

Safe roads

for people and gopher tortoises



© Rebecca R. Jackrel

Why is it important to conserve the gopher tortoise?

- The gopher tortoise is classified as a threatened species in Florida. It is also a keystone species, and therefore its survival is essential for hundreds of other animals' survival. For this reason, the tortoise and its burrow are protected under state law.
- The cold-blooded gopher tortoise often spends time near roads, where it can easily soak up the sun's warmth and forage for food. This makes it vulnerable to injuries or mortality caused by vehicles.

You can help decrease road mortality by:

Observing speed limits and wildlife crossing signs

- Gopher tortoise activity is highest in mid-morning and mid-afternoon.
- Scan the road and shoulder ahead. Gopher tortoises are slow moving; allow time for them to cross the road. If you would like to make your neighborhood a more tortoise-friendly community, crossing signs can be ordered from: wildcotton.com.





Photo by Renee Rau

Leaving the gopher tortoise in the same area it was found

- Do not take the tortoise with you or move it to a different area.
- You can move the gopher tortoise across the road in the same direction in which it was headed. **Do not put your life in danger to move the tortoise.**
- Do not put the tortoise in water. The gopher tortoise is a terrestrial turtle which means it lives on land.

Once a gopher tortoise has been removed from the wild and its place of origin is unknown, it is referred to as a waif tortoise. Waif tortoises cannot be returned to the wild and must be kept in captivity for the rest of their lives. It is important to work together to decrease the number of waif tortoises and keep gopher tortoises wild.

What you can do if you see an injured or dead gopher tortoise

- On weekdays from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., call 850-921-1030. After hours and on weekends, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Wildlife Alert hotline at 888-404-3922 (FWCC), dial #FWC or *FWC on your cell phone or text Tip@MyFWC.com.
- If you cannot remain at the site, be prepared to give a detailed location. Your information could help save the tortoise.

**For more information visit:
MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise**

