

Get The Facts About Gopher Tortoises:

Horses and Safety



Gopher tortoises and horses

Gopher tortoises and horses have lived together in Florida for more than 500 years. Reported incidences of injuries to livestock because of gopher tortoises or their burrows are rare. Although accidents can happen, many times they can be avoided by implementing basic safety practices. The following suggestions are provided to help keep both tortoises and horses safe.



Photo by Joy Hill

Suggestions for avoiding potential horse injury from tortoise burrows

Create a barrier. Barriers alert the horse and rider to the burrow's presence

- **Logs:** Place a log across the burrow. This allows the tortoise to enter and exit, while horses have to jump over or walk around the burrow.
- **Flagged tripod:** A tall tripod made of PVC pipe, topped with a conspicuous flag keeps horses out of the burrow mouth, while still allowing tortoises to move in and out.
- **Fencing:** Create a wood or metal fence around the burrow that allows tortoises to move underneath. Place the fence at least four feet away from the mouth of the burrow (8' by 8').

In most cases, barriers should prevent horses from stepping into tortoise burrows. Relocating tortoises is costly to the landowner and stressful to the animal, so relocation options are advisable only if the methods noted above fail.

On-site relocation

Paddocks, corrals and riding rings

- **10 or fewer burrows:** Obtain a "10 or Fewer Burrows" permit online, before relocation efforts begin.
- **More than 10 burrows:** A conservation permit is required before relocation efforts begin.

Pastures

- On-site relocation is not recommended unless permanent exclusion fencing (at least one foot in height) can be installed to exclude tortoises from areas where horses are present.
- If the barriers mentioned above are not an option, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) gopher tortoise permit coordinator (see below) to discuss the best plan of action.

Off-site relocation

Off-site relocation is a last resort, taken on a case-by-case basis, and only in extreme circumstances. A permit is required before beginning any relocation effort. The cost of off-site relocation is considerably higher than low-cost avoidance methods.

Mitigation contributions

All permits require a mitigation contribution. Mitigation contributions support gopher tortoise conservation actions outlined in FWC's Gopher Tortoise Management Plan.

For more information contact the gopher tortoise permit coordinator at (850) 921-1031 or visit MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise.



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

MyFWC.com