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Desert Managers Group and The Living Desert Partner for California's Mojave Max Emergence Contest

The Desert Managers Group (DMG) and The Living Desert announce the official opening of the annual Mojave Max Emergence Contest (www.mojavemax.com). This year California will have its own desert tortoise to mark the beginning of spring. California's Mojave Max will reside at The Living Desert in Palm Desert California. Max is a female tortoise over 30 years old and weighs 5.7 kg (12.5 lbs). Last year she emerged on February 10th and went into brumation on November 19th. We expect her to follow similar trends this year. The Living Desert is a 360-acre wilderness preserve dedicated solely to interpreting and conserving the deserts of the world. The DMG and Living Desert staff believes it will be a perfect place for California's Mojave Max to reside.

The Mojave Max Emergence Contest began in Nevada as a way for the public to learn about desert tortoises and what can be done to help this threatened species. In 2005 the Desert Managers Group began a California version of the Mojave Max Emergence Contest. The contest along with other desert tortoise projects, such as education kits called "tortoise trunks," help create public awareness about desert tortoises. The Desert Managers Group and the staff at the Living Desert hope to increase understanding about how desert ecosystems work and especially how the desert tortoise and other indigenous organisms are affected when ecosystems are altered.

The object of the contest is to guess when Mojave Max will emerge from his burrow for the first time after a long winter sleep (brumation). Each fall, when the weather turns cold, desert tortoises brumate, a reptilian form of hibernation. As temperatures warm in spring, tortoises become active and feed on wildflowers and other annual desert plants. Max's emergence is a herald of the arrival of spring in the desert.

Any student in grades 1-12 may enter the contest. Students go on-line and register a guess when Mojave Max will emerge from his burrow for the first time in 2009. Students submitting the closest guess, one from each county, will be declared winners. Eligibility for awards is restricted to students enrolled in public, private, and registered home schools in the following counties in California: Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The contest will remain open until Max emerges from her burrow.

For more desert tortoise media information including news stories, press releases, newsletters, and public service announcements go to: www.deserttortoise.gov/information/news.aspx

For Desert Managers Group information, go to: <http://www.dmg.gov>

For Living Desert information go to: www.livingdesert.org/