

NEWS *from the* Nevada Department of Wildlife

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New Regulation Limits Pet Tortoises to One

Nevada residents who want to have a desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) as a pet will be limited to a single animal beginning May 1, 2013. This new restriction was put into place when the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners voted to approve Commission General Regulation 426 as a step toward reducing the over breeding of pet desert tortoises.

Put forth by the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), and supported by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, CGR 426 amends Nevada Administrative Code 503.093 by adding the following language: "A person possessing a desert tortoise... shall not possess more than one desert tortoise."

"This new regulation affects only those people who seek to adopt or acquire a desert tortoise after May 1, 2013," said Cris Tomlinson, diversity biologist for NDOW.

Pet tortoises that were in captivity on or before Aug. 4, 1989 are exempted; however, custodianship of pet desert tortoises acquired after that date need to be registered through an official adoption program or other method that has been approved by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). Currently, the official adoption program is Tortoise Group.

Working together with the FWS and NDOW, Tortoise Group has created an online adoption system through which custodians of captive desert tortoises can complete the

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adoption process. Custodians who currently have legally acquired captive tortoises in possession are encouraged to complete the adoption process for each animal they possess as soon as possible. This service is available at

www.tortoisegroup.org/adoption.php. In addition to the tortoise adoption service, this website includes information tortoise custodians need to care for their animals. Topics include burrow construction, food and water requirements and escape prevention.

Historically, an average of more than 1,000 unwanted pet desert tortoises have been picked up annually in Southern Nevada, most recently by the San Diego Zoo Global Tortoise Pick-Up Service, but such a service is no longer available. Although educational messaging meant to discourage the breeding of pet tortoises is beginning to have an impact on the number of unwanted tortoises, their number is still too high and they are making scientific-based translocation efforts extremely difficult at best, according to Tomlinson.

“Unfortunately, few of these unwanted pets can be used for science-based translocation into the wild because of health concerns, and then only after a very thorough health screening,” he said. “We encourage tortoise custodians to separate their pet tortoises, to cease breeding them and to gift their unwanted pet tortoises to someone who does not currently have one.”

Anyone gifting a desert tortoise to another person should encourage them to complete the online adoption process. Other unwanted pet tortoises can be taken to The

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Animal Foundation located at 655 N. Mojave Rd. in Las Vegas but they should not be released into the wild. "Wild tortoises are protected and should be left alone and left in the wild," Tomlinson added.

Initially wildlife agencies will focus on educating the public about the new regulation. Anyone wanting more information about CGR 426 and the problem of unwanted pet desert tortoises can contact Cris Tomlinson or Jason Jones of NDOW at (702) 486-5127.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) protects, restores and manages fish and wildlife, and promotes fishing, hunting, and boating safety. NDOW's wildlife and habitat conservation efforts are primarily funded by sportsmen's license and conservation fees and a federal surcharge on hunting and fishing gear. Support wildlife and habitat conservation in Nevada by purchasing a hunting, fishing, or combination license. Find us on Facebook, Twitter or visit us at www.ndow.org.

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