

Applicant Guidance: Scientific Collecting Permits for the State-Listed Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)

The following information is provided as guidance to assist applicants in submitting a complete and sufficient application that includes all information necessary to determine whether the application meets criteria to issue a permit. This document provides specific requirements for research projects, educational use, and waif recipient sites for gopher tortoises. Submitting a complete and sufficient application can expedite the permitting process by preventing delays triggered by missing information.

General Permit Application Checklist

You will need to gather or have access to the information below to complete and submit the application in the [Online Permit System](#).

To register as a new user, you will need:

- To determine if you are registering as an Individual or Non-Individual (business or other entity) Applicant.
- Applicant's contact information including name, physical and mailing addresses, phone number, and email address.
- Applicant's social security number or driver's license state of issuance and number. If applying as Non-Individual, you will need the organization's FEIN/FEID number and name of contact person.
- If sub-permittees are needed, also apply for a self-issuing Registered Agent permit in the [Online Permit System](#); include the name, contact information, and qualifications of each requested sub-permittee. Once issued, you can manage sub-permittees who have delegated approval to work under the permit in your absence.

To apply for a Scientific Collecting permit, you will need:

- Your user name and password (created when registering as a new user).
- Project name, description, address, and driving directions.
- To identify the project activity as: live possession, salvage, scientific collecting (multi- purpose or undefined activity), or voucher.
- To list the project county/counties; township, range and section, latitude, longitude and parcel identification number (if applicable).
- A summary of research/educational scope and objectives, target species, methodology, and final disposition (if applicable). See below for specific criteria regarding research projects, educational use, and waif recipient sites.

You will need the following attachments:

- A research proposal detailing the purpose, scope, objectives, methodology, and disposition of the proposed scientific work, and/or an educational plan with documentation of the facility's wildlife conservation program (*required*). See research proposal or educational plan checklists below for additional information.
- Benefit to survival potential (*required; see next page*).
- Provide permit number or copies of current or former state-issued permits related to this work (*if applicable; outstanding reports for prior permits must be provided before permits will be issued.*)

Attachments may be uploaded as part of the online application. The following file types are accepted: *.doc, *.docx, *.xls, *.xlsx, *.pdf, *.txt, *.ppt, *.png, *.tif, *.gif, .jpg, and *.jpeg. There is no limit to the number of attachments; however, the online system will only accommodate attachments that are 20 megabytes or less.

Factors considered when issuing permits

Intentional take permits (including scientific collecting and educational use) for state-Threatened species may be issued for purposes that further the conservation or survival of the species. FWC staff considers the factors outlined in Rule 68A-27.003(2), [F.A.C.](#), when determining if an application will benefit the survival potential of the species. These factors are presented below with additional information to assist applicants in submitting a complete application.

The [Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines](#) (Guidelines) provide specific information regarding permitting considerations. Guidelines include sections on scientific collecting and waif gopher tortoises (Appendix 14). Consulting the Guidelines is strongly encouraged as a first step in preparing your application.

Benefit to Species' Survival Potential:

Please respond to each of the following questions. Responses should be submitted as an application attachment in the online permit system. The attachment should be titled "Benefit to Survival Potential".

1. Is the project's purpose adequate to justify removal of specimens?
If specimens will be removed from the wild¹, outline the consistency with the goals and objectives of the [Gopher Tortoise Management Plan](#) (Management Plan) to justify removal.
2. What probable direct or indirect effect will the project have on the wild population?
If proposed activities may affect the wild population, explain what the probable effects are, and if the effect furthers conservation and survival. If the effects further conservation and survival, explain how. Explain any measures that will be taken to minimize potential effects to the wild population.
3. Does the project conflict with any programs intended to enhance the survival of the species?
Refer to the [Guidelines](#) and/or [Management Plan](#) to determine if any proposed activities in the application conflict with the conservation actions identified for the species.
4. Will the project likely reduce the threat of extinction?
Explain how the proposed activities in the application will provide a conservation or scientific purpose that addresses the threat of extinction. Refer to the [Biological Status Review Report](#) for the species for factors contributing to risk of extinction.
5. What are the opinions and views of experts?
Opinions of those with species expertise will be considered during application review. Include any known relevant opinions, along with the individual or organization from which they originate.
6. Are the expertise, facilities, and resources available to the applicant adequate to accomplish the project objective?
Document the experience, knowledge, and capability of all individuals listed on the permit application (if you are a Registered Agent, RA, please upload this information for yourself and anyone authorized to work under the permit to your account, include RA identification in research proposal). Document the adequacy of facilities and equipment available to you to conduct the proposed activity.

¹ Removal from the wild includes permanent and/or long-term removal of a gopher tortoise from its place of origin, which may include laboratory study that precludes a tortoise's release at place of origin, possession of non-releasable gopher tortoises for educational use, or possession of releasable tortoises intended for placement at a waif recipient site.

7. If applicable, document any relevant risk to human safety posed by the species, and demonstrate that available deterrent methods have been exhausted.

Research proposals must clearly identify the project's purpose, scope, objectives, methodology, and disposition. Necessary information includes:

- Project location(s) for all proposed research activities.
- Duration/timeline of the proposed project.
- Identification of personnel who will complete the proposed research and their qualifications or provide Registered Agent number that includes this information. See Appendix 14 of the Guidelines for minimum qualifications required for common research activities and acceptable documentation of experience.
- Provide specific methodology for all proposed research activities and include citations for any standardized or scientifically-approved methodology.
- Annual and/or total sample size estimates for each proposed activity, identified as such. If multiple sites are proposed, identify sample size for each site. If project ranges across multiple states, provide sample size estimates for Florida and range-wide.
- If population surveys are proposed, provide specific methodology to be used, and whether burrows will be scoped to confer occupancy.
- Identify handling protocols that will be used to minimize stress and handling time of tortoises.
- If tortoises will be marked, identify permanence (i.e., permanent or temporary) of methodology; specify method and justification.
- If using trapping/capture methods, identify all capture methods, trap checking frequency, etc.
- Justification for all methodology, sample sizes, and scope of the project.

Educational plans must provide information regarding the facility's wildlife conservation program including:

- Procedure for education/outreach event activities (i.e., Education Plan)
- Expected average number of events hosted and average number of participants reached, per calendar year. Estimate hours of contact time, including display time at each event and for permanently displayed animals.
- Indicate whether the tortoises and/or shells will be transported to other venues for educational programs and identify where it will be primarily housed.
- If more than one live tortoise, shell, or combination is requested, provide justification for multiple specimens.
- If use of tortoise shell(s) is proposed:
 - State if any gopher tortoise shells are currently in the possession of the applicant and if so, how many.
 - Indicate how many shells are requested and provide justification for proposed number.
 - If shells will be collected, indicate from where, and how many shells are requested from each site.
- If a live gopher tortoise is requested:
 - Indicate if the tortoise will be housed indoors, outdoors, or both. If outdoors, specify whether it will be able to dig a burrow, or if a pseudo-burrow be provided (required when burrowing is not possible).
 - Submit photographs of any pre-existing enclosure area(s) to house a gopher tortoise. Include dimensions of existing and/or proposed enclosure(s) in educational plan.
 - If more than one individual is requested, identify if they will be housed together or separately.

- Indicate if there is a specimen expecting to be used for educational purposes, should the permit be issued. If so, provide photo and origin information of proposed educational use tortoise. If not, indicate if there are any conditions of a tortoise that the educational facility would not be able to care for (e.g., *Mycoplasma* spp. positive, missing limb, etc.).
- Identify how stress to any live animal(s) will be minimized during educational events.

Waif Recipient Site applications must provide information on the proposed recipient area including:

- Applicants are encouraged to request a pre-application site visit from a Regional Gopher Tortoise Conservation Biologist to assess the suitability of the site and provide recommendations. Refer to FWC's [Gopher Tortoise Program contacts](#) page to find the Regional Biologist for your location.
- The physical address of the property and ownership information.
- Size of the proposed recipient area (include only upland area in acres).
- An up-to-date aerial map defining property boundaries, proposed recipient area, and land cover types; list all land cover types and associated acreage either on the map or on an accompanying table.
- A Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey map depicting each soil type and soil suitability rating for gopher tortoises (e.g., highly suited, moderately suited) within the proposed recipient site.

If a gopher tortoise burrow survey has been conducted for the proposed property, plot and label on a map the location of each burrow observed during the burrow survey. Indicate burrow status (i.e., potentially occupied, abandoned) on the map. If a burrow survey has not been conducted, or the existing survey is greater than two years old, the landowner may conduct a visual survey by walking the property and recording potentially occupied burrows observed; indicate if there are any areas on the property devoid of gopher tortoises/tortoise burrows. FWC staff are available to assist with visual surveys.

- Identify any natural and/or man-made boundaries surrounding the property and/or proposed recipient area (fencing, bodies of water, roads, etc). Soft-release enclosures are required for most waif recipient sites (see Appendix 14).
- Photographs of existing habitat within the proposed waif recipient site area; see Appendix 14 of the [Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines](#) for suitable habitat criteria for waif gopher tortoise recipient sites.
- A copy of any existing habitat management plan(s) for the property. If there is no existing management plan, identify commonly conducted/planned habitat management activities.
- Indicate whether marking/monitoring of waif gopher tortoises is proposed.