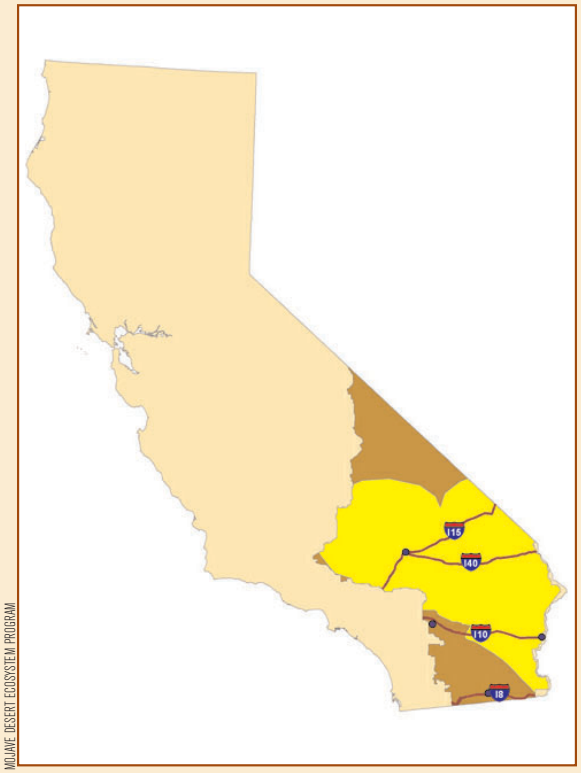
WELCOME TO THE CALIFORNIA DESERT, HOME OF THE DESERT TORTOISE.

You might not see this amazing animal—to beat the heat, it spends most of its time underground. But you need to know a few things about it, because the desert tortoise is a species in trouble, and what you do while you're here can help save it.



MOJAVE DESERT ECOSYSTEM PROGRAM

In the California desert, desert tortoises are found in the areas indicated in yellow on the map above.

Defenders of Wildlife is a leading conservation organization recognized as one of the nation's most progressive advocates for wildlife and its habitat. Defenders is a 501(c)(3) membership organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C. and a field office and staff in California.

www.defenders.org

DESERT MANAGERS GROUP

The Desert Managers Group (DMG) is a partnership of county, state and federal agencies working together to conserve and enhance the California desert for current and future generations.

www.dmg.gov

NOHVCC
National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council™
"Creating a Positive Future for Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation"

www.nohvcc.org

For additional information about desert tortoises, visit:

www.tortoise.org/conservation/savingthetortoise.html

www.tortoise.org

YOU'RE IN DESERT TORTOISE COUNTRY

RESPECT - PROTECT - ENJOY

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You may notice the half-moon-shaped holes that punctuate the desert landscape. These are the entrances to the burrows desert tortoises dig to cope with the extreme desert temperatures.

Desert tortoises leave their burrows, often located in the shade of bushes on the open sandy flats or in the banks of dry washes, mainly to eat and drink. They build up most of their fat and water reserves in the spring, when the desert is abloom with grasses, wild flowers and other succulent green plants. They store water— up to a year's supply—in their canteen-like bladders, absorbing it as needed. In winter they retreat to their deepest burrows.

Well-adapted as the desert tortoise is to the harsh conditions here, this ancient species is defenseless against the human population boom that has brought habitat degradation and other changes to the high desert. As a result, its numbers have sharply declined.

The desert tortoise is now on the federal list of threatened species and is protected by state and federal law. Researchers are closely monitoring desert tortoise populations and working to address the threats they face. By following a few simple rules, you can do your part to protect the threatened desert tortoise and ensure that it survives for future generations to enjoy.

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• LEAVE THEM ALONE!

It is against the law to touch, harm, harass or collect a wild desert tortoise. When alarmed, tortoises void their bladders and waste precious stored water—a reaction that can prove fatal for tortoises unable to replenish the supply. Stay at least 10 feet away from any tortoise you spot, and keep dogs leashed at all times.

• STAY ON DESIGNATED ROADS AND TRAILS.

Don't drive, bike or walk off trails or roads except in designated "Open Areas." Cross-country travel through sandflats and other desert habitat can crush tortoise burrows, burying the occupants underground or stranding tortoises on the surface where they are vulnerable to predators and deadly temperature extremes.

• WATCH FOR TORTOISES ON ROADS AND TRAILS.

Desert tortoises readily cross roads and trails, but the slow-moving species is no match for bikes, cars, trucks and off-highway vehicles. Be alert and proceed with caution!

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The slow-moving desert tortoise is no match for motorized vehicles. Fencing is used in some high-traffic areas to prevent tortoise deaths and injuries, but be on the lookout wherever you drive in the desert.

• CHECK UNDER PARKED VEHICLES.

If you've been parked in the desert for any amount of time, look under your vehicle before you drive off. Desert tortoises are known to seek shade beneath cars, trucks and RVs.

• DON'T RELEASE PET TORTOISES IN THE DESERT.

A pet tortoise released in the wild probably won't survive and may infect resident tortoises with disease. Wild desert tortoises are susceptible to upper respiratory infections and other diseases linked to captive tortoises. If you have a pet tortoise and can no longer care for it, call the San Diego Turtle and Tortoise Society (619) 593-2123, or contact the nearest chapter of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club listed at **www.tortoise.org//cttcmore.html**.

• KEEP THE DESERT CLEAN.

Don't dump or litter. Desert tortoises can get tangled in trash, and garbage attracts ravens and other predators that feed on desert tortoises, their eggs and hatchlings.