

**Proposed General Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Desert Tortoise
VPM Public Information Gathering Forum Transcript**

US Fish and Wildlife Service

June 15, 2022

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00:00:12.210 --> 00:00:14.790

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: The webinar will begin in 15 minutes.

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00:04:42.630 --> 00:04:45.000

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: The meeting will begin in 10 minutes.

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00:09:37.680 --> 00:09:41.430

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Hello everyone, the meeting will begin in five minutes.

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00:14:38.550 --> 00:14:51.660

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Good evening, everyone. Thank you so much for joining. we're going to just go ahead and give it a couple more minutes and give our other attendees a moment to join, so we will see you back in just a few minutes. Thanks so much for your patience.

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00:16:43.320 --> 00:16:51.270

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Good evening, everyone I'd like to welcome you to the virtual public information forum for the Desert Tortoise General Conservation Plan.

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00:16:51.810 --> 00:17:01.590

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We're here to engage the public in the early stages of the proposed environmental impact statement for a general conservation plan for the desert tortoise in California.

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00:17:02.370 --> 00:17:09.300

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: My name is Theresa Ancell and I work for EMPSi, which stands for Environmental Management and Planning Solutions, Incorporated

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00:17:09.990 --> 00:17:14.850

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: and I serve as the project manager, public involvement coordinator, and resource specialist for the project.

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00:17:15.300 --> 00:17:22.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We're a national environmental consulting firm here tonight, working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to facilitate the forum and manage the Zoom application.

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00:17:23.640 --> 00:17:34.110

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: With me today on the call are my coworkers from EMPSi, Amy Cordle, our senior program manager, and Liza Schill, our public outreach specialist.

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00:17:34.800 --> 00:17:42.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I will be assisting the US Fish and Wildlife today with the facilitation of the forum, the question and answer session, and the input session.

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00:17:42.930 --> 00:17:56.610

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Before beginning today's presentation we will briefly review the forum agenda, participation rules, and introduce the US Fish and Wildlife specialists assisting with responding to questions. I would like to remind everyone that the forum is being recorded.

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00:17:58.170 --> 00:18:10.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You can enable the use of your closed captions by clicking the live transcript button on your Zoom toolbar. Once you've clicked that button, there should be a selection, to show subtitles

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00:18:12.120 --> 00:18:22.110

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: To support this public forum, we have created a virtual public forum website and you'll be able to access that website at

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00:18:22.860 --> 00:18:37.350

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: www.virtualpublicmeeting.com/usfws-desert-tortoise-GCP-eis.

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00:18:37.800 --> 00:18:48.030

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And don't worry, we will go ahead and post that into the chat as well as have it displayed on the page a few times, through the meeting so.

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00:18:48.840 --> 00:18:58.230

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: With that Liza, if you don't mind going on to the next, the next slide we'll just review our agenda for a moment. So tonight's plan is

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00:18:58.800 --> 00:19:10.620

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: we are going to go through the details, and we are going to meet our Fish and Wildlife specialists. Then we will hear the project presentation and after the presentation will review

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00:19:11.670 --> 00:19:16.680

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: How to go over and do our questions, and also

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00:19:17.820 --> 00:19:26.700

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: our input period. So the presentation tonight will review the planning area and describe the purpose of preparing the general conservation plan.

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00:19:28.350 --> 00:19:40.140

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And once we've learned more about the planning effort I'll provide a quick tutorial of our virtual public forum website and then we'll go ahead and move on to the question and answer session and follow that up with the public input session.

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00:19:41.760 --> 00:19:43.590

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So we'll go on to the next slide, Liza.

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00:19:44.970 --> 00:19:53.280

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Just a few participation guidelines. We want to just remind you that your microphone is going to remain closed until the public input session.

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00:19:54.000 --> 00:20:02.490

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you do have an urgent question or need technical assistance, you can please enter that message into the chat box and we'll have a Technical Assistant contact you.

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00:20:03.210 --> 00:20:11.850

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you are unable to access the chat box, for any reason, or you just need some technical assistance, you can email me at theresa.ancell@emp.si.com.

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00:20:12.810 --> 00:20:30.780

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Perfect. So we'll have one more slide Liza before we go onto our presentation. so.

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00:20:31.290 --> 00:20:48.000

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We just want to kind of show you guys some tips and tricks for Zoom, so we'll be using these features throughout our meeting after the presentation and we'll actually give this tips and tricks slide we'll put this up again before we go into the question and answer session so.

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00:20:49.560 --> 00:20:53.970

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay I'd now like to go ahead and turn it over to Ray Bransfield.

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00:20:53.970 --> 00:21:07.290

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Ray is our presenter this evening, and he is with the Fish and Wildlife Service. He serves as a biologist and as the project manager and he's going to provide an introduction for the rest of the project team. Hi Ray, thank you.

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00:21:07.890 --> 00:21:09.360

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Hey Theresa. Well,

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00:21:09.420 --> 00:21:18.300

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Good evening, everybody. So yes, as Theresa said, my name is Ray Bransfield, and I am a biologist in the Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office.

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00:21:18.810 --> 00:21:27.660

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And I'd like to introduce Peter Sanzenbacher, who is also in the Palm Springs Office and is working with me on this General Conservation Plan

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00:21:28.080 --> 00:21:41.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and Jessica D'Ambrosio, who is a public affairs specialist in the Carlsbad Office for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Palm Springs is a sub office of Carlsbad, so that's how we're related there.

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00:21:42.690 --> 00:21:49.470

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So also then I'm going to turn it over to Amy Fesnock for the Bureau of Land Management so Amy can introduce herself.

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00:21:52.320 --> 00:21:59.610

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Thanks, Ray. I'm Amy Fesnock. I am the resource advisor for the California Desert District.

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00:22:00.870 --> 00:22:09.810

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: The primary duties that I'm responsible for is the implementation of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan.

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00:22:10.410 --> 00:22:32.730

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: And the reason BLM is engaged in this process with Fish and Wildlife Service is we view the general conservation plan for the desert tortoise to dovetail in quite well with concepts used in the DRECP. So that's why we're here thanks Ray back to you.

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00:22:34.200 --> 00:22:36.240

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Okay Liza next slide please.

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00:22:38.550 --> 00:22:55.890

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So, so this is a brief overview of the general conservation plan. This is a Service proposal, the Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing this and the reason we're doing this is that we haven't processed that many

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00:22:57.030 --> 00:23:02.910

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Requests for incidental take permits, since the tortoise was listed in 1990.

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00:23:04.050 --> 00:23:13.650

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: But in order for us to issue an incidental take permit the applicant has to prepare a habitat conservation plan and what we've seen over the years, is that generally

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00:23:14.430 --> 00:23:23.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we can figure out how to minimize and mitigate the effects of the taking of tortoises that would occur when we

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00:23:23.670 --> 00:23:30.600

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: issue and incidental take permit and we basically we can generally agree to how we're going to do that in pretty short order with an applicant.

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00:23:31.440 --> 00:23:42.630

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: But then we wind up spending lots and lots of time trying to explain that in documents, so that the public really understands what we agree on and how we process

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00:23:43.260 --> 00:23:54.990

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: these permits. So in 2007 the Fish and Wildlife Service issued policy about general conservation plans, which

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00:23:55.290 --> 00:24:04.260

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: encouraged Service biologist to consider the concept of general conservation plans, where we can take actions that have generally the same sort of effect

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00:24:04.950 --> 00:24:19.380

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: on the species and sort of lay out the groundwork of habitat conservation plans through this general conservation planning process to sort of accelerate the process of doing these permits.

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00:24:20.490 --> 00:24:34.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So Theresa already mentioned the environmental impact statement and because we would be developing and issuing incidental take permit because we'd be developing

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00:24:35.460 --> 00:24:49.290

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the general conservation plan then issuing incidental take permit under that plan, this is a federal action, so we have to do NEPA and so we're going to come back to that a little bit later in this pre-scoping meeting to talk about the

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00:24:50.700 --> 00:24:54.360

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: NEPA aspect of it. So next slide please.

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00:24:57.000 --> 00:25:01.410

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Okay, so, so why conservation plan? I touched on this

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00:25:02.490 --> 00:25:10.620

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: A little bit already. So basically a general conservation plan plays by the same rules as a habitat conservation plan.

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00:25:12.180 --> 00:25:17.400

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So whenever we're working with an applicant for an incidental take permit

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00:25:18.180 --> 00:25:29.850

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: they need to prepare a conservation plan that shows us how they're going to minimize and mitigate take to the maximum extent practical. So this is the applicant's document, it's not a Service document. You know, through

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00:25:30.180 --> 00:25:35.640

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: any sort of process we're working on a regular old incidental take permit

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00:25:36.600 --> 00:25:44.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the applicant develops a document and we guide them to help them meet the standards for minimizing and mitigating

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00:25:45.210 --> 00:25:53.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: take of tortoises and meeting the other issuance criteria. So what this has generally led to in the past is sort of a game of bring me another rock.

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00:25:54.120 --> 00:26:04.590

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Well, you know, okay, so if you're going to minimize that way well that's okay, but it doesn't really get to the standard where we can issue a permit. So what we want to do with the

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00:26:06.360 --> 00:26:20.550

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: general conservation plan is sort of streamline this process by providing a mechanism for local agencies and proponents so that, if they need an incidental take permit from us

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00:26:21.300 --> 00:26:31.320

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: that they can meet the requirements that the Endangered Species Act sets forth for incidental take permits. We're going to give them, the Endangered Species Act in general,

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00:26:31.590 --> 00:26:39.120

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: gives them some pretty broad sideboards in order to get a permit, minimize and mitigate take to the maximum extant practical.

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00:26:39.450 --> 00:26:52.740

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And what we're going to do with this, what we're trying to do with this general conservation plan is streamline that process by bringing those sideboards in to a much more defined place for applicants to look at.

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00:26:53.790 --> 00:27:05.970

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: The second thing that we think it will do is promote the conservation of the desert tortoise and for a lot of applicants, delays are a

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00:27:07.830 --> 00:27:17.490

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: really bad part of a planning process and getting something going, so we think that by streamlining it and providing developers

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00:27:18.120 --> 00:27:28.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: or anybody who's applying for a permit, by providing them a more defined streamlined path of getting a document with more certainty

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00:27:29.280 --> 00:27:40.500

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we think that'll make them, you know, possibly lead them to be more amenable to meeting standards that we've set for the mitigation aspect of the plan and also

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00:27:41.490 --> 00:27:53.100

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: what it will do is what we're hoping to do is really define the areas where we want to see the mitigation occur, the offsets that are required for issuance of any incidental take permit.

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00:27:53.430 --> 00:28:01.950

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So if we can define that better I think that'll lead to the whole conservation community having a better idea of how we're trying to manage desert tortoises.

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00:28:02.430 --> 00:28:09.360

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So all of this, we hope, leads to a standardization of the process of how we're going to issue a permit. We certainly envisioned that

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00:28:09.750 --> 00:28:13.980

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: this is not going to eliminate any of the discussions that occur between the Service

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00:28:14.370 --> 00:28:30.840

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and the applicant leading up to it, but once we get to the point of putting things down on paper we're hoping those pulled in sideboards, that standardization process that we hope to set here will really lead us down a much

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00:28:31.980 --> 00:28:36.000

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: faster and more efficient path to getting things done.

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00:28:36.660 --> 00:28:45.930

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And last one of the things that we want to do with this is, what we want to do with the general conservation plan is include in it a good strategy for

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00:28:46.350 --> 00:29:00.960

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: where we're going to move desert horses when they have to come off of a development site, rather than you know doing that on a project by project basis, we would like to lay out a grand

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00:29:03.060 --> 00:29:22.860

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: plan basically that tortoises are going to be moved into a certain area within a protected conservation area, so in a more strategic manner to help augment populations, which is a goal of the 2011 recovery plan for the desert tortoise. So next slide Liza please.

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00:29:25.110 --> 00:29:35.670

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So what's the plan area? So the map you're seeing looks a lot like something that would be in the DRECP. So the really the only new thing

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00:29:36.060 --> 00:29:46.170

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: on this map is that hatched blue area, and what that represents are basically really big chunks of non-federal land

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00:29:46.560 --> 00:29:55.170

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: that are outside areas that have been defined in the DRECP.

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00:29:56.070 --> 00:30:04.560

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So those conservation areas that the Bureau has defined as California desert natural conservation lands,

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00:30:05.130 --> 00:30:21.060

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: wilderness, areas of critical environmental concern. The conservation areas could also include places like state parks, National Park Service lands, mitigation banks, and lands that are being managed by other non-governmental organizations.

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00:30:22.110 --> 00:30:33.750

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So one thing I want to emphasize. Two things I want to mention about this is that one, these boundaries are not set in stone at all, one of the things that we're looking

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00:30:34.200 --> 00:30:51.330

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: at for input from people from local agencies, from the public in general, is what areas are appropriate to use as a permit area, so this is an idea that we have the blue crosshatched area but it's not set in stone.

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00:30:52.350 --> 00:31:03.510

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And the other thing the other area that I've alluded to, is this mitigation area, so we envisioned it we would be issuing permits in the blue hatch area.

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00:31:03.780 --> 00:31:13.980

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And the offsets that would result from this permits would be in a mitigation areas, which are those conservation areas that the Bureau has generally defined in the DRECP

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00:31:14.370 --> 00:31:20.880

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: along with some of those other lands. We haven't mapped those on this map yet, because that that's also something that we're still thinking about.

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00:31:22.410 --> 00:31:23.550

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Liza please next slide.

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00:31:25.860 --> 00:31:34.260

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So what activities will be covered? Basically we're looking at covering anything that has the potential

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00:31:34.710 --> 00:31:44.340

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: to take desert tortoises. Take is a word that's defined in the Endangered Species Act as kill, wound, harm, harass, capture, collect, you know

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00:31:44.880 --> 00:31:51.330

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: that's the legal definition of take and basically

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00:31:51.930 --> 00:32:02.730

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the Service would recommend that anybody apply for an incidental take permit for desert tourists when their activity is reasonably certain to result in a take of tortoises.

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00:32:03.060 --> 00:32:14.970

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So we're not looking to start covering everything is going on out in the desert. Basically we're looking to this general conservation plan to

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00:32:15.510 --> 00:32:22.770

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: replace the concept of going through an individual incidental take permit anytime somebody has a tortoise where they want to work.

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00:32:23.250 --> 00:32:32.250

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: One thing that we are thinking about here in terms of initial ideas for covered activities is basically when you're looking at desert tortoises, all these activities have

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00:32:32.700 --> 00:32:41.520

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: fundamentally the same effects on tortoises. They remove habitat and they crush tortoises if the tortoises are left in place, so we think that

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00:32:42.150 --> 00:32:49.350

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: in general, for these sort of activities, we can have a fairly standard set of minimization measures, measures to reduce impacts.

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00:32:49.830 --> 00:32:58.710

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And so we think it's appropriate to look at these sort of activities and consider them in the general conservation plan.

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00:32:59.640 --> 00:33:10.140

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So the last point on this slide is that the GCP is not going to change the land use allocations in the desert. As I

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00:33:10.530 --> 00:33:20.040

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: showed you, as we showed you before in the previous map, this is largely based on the land use allocations on BLM land that came out of the

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00:33:20.670 --> 00:33:34.290

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. We're not rezoning the desert, the only place that we're saying, here's where something's going to happen is the permit area where the

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00:33:35.730 --> 00:33:53.190

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the general conservation plan would be available for people to uses where they do not have a federal nexus. We're not looking at trying to set aside any additional areas of private land or non-federal land in the desert, that's not the purpose of the plan. Okay Liza, next slide.

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00:33:54.420 --> 00:34:08.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So why environmental impact statement? Well, first of all because we're taking a federal action, we're looking to issue the general conservation plan and incidental take permits under this general conservation plan, we have to do NEPA.

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00:34:09.240 --> 00:34:14.970

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So we're figuring that you know we initially started thinking about

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00:34:16.050 --> 00:34:26.310

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: starting the NEPA process with an environmental assessment and after some internal discussions we've decided that, given the scale of the permit area,

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00:34:27.150 --> 00:34:40.380

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: that we should probably just skip the environmental assessment stage and go right to an environmental impact statement. So we would use the environmental impact statement to satisfy the requirements of NEPA because we're taking a discretionary federal action.

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00:34:41.430 --> 00:34:53.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So in the EIS, we would evaluate alternatives for the general conservation plan. At this point in our planning on this, we have some ideas of how it's going to work.

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00:34:54.630 --> 00:35:08.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So that would be potentially a proposed action. We certainly would have to look at a no action alternative, which means that we would continue to just issue incidental take permits when people come to us in

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00:35:08.790 --> 00:35:16.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: on a case by case basis, and so we're also looking for input from the public on what other alternatives are out there that

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00:35:17.640 --> 00:35:27.990

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we should consider. And lastly, once we have those alternative set, we would look at how those various alternatives would impact

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00:35:28.950 --> 00:35:42.450

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the human environment, and we would work that through the NEPA process, a draft EIS, get public comments, address public comments for the final EIS and record of decision. OK, next slide.

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00:35:43.950 --> 00:35:45.120

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I got a little bit ahead of myself.

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00:35:46.380 --> 00:35:46.860

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So.

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00:35:48.000 --> 00:35:56.130

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Right now we haven't really entered the NEPA process yet. We've been thinking about this general conservation plan for a bit

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00:35:56.490 --> 00:36:05.850

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and we've got some ideas in our head, and so what we wanted to do was take this opportunity to show what we're doing to the public and get some other ideas

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00:36:06.330 --> 00:36:14.940

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: about things that we may not have thought about yet. Once we go through this pre-scoping, we look at all the comments we receive,

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00:36:16.950 --> 00:36:25.920

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we will start preparing the notice of intent to prepare an EIS. We would have to run that up our review chain in the Fish and Wildlife Service

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00:36:26.250 --> 00:36:35.910

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and put it in the Federal Register, the Federal government's daily newspaper at which point we would announce the beginning of a formal scoping process where

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00:36:36.420 --> 00:36:45.180

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we would go through largely you know, we would have a bit more information at that point, we would repeat this process again to see if there any additional ideas out there.

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00:36:45.510 --> 00:36:56.430

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And, as I just said, that would result in the draft environmental impact statement, review by the public, a final environmental impact statement, and then a record of decision.

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00:36:57.210 --> 00:37:11.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: We don't have, it's hard to predict timeframes on this at this point in time, because this is a big process, and how the review chain goes internally, it's just hard to say at the moment. Next slide please.

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00:37:13.140 --> 00:37:15.300

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Oh, this is where I turn it back over to Theresa.

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00:37:17.850 --> 00:37:18.960

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Great, thanks Ray.

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00:37:19.980 --> 00:37:20.520

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay.

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00:37:20.610 --> 00:37:21.000

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Um,

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00:37:21.630 --> 00:37:30.870

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: we talked earlier about our website, and so I would like to just go ahead and take a moment to show you how to use it. We came up with this idea

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00:37:32.220 --> 00:37:33.360

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: to try to

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00:37:34.860 --> 00:37:43.350

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: assist our virtual public meetings with some information to replicate how it would be during an actual in-person meeting so.

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00:37:44.070 --> 00:37:55.440

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: The way we have it set up right now, these website pages, they really serve as informational sessions and provide an opportunity for the public to go ahead and give a direct

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00:37:56.490 --> 00:37:59.100

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: comment easily on a website page.

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00:38:00.630 --> 00:38:08.370

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You'll enter the website link and Liza has put that in the chat for everyone, so, hopefully, you can copy that link out.

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00:38:08.940 --> 00:38:17.460

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You should be able to just copy and paste it out or write it down, and it will be on a number of slides following the presentation as well, so.

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00:38:18.300 --> 00:38:21.480

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: When you land on the homepage this is where it's going to take you.

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00:38:22.200 --> 00:38:29.160

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And you will find some information about what the US Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to do here and so.

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00:38:29.490 --> 00:38:46.710

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: it talks about the desert tortoise, also talks about our information gathering period and that does begin, that did begin actually on June 1 and it will end on July 1, so we really encourage all of our attendees to go ahead and submit their comments before July 1.

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00:38:49.500 --> 00:39:02.550

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: A great feature of our website is this project overview map and this map here is actually interactive and so what you can do is kind of zoom in and out so you'll see here, you can

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00:39:03.510 --> 00:39:13.740

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: there's actually some notes underneath the map that tell you how to use it, but I'll show you just a couple tricks here. So these double arrows will expand into the legend.

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00:39:14.280 --> 00:39:29.370

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And then you just click on the permit area and then this arrow here will show you what that legend says about the permit area. So here, you can see, it is this blue line with the diagonal lines here.

137

00:39:31.020 --> 00:39:39.030

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, and then you can also click on this land management and it will show you which land ownership you might be within.

138

00:39:40.230 --> 00:39:49.440

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, you can use the plus arrow to zoom in, the subtract arrow to zoom out, this little

139

00:39:50.520 --> 00:40:05.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: quad map here, you can select that little icon and that will select a different base map, so if you'd like to see what the imagery looks like versus the topography, or just some of these other options that you have you can select a different base map there.

140

00:40:06.870 --> 00:40:13.350

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You can also use this feature here in the right corner of the screen and this allows you to search directly for an address.

141

00:40:14.610 --> 00:40:24.930

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you'd like to see if the permit area falls within a particular town or near an address of your work or home, you can type your

142

00:40:26.370 --> 00:40:29.610

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Your place that you're searching for here

143

00:40:33.060 --> 00:40:41.070

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: and select and it will actually zoom in right to where you select. So I just typed in Victorville, California and it

144

00:40:42.510 --> 00:40:53.010

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: did zoom straight into there, so you can see exactly where that is. OK so that's just a few features of that map, it's really handy if you don't have access

145

00:40:53.640 --> 00:41:09.150

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: or don't prefer to use that type of a map, we do have a PDF map of this particular project area here, and you can click on that, it will open another page for you, and you'll be able to just download or save this particular map to your desktop.

146

00:41:09.750 --> 00:41:16.980

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you prefer the use of Google Earth there's a KMZ file here. You'll just click on that file and it will open in your Google Earth

147

00:41:18.870 --> 00:41:31.170

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: app. If not, if you don't have Google Earth, we did provide a download link here. Hit that download and then, once your Google Earth has downloaded you'll be able to click on this KMZ file and it will populate

148

00:41:31.710 --> 00:41:42.450

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: there in your Google Earth. Some information about the information on forums and then how to register, of course that's passed now, so no need to look that.

149

00:41:42.870 --> 00:41:57.180

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: But this next station is really great, this is a public input form and so here on this page you'll see the information about the forums, about the public comment period, and then you can actually put your public input here.

150

00:41:58.830 --> 00:42:10.590

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Name, email address, and then your comments, so here would be your comment and or question here. If you have questions feel free to put that but what we're really looking for here is information

151

00:42:11.340 --> 00:42:17.700

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: that you may have that could affect the project or potentially alternatives, things like that.

152

00:42:18.180 --> 00:42:34.560

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you'd like to be added to the project mailing list so in the future you can get a direct email or letter from us that announces additional scoping or maybe scoping period, public comment period, things like that, so it's a really nice way to keep track.

153

00:42:35.940 --> 00:42:45.270

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You'll see that you can contact Ray Bransfield, here's his email, through July 1 and then phone number and stuff is down here if that works best for you.

154

00:42:46.410 --> 00:42:57.360

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So the next website station takes us to our workshop materials. You'll see we have the original press release that came out, we have our project overview map that was on the other, project map

155

00:42:58.140 --> 00:43:06.330

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: page. We have our general conservation plan information sheet and then we do have a revised press release just announcing the cancellation of our in person meeting.

156

00:43:07.200 --> 00:43:22.080

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And then, after these meetings we plan on posting the recordings and transcripts onto this workshop so that you all are, if anyone didn't attend, they can also get onto the website and download this information.

157

00:43:23.370 --> 00:43:33.090

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Hopefully that helped and I really encourage everyone to use the website. We'll go ahead and put it back in the link and then for our phone caller if you're not on

158

00:43:34.620 --> 00:43:43.290

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: your computer to where you can see the information about the website, you can also visit, so hopefully you've got a pen handy, grab your pin,

159

00:43:44.820 --> 00:43:48.420

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: The website address is www.

160

00:43:49.830 --> 00:43:51.150

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: dot virtual

161

00:43:52.200 --> 00:43:56.160

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: public meeting.com

162

00:43:57.210 --> 00:44:08.220

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Forward slash US FWS dash desert dash tortoise dash GCP

163

00:44:09.240 --> 00:44:21.840

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: dash EIS, and we'll say that a few more times during the presentation so hopefully you can capture that. Okay we'll go back to Liza and we'll get going on our question and answer session.

165

00:44:29.970 --> 00:44:42.660

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thanks, Liza. Perfect, okay. So for our question and answer session this evening what we're going to do is have our audience use the Q & A box and so that little icon is located on the bottom of your toolbar.

166

00:44:43.080 --> 00:44:51.930

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you don't see it or don't see a Zoom toolbar you might need to just toggle your mouse around or press on your phone if you're on the phone.

167

00:44:52.410 --> 00:45:00.330

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: To see that toolbar if you're on the video on your phone or if you're on a tablet then your Zoom toolbar should pop up.

168

00:45:00.720 --> 00:45:07.620

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You'll see a question-and-answer button, you'll also see a chat button, and you'll see a raise hand feature.

169

00:45:08.100 --> 00:45:15.540

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, so for the next session it's going to be about a half an hour long and we're going to use the Q & A box, so the Q & A box icon.

170

00:45:16.050 --> 00:45:29.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We do ask that we reserve chat for technical questions only. This allows us to capture your technical questions and yet capture all of your important questions for the project itself in a question and answer feature.

171

00:45:30.570 --> 00:45:38.160

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: During the public input session, our public comment session may be a more familiar word, but

172

00:45:38.790 --> 00:45:48.600

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: during that input session will have the actual use of the raise hand feature and before we go into that session we'll give some more instruction. So please note that you will be muted,

173

00:45:50.130 --> 00:46:03.570

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: the entirety of the meeting. The question-and-answer session is written only and then the comment session will be verbal and the mute and unmute will be controlled by myself just to maintain

174

00:46:05.400 --> 00:46:14.370

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: our allotted time for our individuals to speak. So if you are in the phone, it does look like we have one phone caller on the phone, if you're not watching on your computer as well

175

00:46:14.970 --> 00:46:23.220

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You can hit star nine and star nine is going to raise your hand during the input session to let us know that you do have a comment to provide.

176

00:46:24.060 --> 00:46:38.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If anyone is having technical difficulties, again, you could reach out to myself via email, that's theresa.ancell@empai.com.

177

00:46:40.200 --> 00:46:40.740

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay.

178

00:46:42.090 --> 00:46:43.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So we'll go ahead to the next slide.

179

00:46:46.080 --> 00:46:54.090

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: All right, so you can begin entering your questions anytime now. To do that what you do is you pull up that question-and-answer button.

180

00:46:54.420 --> 00:47:02.040

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And in there you'll see a little screen that says type your question here. You're going to go ahead and type your question there and then hit the send button.

181

00:47:02.370 --> 00:47:12.450

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: That's going to get that question over to our specialists. Our specialists are going to review the questions and Ray Bransfield and Amy Fesnock are going to answer.

182

00:47:12.930 --> 00:47:28.710

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If Peter or Jessica want to jump in on any questions they will as well. Amy Cordle is going to help us with the questions as we receive them. She'll come on and read the questions out loud and so

183

00:47:30.870 --> 00:47:36.330

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: it'll be a pretty simple process for all and we do encourage any and all questions.

184

00:47:37.560 --> 00:47:53.220

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And like I said, we will go ahead and hold the question session open for about an hour, I mean half an hour, excuse me, so while we're waiting for some questions we actually had a few that were submitted during registration and so we'll go ahead and start with those.

185

00:47:54.450 --> 00:48:05.340

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So Ray if you don't mind. Okay. Ray our first question that came through pre-registration. Is this an HCP?

186

00:48:06.690 --> 00:48:19.770

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: No. We're following the same rules, we're following the same rules as we would if somebody was going through a habitat conservation planning process.

187

00:48:21.150 --> 00:48:32.130

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So all this falls under Section 10(a)(1)(b) of the Act. I'm not going to get too wonky but in order to get an incidental take permit under that section of the Act,

188

00:48:32.550 --> 00:48:45.720

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the applicant has to prepare a conservation plan and so we're going to follow the exact same rules, all the same procedures. The big difference is that, rather than having an applicant prepare it for our review,

189

00:48:46.620 --> 00:49:04.740

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we're asking you for your input and we'll take that input and craft a plan that we think will meet the needs of the tortoise and our permitting structure. So we're following the same rules, it's not exactly a habitat conservation plan.

190

00:49:06.570 --> 00:49:08.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Great, thanks for that clarification, Ray.

191

00:49:09.600 --> 00:49:14.310

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, the next one we'll go ahead and read that did come in, we do have one question.

192

00:49:15.120 --> 00:49:30.780

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: But we'll go ahead and read one more from our pre-populated questions and that way we can give our audience attendees a couple more minutes to get more questions in. Ray, the question that came in is how will this plan be implemented, and does it include partnering agencies?

193

00:49:32.010 --> 00:49:53.130

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Well, at this point in time, the Bureau of Land Management has indicated that it would like to be a cooperator on the NEPA process. Based on comments we got last night, one of our things to do next week would be to reach out to the National Park Service

194

00:49:54.450 --> 00:50:14.460

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and ask them. So you know I guess in terms of a sort of formal partnering arrangement, I would view that in terms of implementing mitigation and conservation areas. To me that would be a broader effort

195

00:50:15.600 --> 00:50:26.670

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: among all the agencies that are working to recover desert tortoises. There's a whole lot of stuff going on now and there's a good bit of coordination going on with that.

196

00:50:27.510 --> 00:50:44.700

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And I envisioned that if we start seeing mitigation becoming available as a result of this, our goal would be to integrate that in with the people in the desert who are already doing this kind of work,

197

00:50:45.960 --> 00:50:49.260

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: doing conservation and recovery work for the tortoises.

198

00:50:50.550 --> 00:50:54.750

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: But if somebody has ideas that they think we don't have yet

199

00:50:55.890 --> 00:50:56.880

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: please let us know.

200

00:50:58.860 --> 00:51:01.140

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Absolutely, Ray. We're definitely here for ideas.

201

00:51:02.640 --> 00:51:09.150

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, we do have a question that maybe Amy Fesnock from BLM.

202

00:51:10.260 --> 00:51:18.900

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I'll have Amy Cordle go ahead and step in and once we stop having questions coming in, we'll ask more pre-registered questions. Thanks, Amy.

203

00:51:19.770 --> 00:51:34.710

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks, Theresa. So a question for Amy, and if Ray wants to add on: can mitigations or offsets be in BLM-administered lands, not just NCL, national conservation lands?

204

00:51:36.240 --> 00:51:49.410

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: So that's a really good question. In general, BLM in our land use plans allocate lands for particular purposes and

205

00:51:50.280 --> 00:52:01.950

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: given the purpose of the general conservation plan and the intent of the actions associated with the conservation plan,

206

00:52:02.400 --> 00:52:16.260

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: BLM would want any activities that are occurring on BLM-administered lands to be in areas that have already been designated for a conservation purpose.

207

00:52:16.710 --> 00:52:34.440

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: We would not agree to have mitigations or offsets proposed for the tortoise in the middle of one of our open OHV areas because that area has been designated for

208

00:52:35.310 --> 00:52:50.100

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: OHV recreation purposes, and we wouldn't want to have potential conflicts, right, because if we're doing mitigation and offsets associated with the GCP

209

00:52:50.610 --> 00:53:00.150

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: we would want those offsets to be supporting a conservation purpose. So that's where

210

00:53:01.050 --> 00:53:10.290

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: we would want to look at lands that have already been designated for conservation purposes, that is, not just NCL lands, it would also include

211

00:53:10.740 --> 00:53:17.340

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: areas that were designated as ACECs or areas of critical environmental concern.

212

00:53:17.880 --> 00:53:26.880

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: It could include areas that are already designated as wilderness, it could include areas that were designated as national monuments.

213

00:53:27.630 --> 00:53:43.830

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: But we wouldn't want to accept mitigation or offsets or tortoise translocations into areas that have already been designated for renewable energy development,

214

00:53:44.970 --> 00:53:54.630

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: mineral development, intensive uses that are generally viewed as being incompatible with conservation.

215

00:53:59.700 --> 00:54:02.820

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks, Amy. Did you want to add anything to that Ray?

216

00:54:03.180 --> 00:54:05.400

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: No, no, no, nothing to add.

217

00:54:06.300 --> 00:54:14.040

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: All right, well here's a question for you Ray. To what extent would the plan amend or modify the revised recovery plan

218

00:54:15.390 --> 00:54:17.880

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: and other federal management plans.

219

00:54:18.510 --> 00:54:25.770

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: It would have no effect on the recovery plan or on other federal management plans.

220

00:54:28.620 --> 00:54:36.570

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: To expand on that, the recovery plan is the recovery plan, and we would look to the recovery plan

221

00:54:37.920 --> 00:54:50.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: for ideas about how to offset the mitigation aspect of any incidental take permit that we would issue under the general conservation plan.

222

00:54:51.870 --> 00:54:58.380

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So we would look to the recovery plan for guidance, but we're not going to change the recovery plan as result of this plan.

223

00:54:59.310 --> 00:55:19.470

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And, as I said before, this is not going to change any other federal, it's not going to change any land allocations on federal land. We'll be looking to those other federal management plans, you know, so that any, but basically just what Amy just said, any

224

00:55:20.580 --> 00:55:36.450

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: mitigation that occurs on public lands aligns with the goals and purposes of those plans. We are not going to put tortoises in an OHV area, it would be in an area that the Bureau has designated.

225

00:55:37.890 --> 00:55:42.600

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: If it's on Bureau it would be an area that the Bureau has designated for conservation purposes.

226

00:55:47.730 --> 00:55:57.510

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thank you, Ray. So it looks like we are out of questions in our box from our attendees this evening, so I do want to encourage everyone that's on the line this evening

227

00:55:58.140 --> 00:56:12.330

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: to please submit your questions. We do have about 20 more minutes left in the question-and-answer session, so please go ahead and send them in.

228

00:56:13.950 --> 00:56:29.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: There are no dumb questions, obviously, so please go ahead and continue to send those questions in. It is really, really helpful for our purposes tonight. We do have a few more questions that were sent in via our registration.

229

00:56:30.780 --> 00:56:46.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: This is an interesting question, Ray. So would the California State Parks apply for a permit to cover recreation activities in the Anza Borrego Desert State Park and would tortoises that live here really be candidates for translocation?

230

00:56:49.440 --> 00:57:04.470

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Well, the easy answer is yes. So you know the question there, I think, overall, is worth some sort of discussion.

231

00:57:07.140 --> 00:57:11.760

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Let me throw out a scenario. Let's say that

232

00:57:12.660 --> 00:57:22.080

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Anza Borrego is planning to modify a campground or expand a campground or something and before they go out and do that they see that there are tortoises there.

233

00:57:22.710 --> 00:57:30.390

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: You know, they would, under normal circumstances, we would recommend that the state parks apply for an incidental take permit from us

234

00:57:30.900 --> 00:57:44.340

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and they would minimize and mitigate per standard practices. So we're envisioning, we actually added that area of the desert in, because, you know, because of tortoises at Anza Borrego.

235

00:57:45.210 --> 00:57:53.670

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So it was entirely within the realm of possibility for state parks to use this GCP to deal with the recreation issue.

236

00:57:54.960 --> 00:58:02.760

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And then the translocation issue, we would certainly as we're going through those

237

00:58:03.960 --> 00:58:12.090

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: early discussions on that specific incidental take permit, we would discuss with state parks and with other folks

238

00:58:12.360 --> 00:58:26.400

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: what's the best place for these tortoises, is it somewhere nearby elsewhere in Anza Borrego or is it someplace else. Those are the questions that we will resolve on a case-by-case basis when people come in to use the general conservation plan.

239

00:58:27.720 --> 00:58:29.190

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I hope that answers the question.

240

00:58:30.690 --> 00:58:31.350

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I think it does.

241

00:58:34.980 --> 00:58:39.360

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thanks, Ray. It does look like we have a couple more questions, so if Amy Cordle

242

00:58:40.440 --> 00:58:45.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: wants to come back on, we can have Amy help with those. Thanks, Amy.

243

00:58:46.260 --> 00:58:56.550

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thank you, Theresa, this is a little bit of a follow on, Ray. Would Joshua Tree National Park be a potential considered translocation area?

244

00:58:58.080 --> 00:58:59.400

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Yes, definitely.

245

00:59:00.960 --> 00:59:10.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And actually we've thought about that, and it sort passed by our brains pretty quickly, but I think that

246

00:59:11.370 --> 00:59:25.530

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: as a result of our conversations with the public last night, that one of our tasks next week is to talk to the two national parks and the preserve and talk to them about being potential recipient areas, yes.

247

00:59:29.280 --> 00:59:43.710

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Another one for you, Ray. Has the service discussed the GCP with California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the potential for a complimentary or joint CESA permitting process?

248

00:59:44.670 --> 01:00:02.700

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: We have discussed the GCP with the folks in Fresno and Region 4. We've had a brief discussion with them and it's certainly our goal to engage more. We haven't talked very much. I think we've mentioned it on passing occasions to

249

01:00:03.960 --> 01:00:09.150

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: CDFW in Region 5 and Region 6 but we haven't talked to them as much.

250

01:00:10.560 --> 01:00:20.640

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: You know, to be perfectly honest, we don't envision a joint permitting process.

251

01:00:21.810 --> 01:00:35.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I think one of the reasons why we are pursuing this general conservation plan is that we think that based on past experience with large-scale permitting stuff that

252

01:00:36.090 --> 01:00:47.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the more agencies you involve, the more complicated it gets, so we're not envisioning you know anything joint, but

253

01:00:48.930 --> 01:00:56.220

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: during that period that I've talked about when the applicant first comes in and we're discussing how to

254

01:00:58.470 --> 01:01:09.780

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: minimize and mitigate, how to get them inside the standards, the sideboards of the GCP, that's when we would really want to be talking to CDFW

255

01:01:10.470 --> 01:01:21.900

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: to make sure that we're on the same page in terms of the minimization and mitigation. And we will certainly be talking to the State about the best way of doing that, as we develop the GCP.

256

01:01:23.130 --> 01:01:27.060

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: It could become one of the standards, you know, that's input that we're looking for.

257

01:01:28.200 --> 01:01:28.560

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So.

258

01:01:30.750 --> 01:01:31.380

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks, Ray

259

01:01:32.550 --> 01:01:40.680

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Another question for you. Would the GCP change the communications between the Service and CDFW?

260

01:01:41.550 --> 01:01:44.220

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I would hope that they would only improve them.

261

01:01:47.850 --> 01:02:00.990

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: It just really is not helpful to anybody if we tell an applicant to do A, B, and C and the state or a local county or city are telling them to do you know.

262

01:02:02.070 --> 01:02:13.020

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: xyz. So we want to make the process work for the applicant,

263

01:02:14.400 --> 01:02:16.920

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: CDFW, the Service, and the tortoise.

264

01:02:21.630 --> 01:02:33.450

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thank you, Ray. So it looks like we are out of questions in the box so we'll go ahead and ask some questions from our other list.

265

01:02:34.200 --> 01:02:46.290

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Ray, one of the more important questions that we discussed, I think we discussed this last night, is why a general conservation plan may be better for the tortoises than the current management or not.

266

01:02:47.310 --> 01:02:50.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So right now current management is that

267

01:02:52.020 --> 01:02:56.040

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: any person who wants to do anything in the desert,

268

01:02:58.140 --> 01:02:58.500

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: any

269

01:02:59.790 --> 01:03:11.850

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: person who wants to do anything that's legal in the desert, if they're pursuing a solar project or a housing development or you know, whatever, a factory, whatever,

1. 270

01:03:13.110 --> 01:03:35.910

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: if they do surveys and they find a tortoise they have to apply to us for an incidental take permit. And those things, excuse me occur on a just, you know, we deal with them when they come in. The guidance that we have in terms of implementing those things

271

01:03:37.290 --> 01:03:48.900

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: are those broad standards of minimizing and mitigating take to the maximum extent practicable, but there's no standardization, there's no

272

01:03:50.010 --> 01:04:11.670

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: overall direction being provided, other than do something good in a conservation area. So, there's nothing like that in a standard process, it's totally as they come in, they come in. So we think that one of the things with the GCP is that we can shape things

273

01:04:13.320 --> 01:04:23.220

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: coming out the other end, the finishing end of the incidental take permit process in a much more standardized fashion and more in alignment

274

01:04:24.330 --> 01:04:30.360

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: holistically with what the recovery plan recommends. We think it gives us something to build on

275

01:04:31.410 --> 01:04:38.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: in terms of implementing a more comprehensive recovery program for the desert tortoise.

276

01:04:41.940 --> 01:04:50.820

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks, Ray. I'm going to go ahead and pose a question to Amy Fesnock. Amy, what roles will the BLM play in this project?

277

01:04:55.920 --> 01:04:57.540

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: So

278

01:04:58.590 --> 01:05:07.800

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: one of the things that the BLM is interested and why we're participating in the NEPA process for the GCP

279

01:05:08.400 --> 01:05:21.090

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: is as Fish and Wildlife Service goes through its process and determines where on BLM lands it might consider it appropriate to do

280

01:05:21.570 --> 01:05:36.660

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: tortoise translocation or to require applicants to do conservation actions on BLM lands instead of requiring acquisition, or in addition to requiring acquisition,

281

01:05:37.650 --> 01:05:57.810

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: we need to make sure that those areas are consistent with BLM land use plans. So we're already talking to the Service about designating those areas in critical habitat in lands that are already designated as ACECs or NCLs.

282

01:06:00.060 --> 01:06:14.910

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: And what we will do in our part is that we will identify areas. We're not changing the allocation from the standpoint of changing whether a particular piece of

283

01:06:15.630 --> 01:06:33.090

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: BLM-administered land is for conservation purposes or not, but we will be identifying areas that are then tied to the GCP in order to meet the conservation purposes of the GCP.

284

01:06:34.770 --> 01:06:53.310

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: What that ends up doing is that there is a section of the Dingell Act and the Dingell Act is a law that was passed, Public Law 116-9 that was passed in 2019

285

01:06:55.980 --> 01:06:59.070

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: and it adds a clarification

286

01:07:00.240 --> 01:07:01.350

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: to

287

01:07:02.670 --> 01:07:29.190

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: the California Desert Protection Act, Section 714. What that addition does from the Dingell Act is that it defines conservation lands as any land, including an NCL or ACEC designation,

288

01:07:30.480 --> 01:07:58.800

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: that is also designated through a land use planning process to satisfy the conditions of a Section 10(a)(1)(b) conservation plan or a general conservation plan, or if the California Department of Fish and Wildlife wanted to develop an NCCP or a natural communities conservation plan

289

01:08:00.300 --> 01:08:17.940

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: they could also designate a conservation area within BLM lands as well, and then what ends up happening at that point with this tie to a GCP

290

01:08:18.540 --> 01:08:33.750

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: is those areas that are designated as supporting the GCP or an NCCP there's a whole list of exceptions that then apply through the Desert Conservation

291

01:08:34.950 --> 01:08:51.330

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Act and those prohibited actions include disposal, right-of-way leases, livestock grazing, infrastructure development except for a couple of exceptions, mineral entry,

292

01:08:52.620 --> 01:09:18.960

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: off highway vehicle use except on designated routes or an open OHV area. So by participating in this process, we can help in the implementation of the Dingell Act and the Desert Conservation Plan and that's the role that we're playing here.

293

01:09:23.070 --> 01:09:43.170

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks, Amy. We have a question that's a little bit of a follow up for you. Is this DRECP 2, private lands, other non-federal lands implementation? How will other imperiled species be handled-still on a case-by-case basis?

294

01:09:44.850 --> 01:09:45.810

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: And so

295

01:09:45.870 --> 01:10:02.100

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: I will be happy to respond to this but, but then I'm guessing that Ray will want to jump in. If you go back to 2014 ish

296

01:10:03.690 --> 01:10:12.480

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: the DRECP as envisioned was supposed to be three documents all in one. There was supposed to be a land use plan for BLM.

297

01:10:12.840 --> 01:10:25.110

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: There was supposed to be a general conservation plan for desert tortoise, well for all the species I guess, by Fish and Wildlife Service, and there was supposed to be an NCCP by

298

01:10:26.130 --> 01:10:29.400

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: California Energy Commission and

299

01:10:30.660 --> 01:10:33.300

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

300

01:10:34.950 --> 01:10:47.730

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Due to public comments the Service and the Department needed to delay their aspects of DRECP and BLM in our evaluation

301

01:10:48.840 --> 01:11:02.400

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: needed to continue forward, so we continued forward with our land use plan and that's what was approved. Given that the current GCP is restricted to tortoises but

302

01:11:03.030 --> 01:11:24.090

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: broader than renewable energy, I personally do still consider it to be kind of DRECP ish Part 2, right, because it's part of the vision that had been created in the 2012 to 14 kind of timeframe.

303

01:11:25.980 --> 01:11:51.900

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Other than it's adding more than just renewable energy projects and it's restricted specifically to the tortoise but, from my perspective or my experience, it's the tortoise that's the primary driver of a lot of the complications of doing projects in the desert and that

304

01:11:53.550 --> 01:12:11.820

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: not that it's simple but it's less complex, the other species are less complex to handle, so I would anticipate that those projects would still need to do case-by-case approvals and needs for those other species.

305

01:12:13.470 --> 01:12:15.330

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: And I will now turn it over to Ray.

306

01:12:17.610 --> 01:12:21.030

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So I think Amy covered that well.

307

01:12:22.200 --> 01:12:23.670

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I would say that

308

01:12:24.870 --> 01:12:35.910

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I'm not sure that any of the other species are simpler, but you know, the only species that we have issued incidental take permits for

309

01:12:37.260 --> 01:12:38.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: in this area

310

01:12:39.990 --> 01:12:50.580

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: is the desert tortoise, and I'm just going to correct myself because depending on the exact boundaries, we may have issued an incidental take permit for California condors for an existing wind project.

311

01:12:51.450 --> 01:12:57.000

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: But for the vast majority of activities in this planning area

312

01:12:58.200 --> 01:13:12.600

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the desert tortoise is the driving species for us, it's the only listed species that is on non-federal land for which we've issued incidental take permits. So yeah, I definitely say this is a much less complicated bite

313

01:13:14.460 --> 01:13:33.570

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: of the of the pie, than trying to do the DRECP as it was envisioned or the West Mojave Plan before the DRECP, but we think it's absolutely a task that we can accomplish in a reasonable time.

314

01:13:35.580 --> 01:13:41.940

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And you know I should have mentioned this during my presentation, I'm going to I'm going to throw it out here now is that

315

01:13:42.330 --> 01:14:00.510

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: one of the big reasons why we want to do this, is that we see it, the Fish and Wildlife Service would like to spend more of our time working on recovery actions for the tortoise and certainly some other species too, including maybe some non-listed ones

316

01:14:01.680 --> 01:14:15.630

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: but if we spend all of our time processing individual incidental take permits which usually take at least a year from the time we get a document to review to issuance of the permit and usually more like two years.

317

01:14:16.680 --> 01:14:34.290

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: If we can get at least the same amount of protection for desert tortoises while we do this, but it frees us up to do other recovery actions, we see that certainly as an indirect beneficial effect on tortoises. I should have mentioned that during my presentation, sorry.

318

01:14:37.230 --> 01:14:49.560

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks Ray. I think we're going to ask you two more questions and then switch over to our public input session, and then we can circle back to more Q and A's at the end if we have time.

319

01:14:49.950 --> 01:15:07.680

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: So another question for you. Would the Service consider including additional covered species. If so, would the Service consider including non-listed species, specifically thinking of Joshua Tree, whether ESA listed or not.

320

01:15:08.520 --> 01:15:18.390

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Well, we would certainly consider it and my advice would be no, we would not want to include the species.

321

01:15:19.980 --> 01:15:43.170

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Every time you add a species to a conservation plan, the time to get that plan done just expands and expands and expands. We're really aware of what's going on with the Joshua Tree and I think that if it ever becomes listed

322

01:15:44.430 --> 01:15:52.050

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: federally, if it's federally listed, I think at that point in time, it would be a really, really high priority to

323

01:15:53.400 --> 01:16:05.790

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: address it in the most appropriate way that there is at that point in time, but to plan something now, I think would just really slow down this this general conservation planning effort.

324

01:16:06.930 --> 01:16:19.350

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And I think that we saw the proof of that in trying to work on the West Mojave Plan for 10 years and how the Service's

325

01:16:20.070 --> 01:16:29.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: big HCP part of DRECP just couldn't pan out, so that's why we're taking this smaller approach, we want to take a

326

01:16:30.570 --> 01:16:32.820

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: chunk out of this

327

01:16:33.840 --> 01:16:36.690

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: effort that we think we can handle in a reasonable timeframe.

328

01:16:40.050 --> 01:16:49.410

Amy Cordle - EMPSi: Thanks Ray. A last question, for now, will the GCP help address issues with illegal activities occurring throughout the desert?

329

01:16:50.400 --> 01:16:50.970

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: um.

330

01:16:52.380 --> 01:17:15.270

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: We can only issue permits for legal activities, so if there's any benefit of the GCP to dealing with illegal stuff it would have to be indirect and I cannot envision how it would at this point in time. I don't know how it would do that.

331

01:17:18.570 --> 01:17:36.810

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Well, thanks Ray. That was a really great question and answer session. I really appreciate everyone's wonderful questions and Ray and Amy Fesnock, thank you so much for your fantastic answers there. So at this point we'll go ahead and transition into our input session.

332

01:17:37.950 --> 01:17:44.580

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And so Ray, thank you so much, if you want to go off camera you're welcome to.

333

01:17:46.200 --> 01:17:53.790

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Our next step is just providing some information on how you can best provide your verbal input and so

334

01:17:54.540 --> 01:18:03.900

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: we will first be accepting input from those that pre-registered and indicated that they would like to provide a comment on this session this evening.

335

01:18:04.350 --> 01:18:12.960

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And so, you'll see on the next slide we have the names outlined for everyone that registered and we'll go in order for registration.

336

01:18:13.530 --> 01:18:23.040

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And so you'll see your names on the slide and just kind of be prepared. I'll go ahead and call your name and then you're going to use the raise hand feature if you're on the computer.

337

01:18:23.400 --> 01:18:39.390

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you're on the phone you'll use star nine. It looks like we do have a couple phone callers so we don't want to leave you out at all, but to be able to raise your hand to indicate that you do have an input comment you can hit the star nine.

338

01:18:40.500 --> 01:18:53.280

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So those of you that are online, we will you can find the raise hand feature at the bottom of your screen. It's one of the features in your Zoom toolbar.

339

01:18:54.300 --> 01:19:04.590

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You may have to move your mouse around or like I said, if you're on your tablet or phone viewing the meeting you may have to kind of touch your phone and you'll see those features so.

340

01:19:05.850 --> 01:19:13.500

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Perfect. Once we have you on, your hand is raised, I'll call your name, and then I'll go ahead and open your microphone for you.

341

01:19:13.800 --> 01:19:20.070

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: That way, you can state your name for the record, and then you'll have a two-minute time slot to provide your comment.

342

01:19:20.640 --> 01:19:25.050

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: After we have gone through all pre-registered individuals, we will then go

343

01:19:25.860 --> 01:19:32.190

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: and open the floor to folks that did not pre-register that maybe decided they would like to provide a comment.

344

01:19:32.640 --> 01:19:40.020

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And then, after we have those individuals we'll open it up to anyone that has gone before, or that would like to go.

345

01:19:40.620 --> 01:19:52.110

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: This session we have allotted about an hour for and so we have plenty of time if you don't get through your comments, we don't have a very large

346

01:19:52.770 --> 01:20:05.370

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: attendee list, so I'm sure there will be plenty of time for you to provide an additional comment. Thanks so much for your patience and now we'll move on to our next slide and get going.

347

01:20:06.720 --> 01:20:14.670

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, so first in line we have Ed Stoven. Ed, I do see you're online. If you'd like to use the raise hand feature

348

01:20:15.900 --> 01:20:19.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: that will indicate that you would like to go ahead and provide that comment.

349

01:20:25.110 --> 01:20:33.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay we'll give Ed just a couple more minutes, and if you're having trouble finding the raise hand feature, you can also

350

01:20:33.510 --> 01:20:43.560

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: use the chat feature, and let me know that you would or would not like to provide a comment this evening. So while we're waiting for Ed, let's go to Ileene Anderson.

351

01:20:44.880 --> 01:20:56.670

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And I do not actually see Ileene on our list of attendees, so we'll move along. Lisa Patterson. Lisa Patterson is not on, as well. Jack Goldfarb.

352

01:20:57.750 --> 01:21:10.950

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And I'll go ahead and say the names I don't see Jack on here but, just in case, our phone caller may be these individuals just remember, if you are on the phone star nine will raise your hand to let us know that you do want to leave a comment.

353

01:21:12.870 --> 01:21:14.790

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay I'm not seeing Alexander.

354

01:21:15.900 --> 01:21:25.260

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Either so let's go on let's see Jun Lee. Jun, would you like to leave a comment? There we are, okay I'm going to undo your microphone and you should be able to unmute on your side.

355

01:21:27.780 --> 01:21:40.260

Jun lee: Hi, this is Jun Lee. I'm the interim Executive Director of the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee and Ray Bransfield has already answered my questions about the impact on the recovery plan.

356

01:21:40.890 --> 01:22:00.420

Jun lee: One additional input I have is during the initial presentation, there was a focus on facilitating development in areas that are sensitive to the desert tortoise. I just wonder I strongly recommend that a similar focus

357

01:22:01.860 --> 01:22:05.220

Jun lee: be on streamlining the

358

01:22:06.240 --> 01:22:10.530

Jun lee: assessment and acceptance of mitigation activities.

359

01:22:11.880 --> 01:22:26.940

Jun lee: Ray mentioned that it takes one or two years to get an incidental take permit. Often times it takes one or two years thereafter a permit is issued to finally close the loop and accepting mitigation

360

01:22:28.020 --> 01:22:31.170

Jun lee: lands and actions, thank you.

361

01:22:35.940 --> 01:22:49.860

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thank you so much for your comment, Jun. Really appreciate it. Okay, so the next commenter that we have in line is Natalie Cibel. Natalie are you on?

362

01:22:51.600 --> 01:22:57.840

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I'm not actually seeing Natalie so let's move on to our last individual, Amy

363

01:22:58.590 --> 01:23:08.430

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Granat. Amy has left as well. Okay, so we've gone through our pre-registered individuals, and now we can open the floor up

364

01:23:09.270 --> 01:23:17.970

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: to anybody that did not pre-register that would like to provide a comment. If you would like to provide a comment you can just use your raise hand feature.

365

01:23:18.750 --> 01:23:36.420

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I am working with Ed who is on a computer without a microphone and so we'll track down the comment that Ed provided, and he asked that we do read that so we'll go ahead and track that comment down Ed and we'll read it out loud, so that you can have that captured on this meeting as well.

366

01:23:38.250 --> 01:23:48.420

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: In the meantime, while I'm looking for Ed's comment I'll go ahead and invite everyone that would like to provide a comment you can raise your hand. If you're on the phone star nine.

367

01:23:49.320 --> 01:24:00.180

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We'll just wait until we have a hand and we can find Ed's comment. If we don't get any comments within the 5 or 10 minutes

368

01:24:00.630 --> 01:24:08.670

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: we'll switch back to the question-and-answer session and answer some more questions that were pre submitted.

369

01:24:09.210 --> 01:24:15.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: If you do have more questions and would rather ask a question versus providing a public comment

370

01:24:15.420 --> 01:24:32.280

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: you're welcome to go ahead and type your question into the question-and-answer field again and we can go ahead and take more questions. We'll give you a few minutes to get all that and I'll be right back on with Ed's comment, thank you.

371

01:25:21.480 --> 01:25:26.760

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, I do find Ed, I did find your comment is actually a question so

372

01:25:28.110 --> 01:25:37.110

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Ray, I don't see any hands Ray or Amy, my apologies,. I don't see any hands raised so would it be okay, if we go back to

373

01:25:37.650 --> 01:25:49.170

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: The question and answers for just a moment and answer Ed's question and then we'll leave it open for individuals, if they'd like to raise their hand at any point we'll get that question answered, and then we can go to them.

374

01:25:50.220 --> 01:25:51.300

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Sure, okay with me.

375

01:25:52.110 --> 01:25:58.530

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay perfect. So Liza you can just go to the Q&A button, that'll be great. So Ray and Amy.

376

01:26:00.030 --> 01:26:07.980

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Ed asks how will this plan affect off-road vehicle use on routes and in areas that are currently legal for use?

377

01:26:09.510 --> 01:26:11.910

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: So, Amy would you answer? Thank you.

378

01:26:14.580 --> 01:26:33.690

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: So, so we don't anticipate this affecting legal OHV use at all. The routes that are designated will remain designated and the open OHV areas will remain as open OHV areas.

379

01:26:34.200 --> 01:26:47.460

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: As I had commented before areas that are designated is open OHV use have the primary purpose and intent of recreational activity

380

01:26:47.940 --> 01:27:14.340

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: so we wouldn't allow any tortoises to be translocated into those areas and we wouldn't agree to any conservation or mitigation or habitat enhancement activity occurring in those areas. When it comes to route management, I mean, clearly we need to work on reducing

381

01:27:15.960 --> 01:27:33.330

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: the unauthorized off-road activity but since that's not legal I don't see that changing how BLM is managing areas for conservation and recreation at the same time.

382

01:27:36.090 --> 01:27:37.590

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Ray, any comments?

383

01:27:38.040 --> 01:27:42.150

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Nope, no, I think you hit the nail on the head.

384

01:27:47.730 --> 01:27:49.830

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Perfect. Thanks so much, Ray, thanks so much Amy.

385

01:27:52.050 --> 01:27:59.400

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, I don't see any hands at this time, or any other open questions, so we will just continue to go

386

01:28:00.480 --> 01:28:04.650

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: through our list of questions that were either pre submitted or questions that had come in.

387

01:28:06.420 --> 01:28:13.890

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: About this question Ray, will the project lead to additional take of the desert tortoise in the planning area?

388

01:28:16.860 --> 01:28:22.050

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: That's kind of the crystal ball question. I don't think it will.

389

01:28:26.520 --> 01:28:37.530

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Basically what we've seen over the years is that permit area really does not have a lot of desert tortoises so

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01:28:39.330 --> 01:28:50.730

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: we've never encountered an incidental take permit out there that has come close to having as many tortoises as some solar projects that we've seen

391

01:28:51.870 --> 01:28:58.740

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: throughout the range of the tortoise. I think the most tortoises we've ever moved was maybe 12 or 13

392

01:29:00.360 --> 01:29:09.960

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: from one project site and nothing comes close to that anymore. So I think the only potential for increasing the amount of

393

01:29:10.590 --> 01:29:19.650

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: take of tortoises would be, is I'm pretty sure now that there are projects that that modify their boundaries slightly to avoid

394

01:29:20.310 --> 01:29:31.770

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: getting close to a tortoise or they might have one a tortoise at the very edge of the project, I can envision now that some projects are changing their boundaries to avoid a tortoise here and a tortoise there.

395

01:29:32.310 --> 01:29:46.410

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I can see with the GCP making the federal process easier, maybe they would include that tortoise here and there, so maybe the number will bump up. I am

396

01:29:49.230 --> 01:29:53.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: really certain that this is not going to result in

397

01:29:54.270 --> 01:29:57.420

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: an uptick in development, it just won't.

398

01:30:00.180 --> 01:30:03.870

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And I think one reason why it will add that is that

399

01:30:06.750 --> 01:30:25.410

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: certainly there are a lot of projects where people are not applying for a federal permit, they're still required to obtain a permit from CDFW, and so I just don't see it changing the pace of development in the desert.

400

01:30:30.210 --> 01:30:31.230

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Great. Thanks, Ray.

401

01:30:32.640 --> 01:30:39.300

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: This is kind of a good one, I think, to follow on. How successful have past translocation efforts been in the area?

402

01:30:40.680 --> 01:30:51.030

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: With the onset of some large solar projects several years ago and the expansion of Fort Irwin

403

01:30:53.130 --> 01:31:02.040

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the US geological survey and others have been doing a lot of monitoring of desert tortoises that have been translocated.

404

01:31:02.520 --> 01:31:16.080

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And generally, what we have seen through all this work is that in general, when you look at all the various aspects of tortoise biology and ecology

405

01:31:16.470 --> 01:31:21.120

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: That, after a couple of years, we really don't see differences between how

406

01:31:22.110 --> 01:31:35.550

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: translocated tortoises are behaving and surviving that are different from control animals, animals that are else elsewhere in the desert that have not been affected by the translocations

407

01:31:35.970 --> 01:31:46.590

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: and resident animals, and those are the animals, where we've maybe moved the desert tortoise somewhere nearby the resident, we're just not seeing significant differences in

408

01:31:47.100 --> 01:32:03.990

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: these animals rate of survival and how they behave. We know that translocated animals tend to move more than residents or controls in the first couple of years after translocation.

409

01:32:05.280 --> 01:32:15.360

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: That does make them more vulnerable to predation, but really drought is a much bigger driver on predation than their movements.

410

01:32:16.410 --> 01:32:28.140

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Basically coyotes tend to switch their prey to desert tortoises because during drought other prey becomes more scarce.

411

01:32:28.920 --> 01:32:40.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: But if you do the translation right, you move the tortoises at the right time of the year, at the right time of the day, to the right sort of habitat, they survive well and they begin to reproduce.

412

01:32:46.860 --> 01:32:51.960

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Great thanks for all those wonderful answers Ray, it's so helpful to hear all this information.

413

01:32:53.370 --> 01:32:59.370

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I think we'll take give Ray just a quick break and we'll go to Amy Fesnock. Amy we have a question about

414

01:33:02.520 --> 01:33:09.000

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: what protections would be placed on the BLM areas considered for desert tortoise translocation?

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01:33:11.100 --> 01:33:35.370

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: So, right now, when BLM approves a project on BLM-administered lands and that project requires tortoise translocation within BLM managed areas, we have policy in place where that translocation area

416

01:33:37.500 --> 01:33:38.280

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: Is

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01:33:39.900 --> 01:33:54.000

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: precluded from future development right, so it is identified as an area that is effectively a right-of-way avoidance area.

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01:33:55.140 --> 01:34:10.080

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: In that policy, however, we did recognize that there is the potential for projects that are long and linear like a pipeline or a

419

01:34:10.530 --> 01:34:33.120

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: transmission line or something like that that might be complicated if we had to kind of jog around an area that we had previously used for tortoise translocation, so in that policy, what we say is that if an area that has been used for tortoise translocation

420

01:34:34.980 --> 01:34:50.730

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: needs to be impacted for one of these things where there's no way to avoid doing that action in that area, the mitigation requirements for that action are then doubled.

421

01:34:52.770 --> 01:34:57.780

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: When it comes to translocation associated with the GCP

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01:34:59.040 --> 01:35:10.560

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: what ends up happening or the way that it looks to me as we dovetail with the California Desert Protection Act, with the Dingell Act, with the GCP

423

01:35:11.010 --> 01:35:24.330

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: and the DRECP land use allocations, is that the only place that we would allow a GCP translocated tortoise to be moved to

424

01:35:24.720 --> 01:35:40.980

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: will be one of these areas that are identified in the GCP for this purpose and they're then identified as conservation areas associated with the GCP and that's when the

425

01:35:42.270 --> 01:35:57.360

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: restrictions from the Desert Protection Act that then come in as far as the additional protections are there's no disposal of lands, there's no rights-of-way allowed, there's no leasing activity allowed,

426

01:35:57.900 --> 01:36:09.360

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: there's no infrastructure development that is not specific to conservation or improving conservation on the land, there's no mineral entry.

427

01:36:09.750 --> 01:36:21.390

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: OHV uses only allowed on designated routes or in designated open OHV areas. So with that layering of the

428

01:36:21.840 --> 01:36:38.190

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: conservation plan identifying these conservation areas that they would either use for tortoise translocation or for habitat enhancement associated with mitigation we then get this

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01:36:39.840 --> 01:36:45.930

Amy Fesnock-- BLM Desert District: increased list of prohibited uses that would then be additional protections on those areas.

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01:36:53.910 --> 01:36:54.660

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thanks, Amy.

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01:36:55.710 --> 01:37:02.970

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: So Ray, if we could do one more question and then maybe we'll take a break, I would like to announce

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01:37:03.270 --> 01:37:12.480

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: if anyone online would like to provide a comment or ask an additional question, we still have plenty of time, we have about 14 minutes left in the forum.

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01:37:12.840 --> 01:37:22.770

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: And so again if you'd like to leave a comment, you're welcome to raise your hand using the raise hand feature, we can open your microphone and you're welcome to provide

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01:37:23.070 --> 01:37:32.010

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: a public comment that will be part of the record and that will be taken into account. of course, we're always going to take into account all these great questions and things that you're bringing up

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01:37:32.580 --> 01:37:47.280

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: that we haven't quite thought of, so the questions are absolutely helpful as well, so we do encourage if you have any more questions, please go ahead and put them in the Q and A box and we'll get to them as quickly as we can. So with that Ray, how about one more question.

436

01:37:48.780 --> 01:37:49.230

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Okay.

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01:37:49.530 --> 01:37:50.730

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Let's find one.

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01:37:53.910 --> 01:37:58.650

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: How about where is the mitigation focus for the desert tortoise habitat?

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01:38:00.780 --> 01:38:01.230

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Well.

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01:38:03.000 --> 01:38:05.220

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: mitigation focus will be

441

01:38:06.750 --> 01:38:17.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: generally in areas that we consider desert tortoise conservation areas, so let me back up a little bit. If you look in

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01:38:17.700 --> 01:38:38.280

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: the 2011 desert tortoise recovery plan it says that we are going to attempt, the Service is going to attempt to work with people to recover the desert tortoise in desert tortoise conservation areas, and then it goes on to say that these areas are things like critical habitat,

443

01:38:39.570 --> 01:38:43.830

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: BLM ACECs, national parks, state parks,

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01:38:47.250 --> 01:38:54.750

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: other lands managed for conservation, California Desert National Conservation Lands, or National Conservation Lands that are not in California,

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01:38:55.230 --> 01:39:04.650

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: but it doesn't draw any lines around anything. So one of the exercises that we've done in our office and we're continuing to refine

446

01:39:05.220 --> 01:39:17.820

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: is we've used GIS, and I didn't use GIS because I don't know how to use GIS, GIS is beyond me, but the people in my office who are more adept at that

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01:39:18.780 --> 01:39:27.180

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: have taken the boundaries of all those sorts of management areas that we've talked about, that I've talked about, and we've overlain

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01:39:28.950 --> 01:39:42.450

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: habitat quality maps for desert tortoises and those are the areas that become the first layer of "this is where we want to implement recovery actions."

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01:39:42.900 --> 01:39:54.630

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And then beyond that we're also looking at developing what we're calling focal areas, and these are areas where we think that it's sort of like in some ways

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01:39:55.770 --> 01:40:02.640

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: I'm going to crudely refer to it as the low hanging fruit of where we can get the most bang for the buck in terms of implementing

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01:40:03.360 --> 01:40:23.100

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: recovery actions, where we can stabilize populations, hopefully, in the shortest order, and then move on to other areas within the conservation. So basically the real short answer is desert tortoise habitat within desert tortoise conservation areas where those

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01:40:24.540 --> 01:40:31.950

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: areas that are already under some sort of conservation management by an agency that overlap good desert tortoise habitat.

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01:40:37.980 --> 01:40:40.890

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Thanks, Ray. We're close enough to

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01:40:42.630 --> 01:40:56.640

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: half an hour, so I think what we'll do right now is if we don't have any more questions and we don't have anyone that would lead like to leave a public comment, we'll go ahead and go on a quick break and give everyone some time to

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01:40:57.810 --> 01:41:03.570

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: just process and see if they do have any more questions and actually Liza, during our break

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01:41:04.740 --> 01:41:14.550

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: why don't we leave up the slide that has information on how to comment, that way if folks are still on and they'd like to write that down

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01:41:15.180 --> 01:41:26.610

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: we'll do that and I'll kind of stay on here. Everyone else can just take a break, stretch your legs for a second and then if anyone comes on during our break or decides they'd like to provide a comment

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01:41:27.120 --> 01:41:36.150

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: I will be here. So we'll go ahead and take about a 5 or 10 minute break or probably about a 5 minute break and then we'll come back and see

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01:41:36.810 --> 01:41:51.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: if you'd like to provide a comment at that time. If not we'll talk about how to submit further input and then we will provide some more guidance. So thank you so much, and we'll see you back here in about 5 minutes, thank you.

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01:47:54.840 --> 01:48:06.270

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Hello again everyone, I hope you enjoyed your break, so we would like to go ahead and offer one last chance. We do not want to keep you on the line

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01:48:06.720 --> 01:48:13.800

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: any longer than you need to be, so we are really done with our presentation and this time right now is really for

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01:48:14.280 --> 01:48:31.800

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: our attendees to go ahead and provide any input, questions, anything like that that they may have. So if we don't get any more questions or comments that's great, but at this point, we would like to just go ahead and have Ray provide our closing remarks and

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01:48:32.550 --> 01:48:34.800

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: give everyone one last opportunity

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01:48:35.100 --> 01:48:39.180

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: to go ahead and write down the information.

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01:48:40.380 --> 01:48:52.620

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We will go to Ray, and Ray, I'll just take a quick moment to read out loud this slide actually before I go to you, that way our individual on the phone has a moment to listen to it.

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01:48:54.090 --> 01:49:02.610

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We just want to make sure that everyone understands that this comment period is ending July 1 so we do encourage all comments,

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01:49:03.060 --> 01:49:13.170

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: questions, anything like that to come in, hopefully before July 1. If you would like to mail your comment or questions to the Fish and Wildlife Service, you can mail them to the

468

01:49:13.620 --> 01:49:41.040

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office Attention Peter Sanzenbacher, and that is 777 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 208

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01:49:42.210 --> 01:49:55.500

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Palm Springs, California 92262 and if you would like to email, you can email ray_bransfield@fws.gov

470

01:49:56.130 --> 01:50:12.060

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: or you can write down his phone number and call him up until July 1 that is 805-677-3398.

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01:50:12.780 --> 01:50:24.480

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: You can lastly submit your comments and view more information at our companion virtual public meeting companion website at [www.](http://www.virtualpublicmeeting.com)

472

01:50:25.230 --> 01:50:41.250

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: [virtual public meeting.com](http://virtualpublicmeeting.com) forward slash USFWS dash desert dash tortoise dash GCP dash eis.

473

01:50:42.180 --> 01:50:47.040

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: Okay, well, I want to thank everyone for being here this evening and I want to thank the Fish and Wildlife Service for

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01:50:47.370 --> 01:50:53.970

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: doing such a wonderful job and answering those questions, and I would really love to thank Amy Fesnock for being on.

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01:50:54.420 --> 01:51:02.100

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: She provided such great information. I really looking forward to working on this project, and I want to thank our public that joined.

476

01:51:02.400 --> 01:51:12.990

Theresa Ancell - EMPSi: We got really great questions and some great comments, so thank you and I hope you all have a really lovely evening. And I'll go ahead and turn it back to you, Ray. Thank you.

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01:51:14.670 --> 01:51:19.590

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Thanks Theresa. First thing I'm going to do is thank you and Liza and Amy

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01:51:20.610 --> 01:51:28.980

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: for all the support for this. I mentioned last night and it's absolutely true that if I were controlling the buttons we wouldn't get anywhere.

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01:51:29.580 --> 01:51:36.570

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Cuz I don't do that well, so I really appreciate what you're doing and just so everybody knows

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01:51:36.930 --> 01:51:45.030

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: there are other people out there working that you're not seeing, especially Peter Sanzenbacher is working really, really hard behind the scenes.

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01:51:45.570 --> 01:51:56.010

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: And, and also appreciate Amy Fesnock being on the call to answer the questions about public lands. We really appreciate the comments that we have received you

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01:51:56.820 --> 01:52:04.650

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: tonight, and the questions. It's given us stuff to think about and I've said already, some of the questions have gotten us to

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01:52:04.950 --> 01:52:15.210

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: sort of move things this way or that way, and you know, think about other aspects of how to do this. So with that I just want to say thanks so much for participating.

484

01:52:16.170 --> 01:52:28.800

Ray Bransfield - USFWS: Keep sending input up to July 1 and then we'll be back out in touch when we start the real live NEPA scoping process. So thank you. Have a good night.