

# Gopher Tortoises in IRC

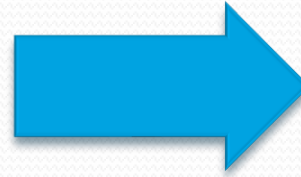


Indian River County Commission

January 23, 2023



# How many Gopher Tortoises lived here?



Before

After



# Nature's Complete & Perfect **Ecosystem**



- Gopher Tortoises are ancient reptiles.
- Their burrows average approximately 15-25 ft. long and up to 6 ft. deep.
- More than 350 animals depend on these burrows for refuge, including:
  - **Gopher frogs**
  - **Burrowing owls**
  - **Florida pine snakes**
  - **Florida mice**
  - **Eastern indigo snake**



# Florida State Law Protects Gopher Tortoises

Gopher Tortoises are a THREATENED species and are protected under State Law, Chapter 68A-27.003 of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC).



## Rule 68A-27.003 (FAC)

The Gopher Tortoise is hereby declared to be threatened, and shall be afforded the protective provisions specified in this paragraph:

*“The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is hereby declared to be threatened, and shall be afforded the protective provisions specified in this paragraph. No person shall take, attempt to take, pursue, hunt, harass, capture, possess, sell or transport any gopher tortoise or parts thereof or their eggs, or molest, damage, or destroy gopher tortoise burrows, except as authorized by Commission permit or when complying with Commission approved guidelines for specific actions which may impact gopher tortoises and their burrows. A gopher tortoise burrow is a tunnel with a cross-section that closely approximates the shape of a gopher tortoise. Permits will be issued based upon whether issuance would further management plan goals and objectives.”*



# What is the problem?

- Gopher Tortoises mortality rates might be rising due to land development when environmental surveys and land clearing permits are not enforced.
- It is a violation of Florida State Law when gopher tortoises are killed without the protections of an environmental survey and/or a land clearing permit; no matter what the size is of the land parcel.





# How can we fix this?

- 1. What can Indian River County do to support Florida State Law?**
  - According to FWC Law Enforcement Officer C. Platt (with permission):  
*“Issue and enforce all land owner and land developers to do an environmental survey before the land is cleared and developed.”*
- 2. Issue land clearing permits BEFORE any size land parcel is cleared or developed.**
- 3. Develop and open more county land for gopher tortoise sanctuaries in accordance with the FWC-approved *Gopher Tortoise Management Plan* (2007).**
  - Our Indian River County can be a successful model for other Florida counties to protect gopher tortoises!



# How can we fix this?

4. Provide the public information about their responsibilities to protect and SAFELY relocate Gopher Tortoises from their land (especially new land owners).
5. Coordinate public protection committees to work with Indian River County to help educate and inform our communities about gopher tortoises and their habitat.
6. Creating an atmosphere of a **WIN – WIN** approach for:



**OUR Gopher Tortoises**  
**OUR Community**  
**OUR Indian River County**  
**Officials**



# Who to Contact If...

## 1. You have a gopher tortoise on your undeveloped land?

- Contact an authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent to relocate.  
([www.myfwc.com/gophertortoise](http://www.myfwc.com/gophertortoise))



- Regional Gopher Tortoise Conservation Biologist: (850) 921-1030

## 2. You know gopher tortoises are living on non-developed land and it is being cleared, contact FWC Law Enforcement:

**888-404-3922**

- For families on a fixed income who cannot afford relocation, we can create a collaborative public/private funded program.





# Live in HARMONY with NATURE



# Gopher Tortoises in IRC



Questions?

**Volunteers?**

**Thank you for your time and consideration**

A copy of this presentation can be found at: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EWJ0t7HVWgAwXduD-7nrDyhWWoLrT6I/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EWJ0t7HVWgAwXduD-7nrDyhWWoLrT6I/view?usp=share_link)