

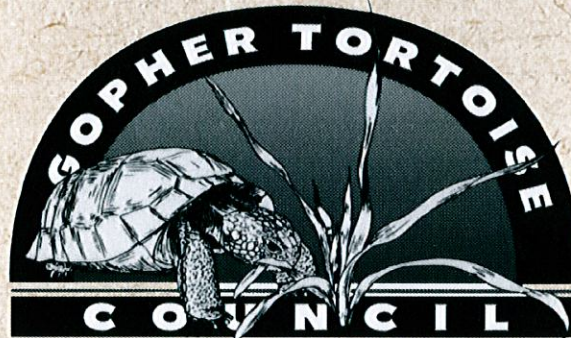


## GET INVOLVED

- ◆ Support conservation land acquisition programs by non-profit groups and government agencies.
- ◆ If your area does not have a land conservation program, work with others to get one started! Links to land acquisition programs can be found on the Gopher Tortoise Council website.
- ◆ Become a volunteer for organizations that manage uplands. Many are underfunded and understaffed.

***Most importantly,  
educate yourself  
so you are equipped  
to educate others!***

***Tortoises are a “keystone species,”  
providing habitat for hundreds  
of other animals that use their  
burrows for finding food, shelter  
from fire and predators, and  
protection from the elements.***



**Gopher Tortoise Council**  
c/o Florida Museum of Natural History  
P.O. Box 117800  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, FL 32611  
[www.gophertortoisecouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org)

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The Gopher Tortoise Council was formed in 1978 by a group of biologists and others concerned about the range-wide decline of the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*).

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*Members of the GTC provided photographs and assisted with the development of this brochure.*

# LIVING WITH GOPHER TORTOISES

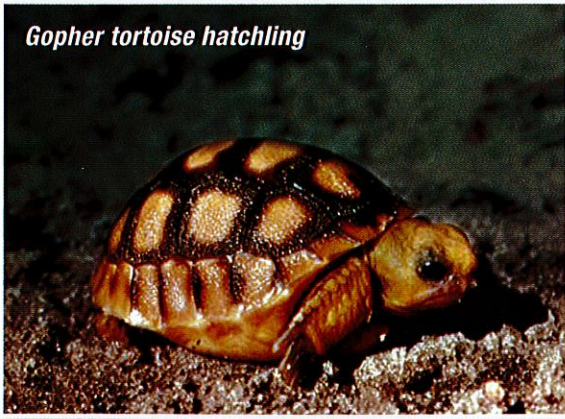
How **YOU** can help  
this declining species



*Working to conserve the gopher tortoise  
and the fascinating world in which it lives.*

*An educational brochure created  
by the Gopher Tortoise Council*

*Gopher tortoise hatchling*



## ***Gopher tortoises are protected in every state and cannot be harmed.***

By understanding gopher tortoise natural history you may be able to help conserve these increasingly rare animals.

Gopher tortoise burrows are an extremely important component of the landscape for tortoises and other animals... more than 360 different animals use tortoise burrows!

## **BE ALERT**

- ◆ When mowing your lawn, use caution to avoid collapsing burrows.
- ◆ Mark behind burrows with a small pin flag to alert pedestrians/mowers, etc. of their presence.
- ◆ When walking your dog in a tortoise's habitat, keep it on a leash.
- ◆ Keep cats indoors where they cannot harm young tortoises or other wildlife.

## **HELP THEIR HABITAT**

- ◆ Tortoises love sunny areas! Don't allow trees and shrubs to create too much shade in your yard. Provide as much open grassy areas as possible.
- ◆ Support land managers' efforts to improve habitat for gopher tortoises through seasonally appropriate prescribed burning, exotic plant removal, tree thinning, etc.
- ◆ Seek out assistance from your state forestry office to conduct seasonally appropriate prescribed burns on your property.
- ◆ If burning isn't possible, use mowing, roller chopping, etc., to mimic fire effects. Mark out burrow locations if possible, and only use heavy equipment in the colder months when tortoises are less likely to be active.



*A seasonally appropriate prescribed burn improves the gopher tortoise's habitat.*



## **CONTACT AND DIET**

- ◆ Tortoises are keenly aware of their neighborhood and will try to return if moved.
- ◆ Do not take them out of the wild. If you find one in an urban setting, contact your local wildlife agency.
- ◆ If you find an injured tortoise, make detailed notes of where the tortoise is located and contact your local wildlife rehabilitator.
- ◆ If you help a tortoise cross a road, try to move it in the same direction it is already heading. Be very careful of traffic!
- ◆ Tortoises have a varied diet including grasses, bean family plants, flowering weeds and low-growing fruits.
- ◆ Plant a variety of low-growing native plants in your yard. Remove invasive exotics plants.
- ◆ Consult the Gopher Tortoise Council website (or your local native plant society) for plant suggestions.