

# Scientific Information

## *Gopherus polyphemus*



Gopher tortoises live 80 percent of their lives underground. Their burrows are up to 40 feet long and 10 feet deep and serve as home to over 360 other species, making the gopher tortoise an ecosystem engineer. A gopher tortoise burrow is distinguished by its half-moon shape and apron of sand around the entrance.

The gopher tortoise is considered a keystone species because their activities exert a disproportionate influence on the patterns of species occurrence, distribution and density in the ecological community.

**Lifespan:** 40 to 60 years

**Status:** State designated as Threatened.

**Home Range:** 0.2 to 4 acres

**Diet:** Herbivorous; low-lying vegetation in their home range.

**Preferred Habitat:** Well-drained, sandy soils found in habitats such as longleaf pine, sandhill, xeric oak hammock, scrub, pine flatwoods and dry prairie.

**Threats:** Habitat loss through destruction, fragmentation and degradation.

**Did you know a gopher tortoise can survive a wildfire from inside their burrow? These burrows also offer safety to other wildlife!**

### Contacts

General Information about gopher tortoises:

FWC Gopher Tortoise Assistant Biologist:  
850-921-1030

### Permitting:

FWC Gopher Tortoise Program  
Assistant:  
850-921-1031

### Previously submitted or issued Gopher Tortoise Relocation Permit in Orange County:

Gopher Tortoise Conservation Biologist  
in the south region:  
561-625-5122

### Orange County Environmental Protection Division:

407-836-1402  
WetlandPermitting@ocfl.net



# Gopher Tortoise

Scientific and Regulatory Information



# Regulatory Information

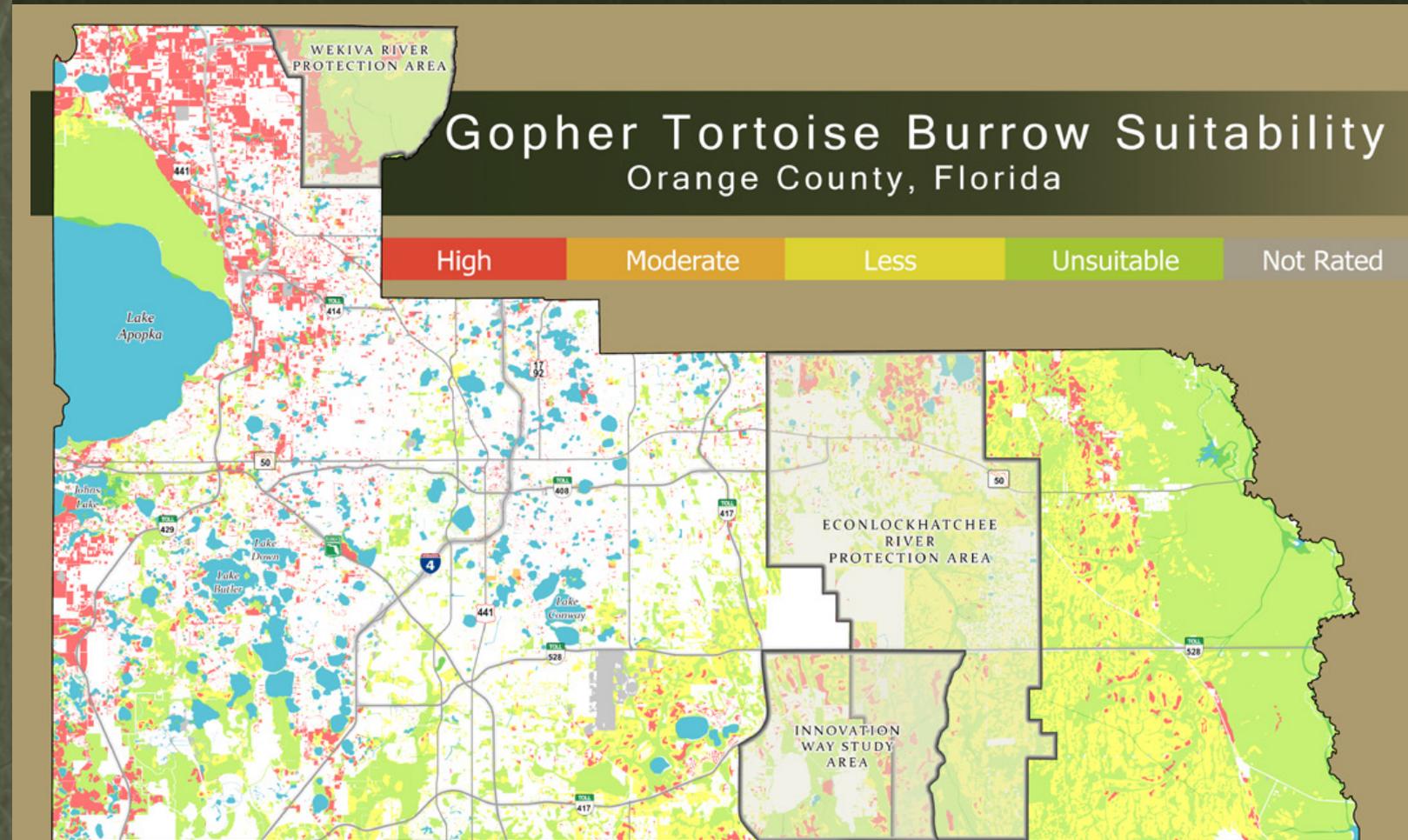
In Florida, the gopher tortoise is regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to achieve the following:

1. Minimization of loss of gopher tortoise.
2. Expansion and improvement of gopher tortoise habitat.
3. Enhancement and restoration of gopher tortoise populations.
4. Maintenance of the gopher tortoise's function in ecosystems as a keystone species.

## Violations of FWC regulations to be aware of include:

- Relocating or possessing a gopher tortoise without a permit.
- Killing or causing direct harm to gopher tortoises.
- Collapsing gopher tortoise burrow entrances or other parts of burrows without a permit.
- Placing harmful substances or devices inside gopher tortoise burrows.
- Penning or restricting gopher tortoise into small areas for more than 72 hours without a permit.
- Altering the habitat to the extent that resident tortoises are taken (killed).
- Excluding tortoises from their burrows without a permit.

# Gopher Tortoise Burrowing Suitability Map



If you're looking to develop land, it's important to know that any land alterations, including changing vegetation that impacts the gopher tortoise, disturbing gopher tortoise burrows or the gopher tortoise itself is a violation of State law and FWC rules.

If you think that there may be a gopher tortoise on your land that you want to develop, you have the following options:

1. Avoid destruction of the burrow and surrounding areas (within a 25-foot radius); or,
2. Obtain a Gopher Tortoise Relocation Permit. With a permit, you can preserve additional habitat to relocate tortoises onsite, or relocate tortoises to a designated recipient site.

**To apply for a Gopher Tortoise Relocation Permit, contact the FWC at (850) 921-1031.**

Orange County has developed a map product that can help landowners know whether a property, or portions thereof, is suitable for gopher tortoises to construct their burrows. The map can be accessed through the QR code above, the Orange County GIS Data Hub or directly at: <https://tinyurl.com/yhnunw47>

**See the FWC gopher tortoise webpage for more details:**

<https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/gopher-tortoise/>