

# Get The Facts About Gopher Tortoises:

## Waif Gopher Tortoises



A waif gopher tortoise is a gopher tortoise that has been removed from the wild but is not associated with a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) permitted relocation effort. These tortoises are generally from unknown sites and therefore cannot be returned to their original location. Whenever possible, waif tortoises should be returned to wild habitats, unless health issues prevent it. Waif gopher tortoises are classified as releasable or nonreleasable.

### Releasable waif gopher tortoises

To be considered releasable, waif tortoises should not:

- Show visible signs of illness;
- Need medical care;
- Have been in captivity for more than 6 months;
- Require human intervention for survival;
- Have been exposed to diseased tortoises.

Releasable waif tortoises can be accommodated in wild, natural areas that are permitted as waif recipient sites by the FWC Protected Species Permit Coordinator. Suitable habitat includes areas with sandy, well-drained soils; minimal tree canopy; and sufficient foraging areas with low-growing, herbaceous plants. Waif recipient sites can generally receive up to two tortoises per acre.



Robert La Follette

### Nonreleasable waif gopher tortoises

These tortoises must permanently remain in captivity and may have one or more of the following conditions:

- Exhibit signs of illness;
- Require ongoing medical care;
- Are sufficiently disabled to prevent successful burrowing or foraging;
- Have been in captivity for more than 6 months;
- Have been exposed to diseased tortoises;
- Require human intervention for survival.

Possession of a nonreleasable waif tortoise requires an FWC permit. These tortoises must be placed with an educator or a wildlife facility that can properly care for the animal for the rest of its life. Examples include schools or zoos that use waif tortoises for educational purposes.

### Waif recipient sites

Both public and private landowners can help ensure the survival of these animals by offering their lands as recipient sites for waif gopher tortoises. Anyone interested in having property designated as a waif gopher tortoise recipient site must obtain a no-cost permit from FWC. Waif recipient sites do not receive the same incentives that long-term, protected recipient sites receive; however, waif sites face less-rigid requirements. A waif recipient site permit is valid for five years, and a lifetime permit is also available.

For more information on releasable or nonreleasable gopher tortoises contact the FWC protected species permit coordinator at (850) 921-5990 or visit [MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise](http://MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise).



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