

## Work Task E29: Desert Tortoise

FY09 Estimates	FY09 Actual	Cumulative Accomplishment Through FY09	FY10 Approved Estimate	FY11 Proposed Estimate	FY12 Proposed Estimate	FY13 Proposed Estimate
\$0	\$0	\$0	\$195,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$0

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**Start Date:** FY10

**Expected Duration:** FY12

**Long-term Goal:** Acquisition and protection of unprotected occupied habitat

**Conservation Measures:** DET01

**Location:** The Chuckwalla Bench Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is located in Riverside County, California, between the Chuckwalla Mountains and the Chocolate Mountains.

**Purpose:** Acquire and transfer to the Bureau of Land Management, 230 acres of unprotected occupied desert tortoise habitat for permanent protection of the species' habitat.

**Connections with Other Work Tasks (past and future):** The Chuckwalla Bench ACEC was identified in the FY07 RFP issued under Conservation Area Site Selection (E16).

**Project Description:** The HCP requires the LCR MSCP to acquire and protect 230 acres of existing unprotected occupied habitat.

In response to the LCR MSCP's FY07 Request for Projects, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy proposed the acquisition of 230 acres of desert tortoise habitat, currently owned by private landowners within the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC, which is managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 2007, the BLM's California Desert District Office was contacted to determine the transfer of ownership process. Several administrative procedures (i.e., letter writing, documentation, and solicitor review) will occur prior to the time of purchase. It is anticipated that private parcels acquired by the LCR MSCP will be transferred to the BLM after purchase.

**Previous Activities:** In 2007, the LCR MSCP solicited potential habitat areas for acquisition from Steering Committee members. Coachella Valley Water District, in

conjunction with the Conservancy, proposed the acquisition of private in-holdings within the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC.

With the help of the Conservancy, individual landowners within the ACEC were identified using county records and tax assessor information. Twelve individual landowners with a combined 1,400 acres located within five section acres were identified. Private parcels for potential acquisition range in size from 40 acres to 120 acres.

**FY09 Accomplishments:** Funding for coordination meetings and administrative costs were previously charged to E16. This is a new start in FY10.

**FY10 Activities:** At the October 2008 Steering Committee meeting, motion 09-003, Desert Tortoise Land Approval, was approved, which directed Reclamation to evaluate private in-holdings with the Chuckwalla Bench ACEC. Private in-holding landowners have been contacted by the LCR MSCP and the Conservancy. With the landowners' permission, a federal appraisal was conducted to establish fair market value.

Three federal appraisals were conducted in FY09 through the Federal Appraisal Service Directorate based in Sacramento, California. Three parcels were appraised totaling 260 acres. Fair market value was determined to be \$450-\$550 per acre, depending on how close the property was to a BLM designated access route.

Offer letters describing the LCR MSCP's approach to acquisition with accompanying financial value have been mailed to landowners. The LCR MSCP has received written commitments to sell from all landowners and is moving forward with due diligence and escrow.

**Proposed FY11 Activities:** If landowners do not accept the LCR MSCP's offer, a second round of appraisals with different landowners will be initiated. Appraisal and offers will be coordinated until the goal of 230 acres acquired and transferred to the BLM is completed.

**Pertinent Reports:** N/A