

# GOPHER TORTOISE RECIPIENT SITE PROGRAM

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# Overview

- Gopher Tortoises and Their Ecology
- The Recipient Site Program
- Recipient Site Permits and Requirements
- The Pre-App Process and Application Process
- How Do I Get Started?
- Summary and Questions







# Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)

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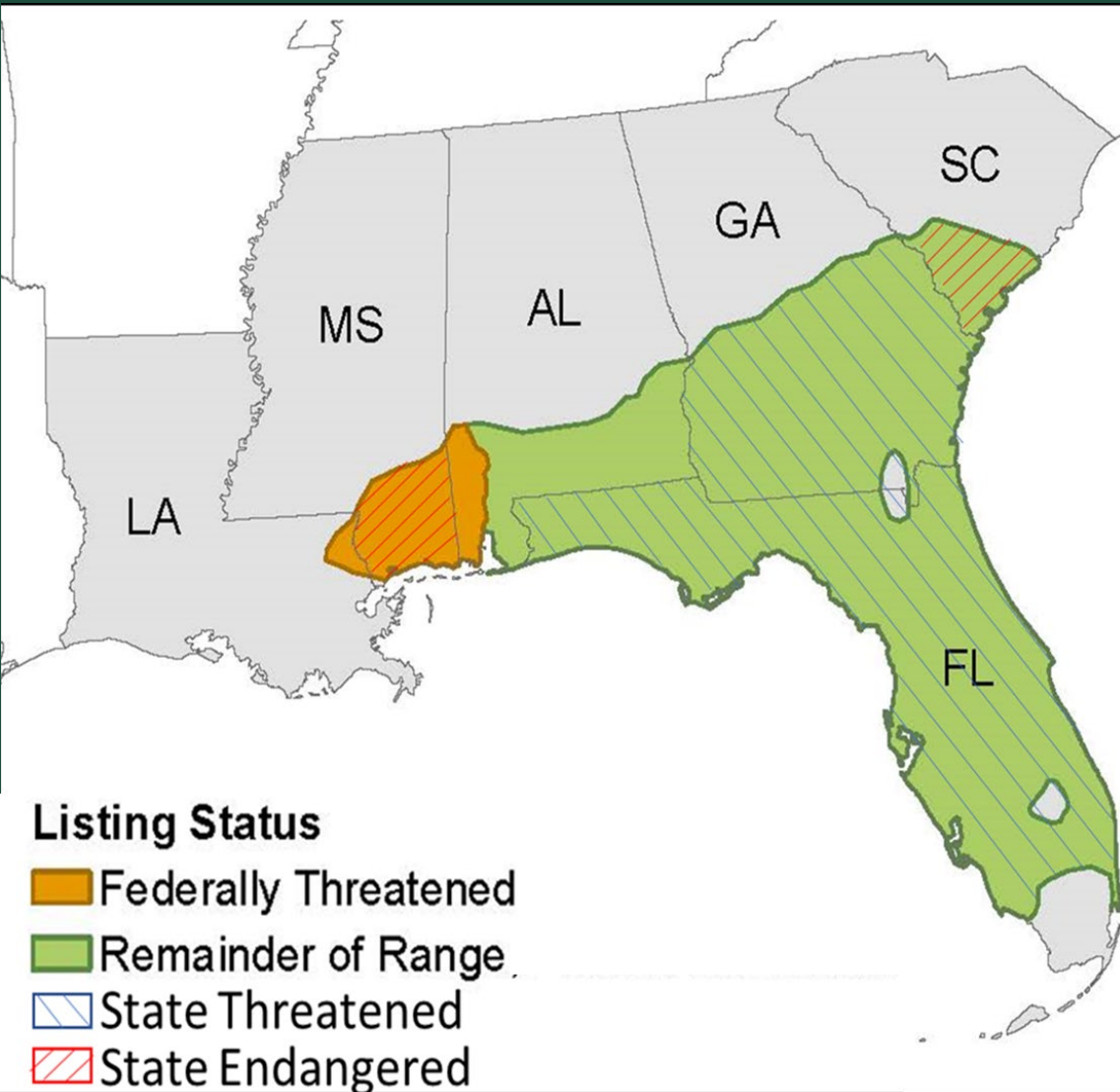


# Keystone Species and Ecosystem Engineer

Why are Gopher Tortoises  
important?







# Historical Reach and Decline

- Population decline over the years due to loss of habitat
- In Florida, Gopher Tortoises are considered **State Threatened**
- Not federally listed in Florida at this time – this is good!







# Recipient Site Program

How Gopher Tortoise Relocation  
is an Important Conservation  
Tool





## FWC's Response to GT Decline: Relocation

- Authorized, humane relocation from development sites to recipient sites
- Responsible and humane relocation: deliberately moving wild Gopher Tortoises into protected, managed, suitable habitat to improve chances of future survival and long-term population viability
- Gopher Tortoises are resilient
- Recipient sites are in high demand (so much so that we had to expand our program!)





## Reasons to Become a Recipient Site

- Conservation benefits
- Financial incentives
  - Varies by property (size, habitat, etc.)
  - Economically self-sustaining
  - Price per tortoise: \$5-10,000
- Land use compatibility
  - Hunting for quail, turkey, deer, etc.
  - Recreational uses
- Land protection





# Recipient Site Permits

Types of Recipient Site Permits  
and Their Criteria





## Types of Recipient Site Permits

- Long-term Recipient Site (Tiers 1 and 2)
- Short-term Recipient Site (Tiers 1, 2, and 3)
- Unprotected Recipient Site
- Research Recipient Site
- Contiguous Public Conservation Land Recipient Site
- Restocking Site Permit





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# Recipient Site Tiers

- **Contiguous upland habitat:** uplands are considered contiguous if two or more upland communities occur within a distance of 1,000ft and there is no physical obstacle (e.g., road greater than 2 lanes, curb or other physical barriers, or a speed limit of >30mph, river, lake, etc.)
- **Acceptable habitat criteria:** >30% herbaceous groundcover, <60% canopy cover, <20% woody groundcover
- **Desirable habitat criteria:** >50% herbaceous groundcover, <40% canopy cover, <20% woody ground cover

## • Short-term Recipient Sites

- Tier 1- Monitoring commitment and minimum of 40 acres habitat that meets *Desirable* criteria
- Tier 2- *Desirable* habitat criteria are met in the majority of the potentially permittable acres.
- Tier 3- Meets minimum requirements; easement, 25 acres and acceptable habitat

## • Long-term Recipient Sites

- Tier 1- Perpetual easement with FWC
- Tier 2- 100-year easement with FWC



# Recipient Site Minimum Criteria

Recipient Site Permit	Size (Minimum)	Soils	Habitat	Acceptable Landcover (CLC)
Long-term (tier 1 & 2)	40acres	>18in DWT (including 18in) >12in (select cases)*	>30% herbaceous ground cover, <60% canopy cover, <20% woody groundcover	Yes (see next slide)
Short-term (Tier 1)	40acres	Same	>50% herbaceous ground cover, <40% canopy cover, <20% woody groundcover (desirable)	Yes (see next slide)
Short-term (Tier 2)	25acres	Same	Min. 51% of site must be desirable (see above)	Yes (see next slide)
Short-term (Tier 3)	25acres	Same	Same as acceptable	Yes (see next slide)

• **Contiguous upland habitat:** uplands are considered contiguous if two or more upland communities occur within a distance of 1,000ft and there is no physical obstacle (e.g., road greater than 2 lanes, curb or other physical barriers, or a speed limit of >30mph, river, lake, etc.)

• **Phasing:** can bring in noncontiguous areas under separate permits

• **Strata:** unique combination of CLC and soil

• **\*Must have adequate drainage features that are man-made and evidence of tortoises on site (potentially occupied burrows)**



# CLC Types

## Acceptable CLC Types

Bare soil/clear cut; coastal scrub; coastal uplands; dry upland hardwood forest; hardwood plantations; coniferous plantations; **improved pasture\***; mesic flatwoods; mixed hardwood; mesic hammock; oak scrub; pine flatwoods; dry prairie; palmetto prairie; rural; sandhill; scrub; scrubby flatwoods; successional hardwood forest; shrub and brushland; tree nurseries; unimproved/woodland pasture; upland coniferous; upland mixed woodland; upland pine; vineyards; wiregrass savanna

## Unacceptable CLC Types

Artificial impoundment; bare soil; artificial/farm pond; any swamps, marshes, wetlands, lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, canals; anything 'hydric'; commercial and services; field crops; feeding operations; high intensity urban; rights of ways; industrial; row crops; orchards; residential; roads; sawgrass; sand; stormwater treatment areas; utilities; etc.

\*Must be less than 40% of entire site and have minimum 10% patchy shrub cover to be permitted



# Permittable



CLC:  
Coniferous  
Plantations

# Not Permittable



CLC: Mixed  
hardwood-  
coniferous

Not permittable  
due to habitat  
conditions  
(herbaceous  
groundcover  
and canopy  
cover)





## Permittable



CLC: Dry Prairie

\*Can't place tortoises in pen here without adequate shrub cover but can still permit.

## Not Permittable



CLC: Improved Pasture

Not permittable due to lack of shrub cover





## Permittable



CLC:  
Coniferous  
Plantations

Meets  
minimum  
criteria

## Not Permittable



CLC: Rural  
Open

Not permittable  
due to lack of  
herbaceous  
groundcover.  
Also would not  
be able to pen  
here due to lack  
of shrub cover





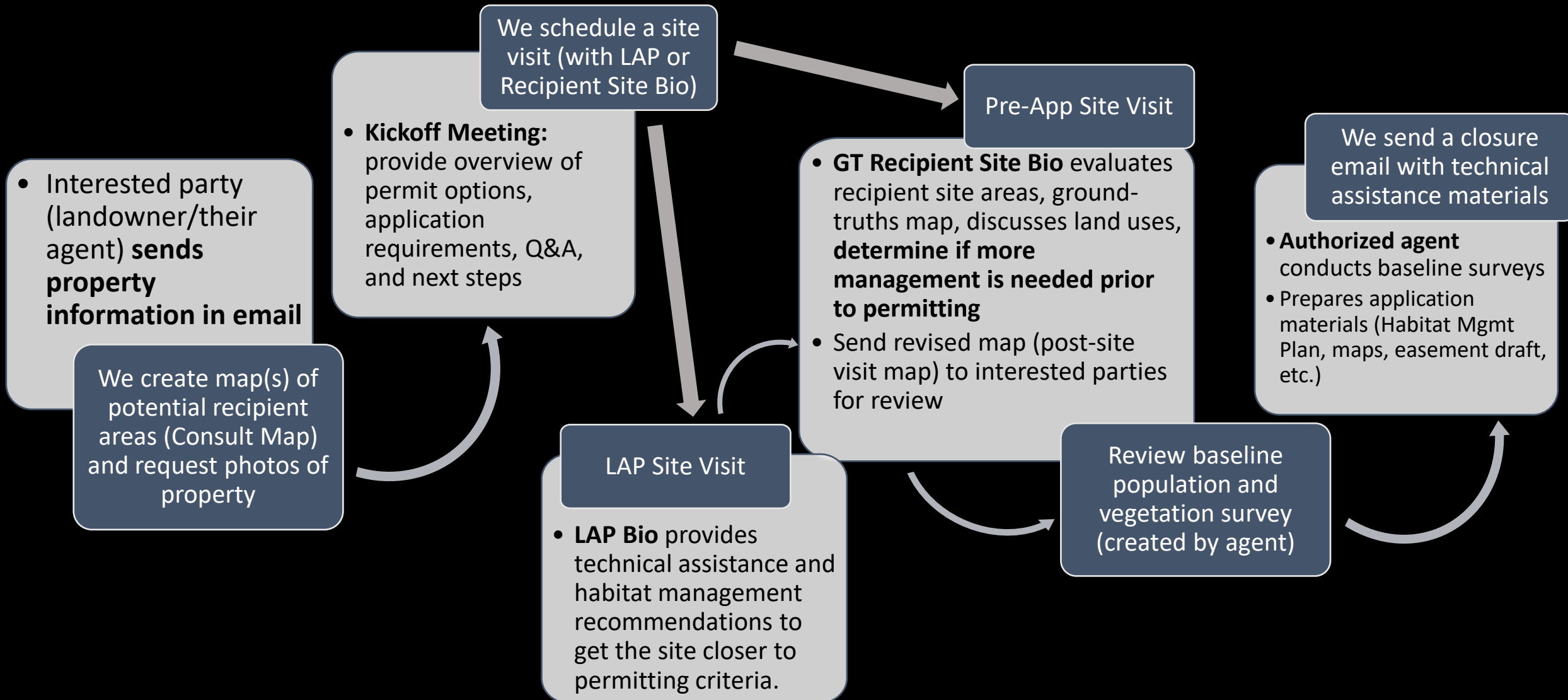
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# Pre-App Process and Application Process

The Recipient Site Permitting  
Process from Start to Finish (and  
beyond)



# A walk-through of the pre-application process





# Application Process

- Agent submits various documents required for permit
  - Various maps and shapefiles, vegetation survey results, Gopher Tortoise Burrow survey results, Habitat Management Plan, Easement draft, financial assurance (long-terms only), etc.
- FWC has 30 days to review and respond with a Request for Additional Information (RAI)
- Agent has 60 days to respond to RAI
- Lastly, permit application is recommended for approval
- Process can take a couple months





# Post-Permitting

- Tortoises are placed in soft release enclosures on site
  - Enclosures built by agent/contractor
  - Tortoises received from donor sites
  - Enclosures up for 12months, can only place tortoises during first 6months
- 25-year Monitoring Commitment: agree to conduct monitoring of site every 5 years and send in monitoring report (done by agent)
  - Vegetation survey
  - Burrow survey
  - Summary of management done, any issues encountered and how they were resolved, etc.
  - Site visit with every monitoring report
- Annual site visits done every 12-18months
- Management is done as necessary as outlined in Habitat Management Plan and Conservation Easement to maintain Gopher Tortoise habitat
- Conservation Easement is a long-term commitment that must be upheld (perpetually, for 100 or 50 years)







# How Do You Get Started?

It's easy!





## Contact **GTRecipientSite@myFWC.com**

- First, reach out with your Parcel ID(s) (or shapefiles) and the name of your county to our email above.
- Search for an authorized agent
- Reach out to LAP (Landowner Assistance Program)





# Summary

- Recipient Sites can protect your land, help conserve Gopher Tortoises, and make you money
  - Landowner is still responsible for the cost of management and agent/contractor services
- Must meet eligible criteria based on acreage, habitat conditions, soils, and landcover types
- Pre-Application Process is optional, but highly recommended
  - Can take 1 year or more
- Recipient Sites are long-term commitments



# Questions?

## contact info

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Questions? What are questions...

