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THE LEADER IN ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY NEWS

22. **ENDANGERED SPECIES: Desert tortoise among top recipients of recovery funds**

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The Mohave desert tortoise was on the receiving end of more than \$93 million in recovery funds from 1996 to 2006, making it one of the country's most expensive species and more costly than the grizzly bear, gray wolf or bald eagle.

The money, spent by state and federal wildlife agencies, is aimed at reviving a species on the brink of extinction and threatened by highways, urbanization, wildfires, disease, off-road vehicles and climate change. Protected tortoise habitat spreads across 9,600 square miles and four states, seven military installations and four national parks.

The tortoise's slow rate of reproduction makes recovery difficult to assess, and some populations have declined dramatically. To qualify as recovered, a species' population must increase or hold steady for 25 years. "We really haven't given the tortoise enough time to know whether we've done any good or not," said Roy Averill-Murray, desert tortoise recovery coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Reno, Nev.

Wildlife advocates say the money is well spent because of the species' high symbolic and biological value. "Nobody thought it was going to be an inexpensive proposition," said Ilene Anderson, a biologist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "But the desert tortoise is a bellwether for the health of our deserts."

Congress in 1988 amended the Endangered Species Act to require an annual report of how much is spent on each species by states and the federal government. In 2006, \$884 million was spent on more than 1,100 species on the list, according to FWS.

The top recipients have been salmon in the Pacific Northwest and the Steller sea lion along the Pacific coast (Mike Stark, [AP/San Francisco Chronicle](#), Jan. 20). -- PR



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