# Desert Tortoise Recovery Partnership


## NFWF CONTACT

**Kirstin Neff**
Program Director,
Southwest
kirstin.neff@nfwf.org
303-222-6485

**Emma Wigger**
Manager,
Rocky Mountain Regional
Programs
emma.wigger@nfwf.org
202-888-1680

**Trevor Davis**
Coordinator,
Regional Programs
trevor.davis@nfwf.org
202-595-2442


## FUNDING PARTNERS

- U.S. Marine Corps
- U.S. Department of Navy

## ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) works with partners to foster sustainable and impactful conservation solutions so that people and nature thrive together. Chartered by Congress in 1984, NFWF has grown to become the nation's largest conservation foundation. Since its founding, NFWF has funded more than 23,900 projects that have generated a total conservation impact of more than $12 billion.

Learn more at **www.nfwf.org**


**NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS**
1625 Eye Street, NW
Suite 300
Washington, D.C., 20006
202-857-0166




Desert tortoise

## OVERVIEW

The Desert Tortoise Recovery Partnership (DTRP) was formed in 2022 through partnerships between the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), U.S. Marines Corps, U.S. Army, Department of the Navy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to address pressing conservation needs for the Mojave desert tortoise *(Gopherus agassizii)* in California's West Mojave Desert. The DTRP was established as an effort of the Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP), a joint initiative of the Department of War and the Department of the Interior to develop threatened and endangered species conservation and recovery programs while maintaining military readiness. The West Mojave Landscape Resilience grant category was launched this year through a new cooperative agreement between NFWF and the U.S. Marine Corps to support projects that protect the military mission while benefitting native species such as the Mojave desert tortoise, Joshua tree, and desert bighorn sheep.

To date, the West Mojave Landscape Resilience and Desert Tortoise Recovery Partnership program has awarded 24 grants across five slates, investing nearly $15.5 million and leveraging nearly $8.4 million in matching contributions to generate a total, on-the-ground impact of roughly $23.9 million.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), U.S. Marine Corps, and U.S. Department of Navy announced a 2026 round of funding for West Mojave Landscape Resilience and Desert Tortoise Recovery Partnership projects. Ten new landscape resilience and tortoise conservation grants totaling over $7.1 million were awarded. The ten awards announced generated nearly $700 thousand in grantee-provided matching contributions, for a total conservation impact of nearly $7.8 million.

*(continued)*



Joshua Tree National Park

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

West Mojave Landscape Resilience projects will support watershed and ecosystem function within or adjacent to the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) Twentynine Palms, California, to directly benefit the military training mission by protecting military readiness, natural and cultural resources, and built infrastructure from vulnerabilities related to natural hazards. These projects use natural infrastructure to reduce risk to military mission, restore watershed and landscape function for watershed security, and provide co-benefits to species and habitat.

Desert Tortoise Recovery and Sustainment Partnership (RASP) projects will produce measurable outcomes for threatened Mojave desert tortoise in California's western Mojave Desert. The projects address the leading factors in Mojave desert tortoise decline such as habitat alteration and fragmentation, environmental change, and tortoise mortality. The primary goal of this category is to marshal resources in a coordinated manner to work to recover the species by protecting Mojave desert tortoises from threats and restoring critical habitat.

The goals of the DTRP are laid out in the Mojave Desert Tortoise Recovery Implementation Plan and include closure of unauthorized OHV routes and habitat restoration, installation of tortoise exclusion fencing along highways and improvement of road crossing structures, species monitoring, and land acquisition for habitat protection.

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES TO DATE

Collectively, the five West Mojave Landscape Resilience projects aim to accomplish the following outcomes:

- 52 riparian acres restored
- 1,976 acres with watershed restoration practices to reduce stormwater and sediment flows
- 319,617,000 gallons stormwater storage created by water infrastructure projects
- 120 CFS reduced at peak flood stage
- 300,147 pounds of sediment removal avoided through erosion control
- 40 acres of desert crust preserved through protective measures
- 1,443 acres of desert crust restored

*(continued)*

Collectively, the 19 Desert Tortoise Recovery Partnership projects aim to accomplish the following outcomes:

- 22 defensible restoration polygons established
- 50,858 acres protected within defensible polygons
- 9 acres of Mojave desert tortoise habitat restored
- 74 sites with vertical mulching conducted and/or physical barriers installed to discourage use of unauthorized OHV routes
- 213,855 people reached through outreach efforts
- 663 sites monitored for Mojave desert tortoise population
- 53 datasets or monitoring reports produced and entered into relevant databases to inform management
- 1,480 acres acquired in fee for habitat protection
- 3 pounds of native seed harvested for habitat restoration
- 2,000 seedlings propagated for habitat restoration
- 160 tortoises reared in headstarting programs
- 5 miles of highway exclusion fencing improved
- 16 miles of highway exclusion fencing installed
- 3 highway underpasses installed or improved for road crossing



Bighorn sheep

## 2026 GRANTS

### CATEGORY 1: WEST MOJAVE LANDSCAPE RESILIENCE

**Growing and Mapping Biocrusts to Restore Degraded Soils in the West Mojave (CA)**

Grantee: USGS Southwest Biological Science Center
Grant Amount:.....$287,400
Matching Funds:.....$36,400
Total Project Amount:.....$323,800

Grow locally adapted biological soil crusts, or biocrusts, and map their presence and condition across the western Mojave Desert in California to identify where restoration is most needed and where healthy source material can be collected. Project will deploy biocrust sods at scale and create maps and spatial tools that guide recovery, stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and improve habitat for the desert tortoise and other wildlife.

**Natural Infrastructure to Capture Stormwater and Reduce Flooding at Twentynine Palms (CA)**

Grantee: Regen Resilient
Grant Amount:.....$2,325,400
Matching Funds:.....$0
Total Project Amount:.....$2,325,400

Install natural infrastructure such as terracing, micro-catchments, vegetation, and erosion-control treatments in the Mainside and housing areas of Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, to slow, spread, and infiltrate stormwater across the desert landscape. Project will reduce flooding and erosion, recharge groundwater to improve water security, and enhance habitat for desert wildlife including the desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep.

**Restoring Desert Washes to Build Habitat Resilience in Joshua Tree National Park (CA)**

Grantee: Joshua Tree National Park
Grant Amount:.....$522,500
Matching Funds:.....$132,400
Total Project Amount:.....$654,900

Restore dry desert washes in Joshua Tree National Park, California, using low-tech rock structures such as one-rock dams and weirs, along with native plantings and biological soil crust restoration, to slow floodwaters and rebuild soils. Project will increase infiltration and soil moisture, expand native vegetation, and stabilize channels to reduce erosion and improve habitat for the desert tortoise and other wildlife.

**Scalable Natural Infrastructure to Restore Desert Washes and Watersheds at Twentynine Palms (CA)**

Grantee: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center
Grant Amount:.....$1,340,100
Matching Funds:.....$0
Total Project Amount:.....$1,340,100

Design and test scalable natural infrastructure such as brush checks, coir wattles, vertical mulch, and contour basins in desert washes near Surprise Spring and Deadman Lake at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, to slow runoff and rebuild soils. Project will increase infiltration and groundwater recharge, retain sediment and seed, reduce erosion and dust, and provide guidance to improve desert tortoise habitat across the Mojave.

*(continued)*

**Supporting Native Plants and Soils to Restore Desert Tortoise Habitat at Twentynine Palms (CA)**
Grantee: University of Connecticut
Grant Amount:.....$412,400
Matching Funds:.....$43,500
Total Project Amount:.....$455,900
Restore desert washes at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California, by pairing native plantings with beneficial soil fungi, biological soil crusts, and erosion-control wattles to stabilize soils and slow stormwater. Project will improve habitat for the desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep, increase resilience to flood and fire, and reduce erosion that threatens nearby resources and infrastructure.

## CATEGORY 2: MOJAVE DESERT TORTOISE RASP

**Conserving Mojave Desert Tortoise Habitat in the West Mojave (CA)**
Grantee: Mojave Desert Land Trust
Grant Amount:.....$374,600
Matching Funds:.....$0
Total Project Amount:.....$374,600
Acquire strategically located private inholdings within the Superior-Cronese and Ord-Rodman focal areas of the western Mojave Desert in California to support Mojave desert tortoise habitat connectivity and management. Project will reduce habitat fragmentation, strengthen existing conserved lands, and reinforce recent tortoise augmentation efforts to improve long-term recovery in the region.

**Estimating Desert Tortoise Density and Demographics in the Superior-Cronese Area (CA)**
Grantee: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Desert Tortoise Recovery Office
Grant Amount:.....$347,600
Matching Funds:.....$22,500
Total Project Amount:.....$370,100
Estimate population density, abundance, and demographic structure of the threatened Mojave desert tortoise in the western Superior-Cronese area of the Western Mojave Recovery Unit in California using a new survey and monitoring method developed for the species. Project will establish baseline data to evaluate population trends and measure the effectiveness of coordinated recovery actions, guiding improved management and conservation of the species.

**Expanding Highway Exclusion Fencing to Reduce Mojave Desert Tortoise Mortality (CA)**
Grantee: Desert Tortoise Council
Grant Amount:.....$688,300
Matching Funds:.....$0
Total Project Amount:.....$688,300
Install wildlife exclusion fencing along a high-priority segment of Interstate 40 in the Western Mojave Recovery Unit in California to reduce Mojave desert tortoise highway mortality. Project will reduce tortoise-vehicle collisions, improve habitat connectivity, and protect critical habitat along a priority fencing segment identified for desert tortoise recovery.

**Monitoring Juvenile Desert Tortoise Growth and Survival in Restored Habitat (CA)**
Grantee: Zoological Society of San Diego
Grant Amount:.....$389,400
Matching Funds:.....$446,600
Total Project Amount:.....$836,000
Release and monitor the growth and survival of juvenile Mojave desert tortoises at two restored sites in the Superior-Cronese area of the western Mojave Desert in California, in coordination with habitat restoration and invasive plant management. Project will measure juvenile growth and survival to assess whether restored habitat can support the transition of juveniles to breeding adults and advance tortoise recovery.

**Restoring Unauthorized Routes to Conserve Desert Tortoise Habitat in the West Mojave (CA)**
Grantee: Preservation Ranch
Grant Amount:.....$429,000
Matching Funds:.....$0
Total Project Amount:.....$429,000
Rehabilitate unauthorized off-highway vehicle routes across 286 acres of Mojave desert tortoise critical habitat in the Superior-Cronese West Focal Area, and promote responsible recreation through an interpretive kiosk and field outreach. Project will restore habitat, ensure long-term site protection, and secure a monitored 490-acre block of defensible desert tortoise habitat in the West Mojave.



Desert tortoise