



GOPHER TORTOISE REGULATION CHANGES 2007

In 2007, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved the up-listing of the Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) from Species of Special Concern to Threatened, affording this species a higher level of protection. As part of this process, the FWC has issued new guidelines and policies, which serve to outline the available permitting options and requirements for projects that will impact Gopher Tortoises (GTs) and/or their burrows.

Beginning in the spring of 2009 the FWC Management Plan and Permitting Guidelines will require:

- GTs must be relocated for ALL projects – no Incidental Take Permit is available, as before;
- 100% surveys must be completed prior to relocation of GTs;
- All Active and Inactive Burrows must be excavated;
- FWC fees (conservation donation) will apply to all projects under the new rules;
- Conservation donation fees per GT will vary based on the level of protection placed on the designated recipient property whether on or off site;
- For off-site GT relocation, an Authorized MEI Staff Agent (permitted by the FWC) must conduct and supervise the excavation and relocation efforts;
- FWC Permit Conditions require that projects obtain local government clearing/grubbing or construction approval and/or permit prior to initiating GT Burrow Excavations.

Robby Hutchinson, Meryman Environmental backhoe operator in the process of excavating a gopher tortoise burrow.

The last few feet of the burrow are excavated by hand, when a tortoise may be at the terminal end. Gopher Tortoise burrows can be over 30 feet in length and over 20 feet below the ground surface, depending on the groundwater levels.



► HOW MERYMAN CAN HELP

- Decision making discussions regarding appropriate permitting strategy to meet project goals;
- Location of recipient property/habitat bank and conducting contractual negotiations for the owners;
- Conduct 100% GT surveys on proposed development site and recipient property;
- Assist you in navigating through and expediting FWC permitting and relocation process;
- Meryman Environmental can provide a GT Relocation Authorized Agent who is also a Wildlife Biologist;
- MEI provides FWC post relocation reporting.

► OTHER WILDLIFE SERVICES

- General Listed Species Site Assessments;
- DRI Permittable Vegetation and Wildlife Surveys;
- Specific Wildlife Species Population Surveys;
- Habitat/Environmental Management Plans for Eagles, Sherman's Fox Squirrels, Eastern Indigo Snakes, Scrub Jays, Wood Storks and other species;
- Underground Infrared Camera Wildlife Survey;
- Urban Wildlife Sanctuary and Park Kiosk Designs;
- Greenways and Wildlife Corridor Permitting, Design and Construction with Monitoring and Maintenance.

Development in Harmony with Nature