



# *Report to* **STAKEHOLDERS**

September 2009

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to the future of  
desert tortoise**

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valuable career skills  
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# Report to STAKEHOLDERS

*Report to Stakeholders* is a publication of Edwards Air Force Base, 95th Air Base Wing, Environmental Management. Its purpose is to inform and educate the public, base workers and residents about continuing environmental and safety efforts on base. It currently has a circulation of 6,000, including about 2,000 subscribers.

Contents of the *Report to Stakeholders* are not necessarily the official view of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force.

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**Q:** I've seen the terms "surveying" and "monitoring" used frequently in the Report to Stakeholders. What is the difference?

**A:** Surveying is looking for what is in an area so that workers at Environmental Management can know how to best protect what is there, while monitoring is ensuring that projects follow predetermined guidelines to make sure they are having the least possible impact to the environment.

Under federal conservation laws, the base must manage natural and historical resources found within its 470-square-mile boundary. To do this, base biologists and archaeologists need to know where those resources are located.

For example, base biologists survey a predetermined location to record the natural resources in the area. They walk through the area in a grid-like pattern, observing conditions and looking for plants and animals, such as the desert cymopterus or the federally threatened desert tortoise. A global positioning system unit is used to record the quantity of resources and their locations. These data are then loaded into a geographic information system (GIS) database. The system translates the data into a visual map, showing the locations and density of natural resources on base.

A similar process is followed for archaeological surveys. Base archaeologists search the ground to determine if there are any sites in the area. Locations of historical sites and artifacts are recorded in the GIS. To date, there are still many areas of the base that have not been surveyed. Base archaeologists have visually inspected approximately 58 percent of the base.

In addition to a random sampling of the base, archaeologists have also surveyed areas for base projects. As early as possible, the archaeologists survey areas where future projects may take place. This gives the team time to evaluate any sites they might find. If sites are found within a project area, then a determination must be made whether they are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

In contrast to surveying — identifying resources — monitoring helps conserve resources. Natural and historical monitoring typically occur once a project begins. For instance, archaeologists observe construction activities that take place near a historical site. By doing so, they are able to make sure the site is not disturbed in any way. Biologists also observe activities to ensure

*See Q & A, page 7*



### What's on the cover?

#### ADULT DESERT TORTOISE —

*Female adult tortoises, like the one seen here, are brought to the Head Start Program pens at Edwards Air Force Base to lay their eggs. This is just one of many processes of the program that biologists study. See article on page 4.*

**For all environmental concerns, please call the Environmental Management Customer Service Desk at (661) 277-1401.**

# Recycling managers meet to share ideas and challenges

**E**dwards Air Force Base (AFB) hosted a first of its kind workshop for Air Force Materiel Command (AFMC) qualified recycling program managers on June 11. Eleven people from eight different AFMC bases and the AFMC recycling program manager met for two days to share successful ideas and brainstorm on how to address challenges.

Qualified recycling programs (QRP) allow individual bases to sell recyclables to outside vendors and keep the proceeds to cover the costs of the recycling program or other base projects.

Richard Baumer, AFMC recycling program manager, told attendees that the Air Force saves \$26.4 million in solid waste costs annually through recycling. Most of that is in diversion, not revenue from sales of recyclable material. Diversion means keeping waste from going to a landfill, whether by recycling or finding a reuse.

“At Robins, we see diversion savings from carpet recycling,” said Ken Wharam, QRP manager for Robins AFB, Ga. Wharam found a carpet mill willing to take used carpeting for free. They even provide empty trailers for collection and transport the used carpet to their facility, where they use it as raw material for new carpet. Recycling the carpet saves Wharam’s program money in paying off-base landfills to take waste.

Staff from Hill AFB in Utah found a company that recycles plastic blast media into concrete masonry bricks. Hill uses the plastic media to clean parts and remove paint from surfaces. This use keeps the base from having to pay



**INVENTORY** — Robert Spelfogel, QRP manager from Hanscom AFB, Mass., looks at materials from the HazMER (hazardous materials excess reutilization) program during a tour of the Consolidation Recycling and Universal Waste facility, June 12. Spelfogel and 11 other AFMC recycling program managers met at Edwards on June 11 and 12.

for disposal of the media as hazardous waste. Hill QRP manager Paul Betts said he’s even gotten some of the bricks to use for projects at the base.

Edwards staff gave a presentation on the challenges of running a landfill and the successful recycling center. Edwards is the only AFMC base with its own landfill.

The second day included a tour of the Edwards composting and recycling operations, the landfill and the Consolidation Recycling and Universal Waste

facility.

Attendees were particularly interested in the base’s new polystyrene densifier at the recycling center. Recycling center staff demonstrated how the densifier works. Several attendees asked for samples of the densified polystyrene to take home. A few of the managers said they’ll be looking into purchasing one for their own programs.

Gary Schafer, a recycling specialist at Environmental Management, thought the workshop was useful. “It was beneficial to hear what other bases are doing,” he said.

The staff at Edwards has already used some of what they learned from Eglin AFB’s experience in selling abandoned vehicles to move a trailer abandoned six years ago from the flightline to the landfill. They plan to sell the trailer, and the material on it, to help purchase new equipment to make the Edwards recycling program even more efficient and profitable.

“ It was beneficial to hear what other bases are doing.

Gary Schafer  
Recycling Specialist  
Environmental Management

“

# Air Force commmits to the future of desert tortoise

*Desert tortoises have lived in the Mojave Desert for thousands of years, but declines in population in recent decades resulted in the federal listing of this reptile as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. This afforded greater protection of the species and its habitat.*

**W**hen an animal found at Edwards Air Force Base is listed as threatened under the *Endangered Species Act of 1973*, the base is required to take certain measures to protect it and its habitat more aggressively.

At Edwards, the Air Force does more than simply manage desert tortoise habitat. Through its Head Start Program, base biologists allow young desert tortoises to grow in protective pens and study ways to give the young reptiles a head start at life, with the goal of improving survivability into adulthood. Desert tortoises take approximately 15-20 years to reach sexual maturity, yet oftentimes the shelled reptiles are unable

to make it to that age.

Juvenile desert tortoises often fall prey to harsh weather conditions and heavy predation. Biologists say that maybe one out of every 100 hatchlings survive into adulthood in the wild. While the odds for desert tortoises seem grim, the Air Force's Head Start Program at Edwards is experiencing success in the specially designed, enclosed pens at the study site.

There are 103 juvenile desert tortoises housed at the program's pens. Biologists bring wild, adult females carrying eggs to the pens to lay their eggs. Afterward they return the adult females to where they found them. Once the baby

A close-up photograph of a young desert tortoise in a pen. The tortoise is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, facing right. It is actively eating a small, purple, five-petaled flower. The tortoise's shell is a mix of brown and tan, with distinct scutes. Its head and front legs are visible. The background is a soft-focus desert landscape with various green and purple plants and dry grasses. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

**SNACK TIME** — A baby tortoise takes a snap at some vegetation at the Head Start Program pens where tortoises are raised by biologists in an effort to recover the local population.

tortoises hatch, they make their home in the enclosed pens — which protect them from several of the usual predators they face in the wild.

“We just did a release last year that is looking pretty promising,” said Mark Bratton, a biologist at Environmental Management, who conducts some of the program’s activities. “We released two groups of 2-year-olds in different locations: one group in sandy soil and the other in rocky soil.

“One of the things we wanted to look at this year was to see if the soil type at the release site made any difference in the survivability,” Bratton continued. “We were thinking that the rocky area would provide more camouflage for the tortoises and so far, it is panning out.”

This is because the small, palm-sized tortoises can blend in with the rocks at the rocky soil area and avoid some predation.

Each year, base biologists organize a release of desert tortoises housed in the pens, in efforts to find the ideal conditions for release. Before releasing the juvenile tortoises, the biologists affix transmitters to the shells to be able to track the tortoises’ movement and survivability.

Previous years’ releases involved 1-year-old tortoises and, while the tortoises did not survive past a year and a half, the results are helping biologists pinpoint the ideal conditions. Last year was the first release of 2-year-olds and according to Bratton, while the progress this year looks promising, it is too early to tell whether the rocky soil and older age of the released tortoises create the ideal combination.

“We’re going to track the released tortoises for several years if possible,” Bratton said.

### Beyond the program

In addition to studying ways to recover desert tortoises through the Head Start Program, the base partners with universities, researchers and other government agencies, to combine efforts and learn from each other.

“We still need to protect existing and future tortoise populations in many ways such as: protecting existing habitat, decreasing poaching or illegal collection of the animal as a pet, decreasing the release of captive tortoises into the wild and educating the general public about tortoise concerns,” Bratton said.



**YOUNG** — These baby tortoises are being raised in the Head Start Program on base. In the wild, baby desert tortoises often end up as a snack for various predators because of their size and soft shells. Biologists are hoping to raise the hatchlings until their shells harden and then release the hatchlings into the wild.

Collaborating with land managers around the desert helps with that effort. Each year, Environmental Management biologists educate the base community at several outreach and educational events, by displaying captive desert tortoises, talking about the animal and the importance of leaving wild tortoises alone, and keeping pet tortoises in captivity. They also manage an adoption program, which takes tortoises that were previously kept

as pets or were born to pets, and then sets them up with new owners.

Pet tortoises can introduce diseases into wild populations and so it is crucial to keep them in captivity. For more information about desert tortoise adoption, you may visit [www.tortoise.org](http://www.tortoise.org). Also, if you find a desert tortoise in danger, you may call (661) 277-1401.

RTS

## Head Start Program receives national attention

**A**ir Force reporters from Defense Media Activity in San Antonio (formerly known as the Air Force News Service) visited with Edwards Air Force Base biologists to take a quick peek into the world of the Head Start Program and share it with the Air Force community worldwide. They met with base biologists who gave them a tour of the Head Start pens and explained the purpose of the program.

“This is a good thing for the program,” said Mark Bratton, a biologist at Environmental Management who conducts some of the program activities. “Head Start is an interesting program we have on base and it’s good to get exposure outside the base to share what the Air Force is doing here to recover the species.”

To find the coverage of the program in Airman Magazine, you may go to [www.airmanonline.af.mil](http://www.airmanonline.af.mil). Also, a video about the program can be found at <http://www.af.mil/news/video> and by searching for “desert tortoise.”



**LEARNING** — Leah Hunter, left, Meredith Gandy and Phi Nguyen work together during a summer briefing put on by the community relations staff at Environmental Management.

## Students gain valuable career skills at Environmental Management

**A** dozen local high school and college students on summer break enjoyed a unique beach-themed vacation this year. Instead of splashing in the sparkling waters of Santa Monica, Calif., these students were greeted by the dry desert sands of Edwards Air Force Base each morning. For these students, summer vacation meant a working adventure at Environmental Management.

“A lot of planning went into our summer hire program,” said Elizabeth Doss, executive officer for Environmental Management. “We didn’t want to throw the students into tasks without providing them with direction.”

“We wanted to provide them with the best educational experience while making it fun,” said Cassandra Cox, the functional area records manager for Environmental Management.

As Doss explained, “It’s a two-way street. The summer hires are doing a lot of tedious tasks for us, such as shredding, filing and moving boxes. If that was all the job entailed, it could get mundane and uninspiring as a first-job experience.

“That’s why it was important to sit them down and explain what Environmental Management does for the base and the

importance of our records,” Doss said. “It’s good to give the summer hires the bigger picture so they can understand why they are shredding a box of documents.”

In addition to learning how Environmental Management fits into the mission at Edwards, the summer hires gained insight into the different environmental departments. One of their goals was to identify official documents and remove unofficial records.

“By sorting through the thousands of documents generated by Environmental Management, the summer hires are learning how everyone does business,” Cox said. “They are learning what each department does and how the departments interact with each other.”

“We are lucky to have such diversity in this building: biologists, archaeologists, engineers,” Doss said. “The summer hires have an opportunity to be exposed to so much here. While they are working for us, it’s a good opportunity for us to introduce them to something they may not know about or be aware of.”

As part of that exposure, the environmental summer hire program offered tours of on-base facilities and presentations by environmental experts. The group also visited the Curation

facility to learn about the history of the base.

“During a tour of the Curation facility, I noticed different topics excited different students,” Doss said. “If you can catch what things the students find interesting, you can help develop those interests. That’s why we took the time to ask them about their education and career goals. It’s important to hear what these kids want to do in the future.”

“I found out about the summer hire program through Mr. Wood [Environmental Management director],” said 16-year-old Brandon Taylor, a soon-to-be junior at the base’s Desert High School and son of 95th Air Base Wing Medical Group commander, Col. Janet Taylor. “He knew I wanted to be a veterinarian and encouraged me to apply.

“Currently, I’m training with the biologists, gaining a better idea of what it means to work with animals. So far, I’ve helped relocate two birds found on base. Through this experience, I’ve found I really do enjoy going into the field and searching for animals,” he said.

“This job experience will not just open their eyes to other job opportunities, but also train them to be a professional in the workforce,” Cox said. “Several of the tasks they are performing can be applied at other organizations. They are learning how the government manages records, about security and how to protect information.

“We’re also teaching them the fundamentals of office work. They are gaining computer skills and learning how to use software programs to accomplish different tasks,” she said.

Karen Welling, an administrative assistant at Environmental Management,

highly recommends the summer hire program to everyone. In fact, her younger sister, Valerie, became a summer hire this year after Welling encouraged her to apply.

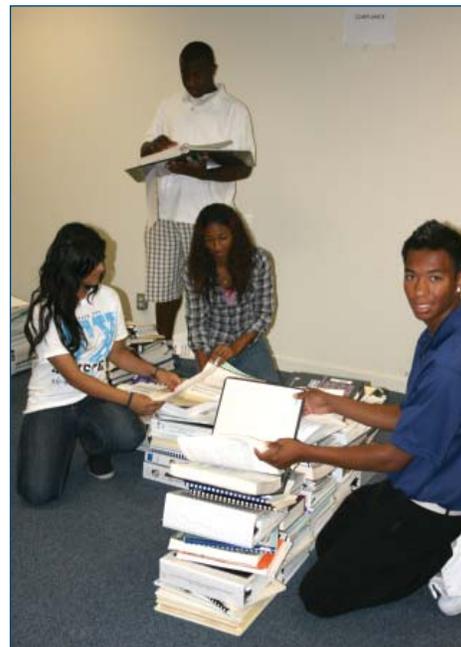
Welling started at Environmental Management as a summer hire last year and now works year-round as part of the Air Force’s student temporary employment program or STEP. Both the year-round and summer hire positions are offered through STEP.

“It’s a huge opportunity; I’ve learned a lot,” Welling said. “I was excited to get into Environmental Management. I’m looking at clothing and textiles as a major. Natural fibers and ‘going green’ are major concerns in the industry. I was amazed at how much we impact our environment every day, and how many different activities take place in this building. I have been able to gain different experiences and work with different people every day.

“And they are very encouraging about my education. I can arrange my work schedule according to my classes. If I have to take a day off for school, my supervisors are very accommodating,” Welling said.

A student must be enrolled in school to be eligible for any of the STEP positions. During the school year, high school students may work up to four hours a day for a maximum of 25 hours a week. College students can work up to eight hours a day for a total of 32 hours a week. Maintaining a year-round STEP job is dependent upon grades. A grade point average of 2.0 must be maintained and you can lose your job immediately if you fail a class.

During the summer, all students can work eight hours a day. Both year-round



**WORKING** — Summer hires, from left, Sarah Ali, Brandon Taylor, Leah Hunter and Phi Nguyen sort through Environmental Management documents, after being trained on what to keep and what not to keep.

and summer hire positions are considered full-time temporary government employee positions.

The STEP combines the best of both worlds by providing career opportunities for those pursuing an education. As Doss explained, “With the state of the economy and so many adults vying for jobs, I don’t know if any of these students would get a job or work experience without this opportunity.”

More information about STEP and other student employment programs can be found at [www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp](http://www.opm.gov/employ/students/intro.asp).

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## Q & A

### From page 2

that construction crews are following the work order checklists, such as staying in predisturbed areas, capping pipes, receiving desert tortoise training before they begin a project and so forth.

This type of monitoring is especially helpful since historical and natural sites are not clearly marked. For this reason, when an active range must be cleared of any ordnance, archaeologists mark site locations and monitor the cleanup.

Another type of monitoring activity includes groundwater monitoring. Because of federal cleanup laws, the base is responsible to clean up hazardous waste and groundwater contamination from past military activities. The hazardous waste includes chemicals such as jet fuel and solvents in the groundwater and

soil. To track the movement of contaminant plumes, cleanup scientists take samples from monitoring wells on a regular basis.

Groundwater monitoring is also performed on wells surrounding landfills and the base’s wastewater treatment plant. By monitoring these wells, base officials can easily identify if any pollutants are present in the groundwater. This would indicate if a landfill cover is not providing adequate protection or if a leak from a wastewater holding tank exists.

Environmental Management employees perform a third type of monitoring: air quality monitoring. The base is required to maintain an air monitoring station that checks for certain pollutants such as ozone and particle pollution. Particle pollution includes coarse dust, which is produced from crushing or grinding operations, and fine particles produced from motor vehicles or power plants. Air quality specialists compile the data from the air monitoring station monthly and report it to the county.

RTS

## Where to Find More INFORMATION



Published data and documents relating to Environmental Management are available for public review in information repositories at three locations.

The current information repositories are located in the cities of Lancaster and Rosamond, as well as Edwards Air Force Base. They are updated when new documents are released.

For questions about information in the repositories, you may contact Gary Hatch, Environmental Public Affairs at (661) 277-1454 or by e-mail at [95abw.pae@edwards.af.mil](mailto:95abw.pae@edwards.af.mil). Here is a list of our current information repositories:

### Edwards Air Force Base Library

5 W. Yeager Blvd.  
Building 2665  
Edwards AFB, Calif.  
(661) 275-2665  
Hours of operation: Mon-Thu 9:30 a.m. – 7 p.m.  
Fri 9:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
Sat-Sun 10:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### Kern County Public Library

**Wanda Kirk Branch**  
3611 Rosamond Blvd.  
Rosamond, Calif.  
(661) 256-3236  
Hours of operation: Tue-Wed 12 p.m. – 8 p.m.  
Thu-Sat 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

### Los Angeles County Public Library

601 W. Lancaster Blvd.  
Lancaster, Calif.  
(661) 948-5029  
Hours of operation: Mon-Wed 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.  
Thu-Fri 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Sat 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

For general information about Edwards and an electronic version of the latest issue of Report to Stakeholders or other documents of public interest, please visit the following link:

<http://www.edwards.af.mil/library/environment/index.asp>.

## Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) Information

The RAB is made up of appointed representatives from communities in and around Edwards Air Force Base, regulators from federal and state agencies and base officials. The board's purpose is to provide a forum for two-way communication among base restoration officials, regulators and representatives regarding the cleanup of contamination from past military activities.

The board meets quarterly, rotating meeting locations in communities surrounding the base. The public is welcome to attend. If you have any questions or concerns about the cleanup activities going on at Edwards, you

may contact your community's RAB member or Gary Hatch, Environmental Public Affairs, at (661) 277-1454.

### Next Quarterly Meeting

Date: Nov. 19, 2009  
Time: 5:30 p.m.  
Location: Lancaster, Calif.  
Venue is to be determined

## RAB Members

### OFF-BASE COMMUNITIES

#### Boron

Vacant

#### California City

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### ON-BASE COMMUNITIES

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Vacant

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#### South Base

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### Edwards AFB

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### Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control

#### Board

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### U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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Joseph Healy (415) 972-3269 Work  
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