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A History of Wild and Pet Desert Tortoises Activities Under the Desert Conservation Program

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Wild and Pet Desert
Tortoise Activities

**The desert tortoise is a threatened species,
protected under the federal Endangered
Species Act and Nevada Revised Statute**





- **1991 Short Term Habitat Conservation Plan**
 - Idea for a desert tortoise pickup service originated
 - Required mandatory clearances of tortoises from construction sites
 - Taken to a holding facility
 - Held for no more than five days, then humanely euthanized, if no other disposition option identified
 - Estimated cost, \$25,000 per year
 - Estimated that up to 3,710 would be brought in over the three year term



- **1995 Desert Conservation Plan**
 - Clearance of tortoises no longer mandatory
 - Provides for a pickup service for tortoises found on construction sites and in harms way in urban areas
 - Provides for operation of a transfer and holding facility
 - Pickup of unwanted pet tortoises began in 1996 as a pilot project



- 2001 Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

- Continued pickup service, operation of a transfer and holding facility, and a translocation program



- ELISA positive tortoises euthanized, other disposition options included translocation to Large Scale Translocation Site, research, adoption, placement in zoos, etc.



- **Desert Tortoise Conservation Center**
 - Construction completed in 1991
 - 222 acre fenced facility, 11,014 acre DTCC Management Area
 - Built with funds from a “Settlement Agreement” following the listing of the desert tortoise
 - Facility was gifted to the Bureau of Land Management

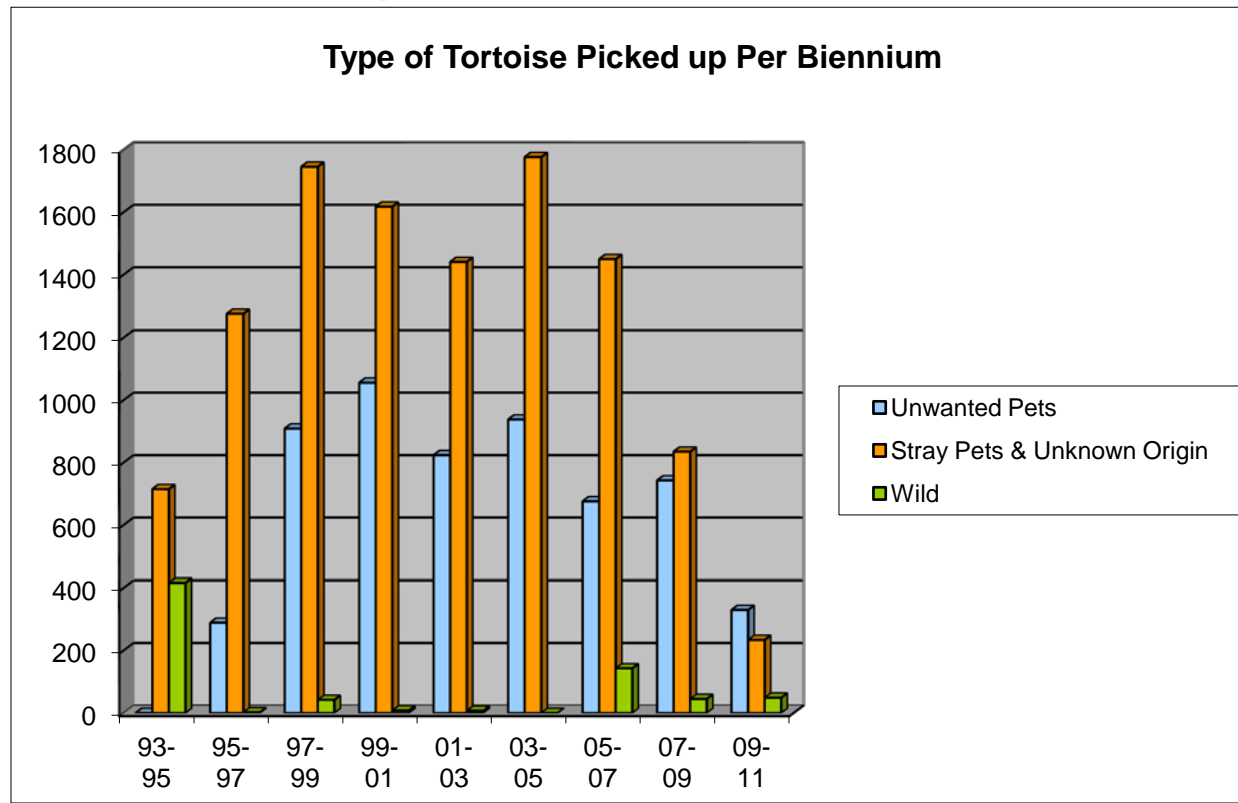




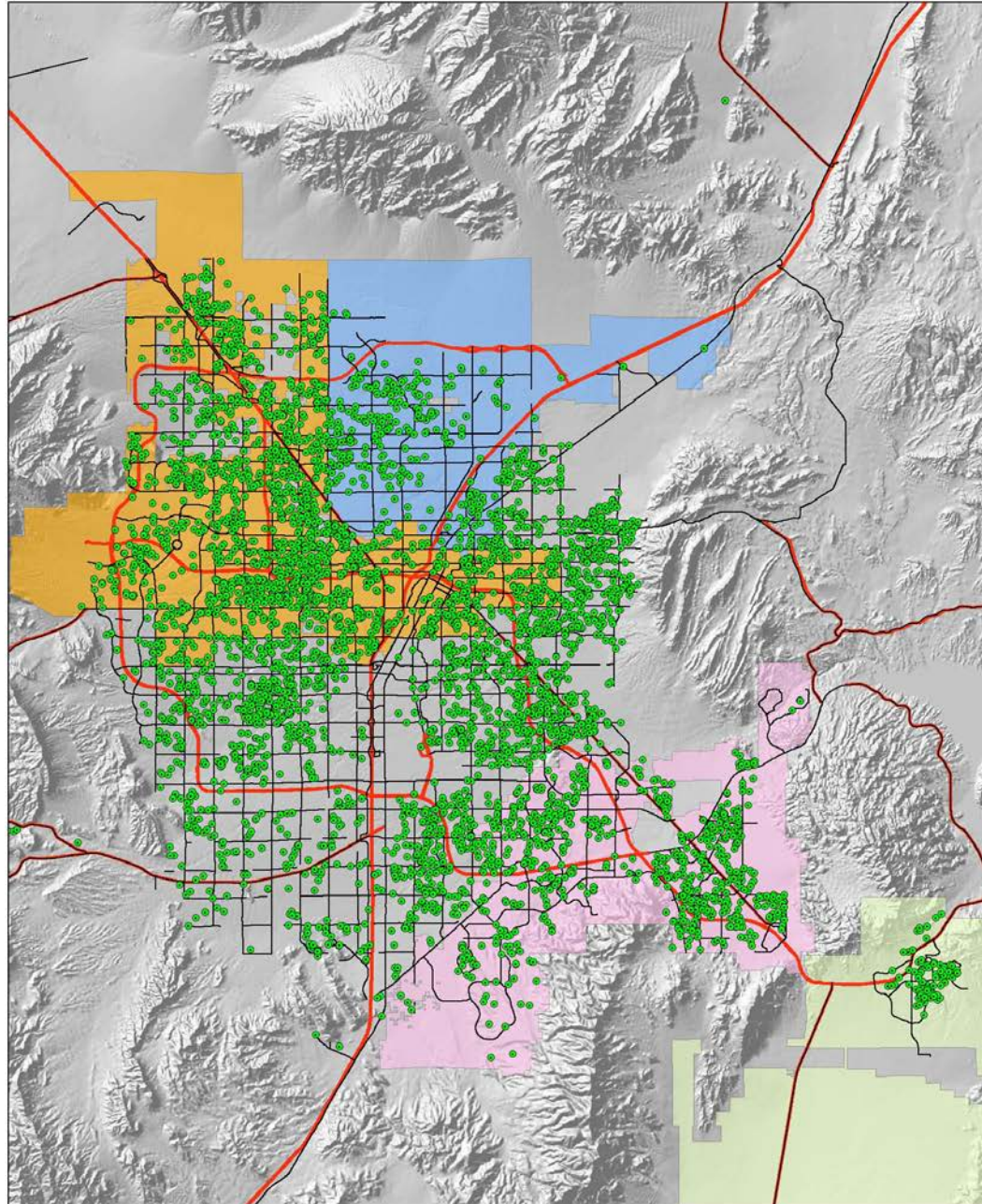
- Over 17,500 tortoises collected and managed from 1996 to 2009
 - Averaged ~1,100 tortoises picked up annually
 - 98% of these animals were stray or unwanted pet desert tortoises
- Average annual cost for all services was \$250,000 between 2003 and 2009
- In 2009 the cost for the operation of the transfer and holding facility was requested at over \$1 million/year



- 98% pet desert tortoises and backyard breeding
 - Database analysis



DCP Tortoise Pickup Locations
July 1999 - May 2008





- In September 2009, the DCP reviewed provisions in the MSHCP, permit, and other related documents related to desert tortoise requirements
 - Ceasing collection and care of stray and pet tortoises and focusing efforts on more meaningful conservation actions for desert tortoise is consistent with the scope and requirements of these documents



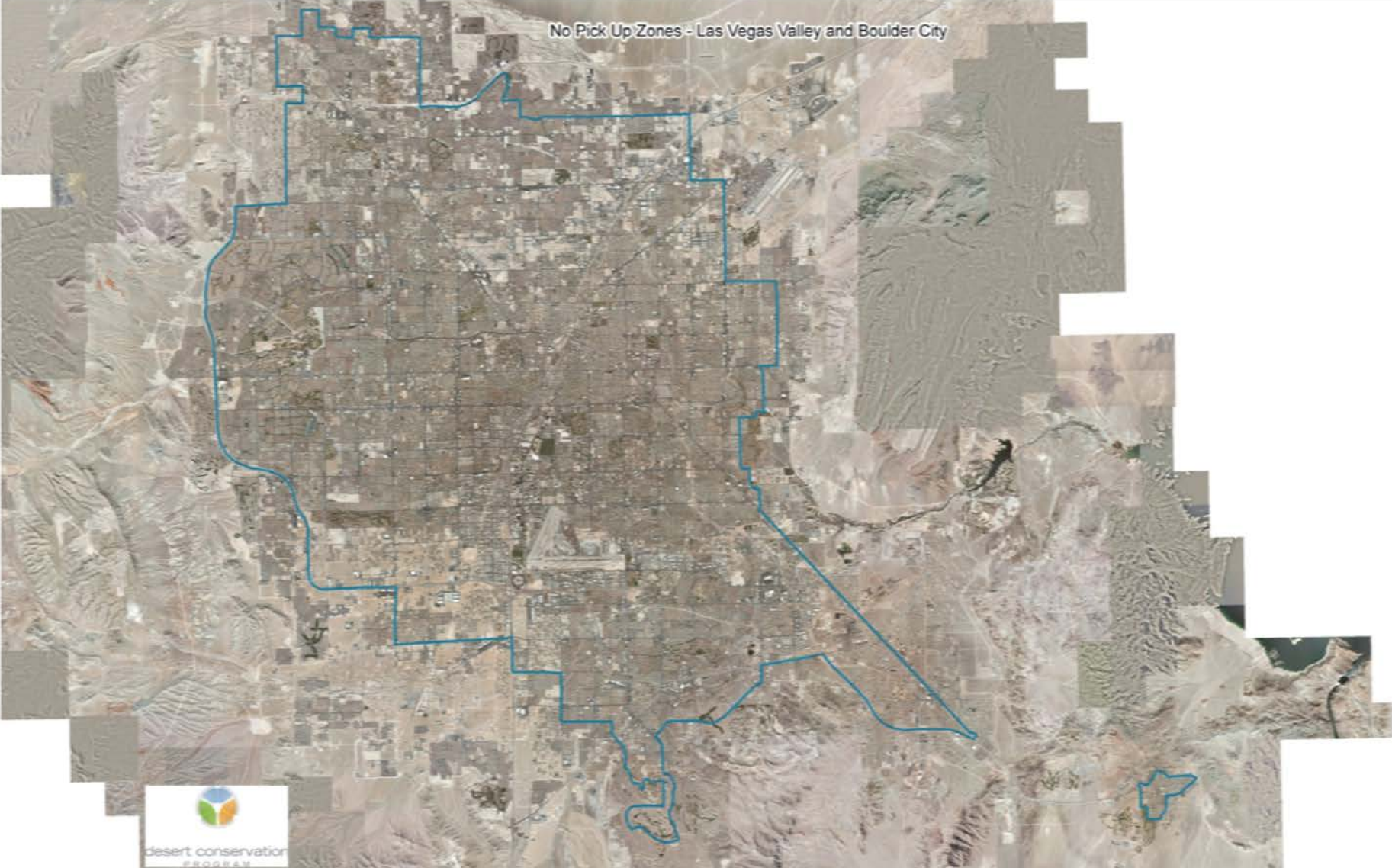
- Adoption, possession, and breeding of desert tortoises are not covered activities
 - Costs and requirements to care for pets are unsustainable and taking funding away from wild tortoise efforts
- Local municipalities do not have regulatory authority over wildlife
 - Federally and state protected wildlife



- **Transition Plan**

- First moved to a “no pickup zone” policy, wherein only tortoises at the edge of urban development were collected
 - “Wild Desert Tortoise Assistance Line”
 - 702-383-TORT (8678)
- USFWS and San Diego Zoo assumed responsibility for collecting unwanted and stray pet tortoises
 - “Pet Desert Tortoise Pickup Service”

No Pick Up Zones - Las Vegas Valley and Boulder City





- **Transition Plan**
 - Pet DT Pickup Service was shut-down on January 29, 2013
 - Desert tortoises can be turned in to the Lied Animal Shelter
 - Wild DT Assistance Line currently only collects tortoises from active construction sites



- What's happening now?
 - Pet Desert Tortoise Working Group meetings
 - DCP funded a sterilization study
 - To be used to train local veterinarians
 - NDOW passed temporary regulation limiting pet tortoise ownership to one per person
 - If acquired after May 1, 2013
 - Expecting to become permanent Winter 2013
 - The Desert Tortoise Conservation Center is expected to close in Fall 2014
 - No more tortoises can be accepted to ensure all tortoises can be removed from the facility



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Wild and Pet Desert
Tortoise Activities

- **Closure of the Desert Tortoise Conservation Center**
 - Difficult decisions need to be made regarding the disposition of unwanted and stray pet tortoises
 - DCP is currently supporting translocation efforts for these animals in the Eldorado Valley



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Questions?

