United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Dr. Bob Clark, Program Manager
Joint Fire Science Program
National Interagency Fire Center
3833 S. Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705

JOSHUA TREE
MAY 01 2000
NATIONAL PARK

Dear Dr. Clark:

Subject: Support for Research Proposal on Fire and Invasive Annual Grasses in Western Ecosystems

On behalf of the cooperating agencies of the Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (Desert Tortoise MOG), I am submitting this letter of support for a research proposal by Matt Brooks, Jayne Belnap, Jon Keeley, and Robert Sanford entitled *Fire and Invasive Annual Grasses in Western Ecosystems*. The relationship between fire and invasive annual grasses in the Mojave Desert, and the looming effects of this dynamic on desert tortoise habitat, are of major concern to the cooperating agencies of the Desert Tortoise MOG. To date, there has been little research conducted on the ecological relationship between fire and alien plant invasion and distribution in Mojave Desert ecosystems. The research proposal by Brooks *et al.* would address an important science information need for desert tortoise recovery. This topic is among the top tier of desert tortoise research needs identified by the Desert Tortoise MOG at its March 29, 2000, meeting.

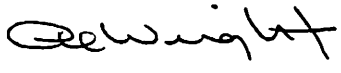
As chair of the Desert Tortoise MOG, I was asked to communicate our support for any research proposals under consideration by the Joint Fire Science Program that might address our priority science information needs. The Desert Tortoise MOG is an interagency coordinating committee that was established in 1988 pursuant to BLM's Desert Tortoise Rangewide Plan. In recent years, the focus of the Desert Tortoise MOG has shifted from overseeing the implementation of BLM's Desert Tortoise Rangewide Plan to overseeing the implementation of the Desert Tortoise Recovery Plan. The Desert Tortoise MOG includes representatives of BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Biological Resources Division of USGS, the four branches of the military that have desert tortoise habitat, and the State wildlife management agencies from Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. Desert tortoise research needs and priorities have been reviewed annually by the Desert Tortoise MOG since the early 1990's. The top tier of our most recently updated list of desert tortoise research needs includes the following topics that would be addressed by the Brooks *et al.* research proposal: (1) ecological relationship between fire and alien plant invasion and distribution; (2) relationship between desert tortoise distribution and alien plant invasion and distribution; and (3) potential mechanisms for controlling and managing invasive alien plants.

Research on ways to prevent alien annual grass invasions, and to restore invaded habitats, has been identified by Federal land management agencies as a top national research priority. The geographical focus of our concern is the Mojave and Colorado Deserts, especially the 6.5 million acres of designated critical habitat for the desert tortoise in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. We need to know which of these habitats are most vulnerable to invasions by alien annual grasses, and which may be naturally resistant. With such information, cooperating agency managers could more effectively deploy their limited staff and budgetary resources before, during, and after fires. By identifying what soil and other site factors confer natural resistance to annual alien grass invasions, and understanding how these factors are altered by fire, the Brooks *et al.* research proposal might give us the information we need to predict or prevent such invasions, or at least allow us to develop cost effective mitigation measures. Fire prescriptions might also be designed that would minimize the potential for conditions to develop that are favorable for alien grass invasions, and restoration techniques could be targeted to those sites that have the greatest potential for long-term success.

With these science information needs in mind, we urge you to fund the research proposal submitted by Brooks *et al.* on *Fire and Invasive Annual Grasses in Western Ecosystems*. Any support you can provide for research on this topic – applicable to Mojave Desert ecosystems – would serve to promote the conservation of the threatened Mojave desert tortoise population. For background purposes, I am enclosing fact sheets concerning the desert tortoise, the Desert Tortoise MOG, and the current membership of the Desert Tortoise MOG. (See Enclosures 1, 2, and 3.)

Please contact me at (916) 978-4600, or other Desert Tortoise MOG members at the numbers shown in Enclosure 3, if you questions regarding the role and activities of the Desert Tortoise MOG or this support letter.

Sincerely,



Al Wright
State Director

Enclosures
1 - Fact Sheet, Desert Tortoise Life History and Status (2 pp.)
2 - Fact Sheet, Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (1 p.)
3 - Membership roster, Desert Tortoise Management Oversight Group (1 p.)

cc: All Members of the Desert Tortoise MOG (w/o enclosures)