model: \$45,000
- Reread SDT study plots in Pinal County: \$200,000

# Request from WNRCD

From Letter Received October 2013

- Literature review: \$10,000
  - USFWS staffer is focused on SDT
  - Has gathered the existing research

# Request from WNRCD

From Letter Received October 2013

- Create a habitat based population model: \$45,000
  - US Geological Survey (USGS) is developing a model, will be complete in next few months

# Request from WNRCD

From Letter Received October 2013

- Reread SDT study plots in Pinal Co.
  - SDT is in 9 of 15 AZ Counties
  - Population decline only identified in Maricopa Co.
  - 2 more years of data will not make a significant difference in listing or not listing the SDT: Long SDT Lifespan