

## **The next phase of implementation for the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines begins**

March 2, 2009

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is preparing to implement the next phase of the gopher tortoise permitting system that was approved by FWC Commissioners in April 2008 (Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines – April 2008, revised September 2008) to implement the Gopher Tortoise Management Plan. This new phase will include the two-stage launch of the FWC's new online permitting system for gopher tortoise permits and replacement of the existing standard relocation, interim incidental take and special tortoise relocation (i.e., five or fewer on-site relocation) permit processes with the conservation, 10 burrow or fewer, and temporary exclusion for major linear utility corridor permit processes.

**March 23, 2009** - The first stage of this phase begins by launching public access to the new online gopher tortoise permitting system for the Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent and the Gopher Tortoise Recipient Site permit processes. Applicants will be able to apply for these types of permits online, track the status of pending applications, and receive an electronic copy of an issued permit.

**April 22, 2009** - The second stage of this phase begins, which will include implementation of the remaining Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines (except for the Settlement Permit process) approved in 2008. This will include implementation of the conservation, 10 burrow or fewer, and the temporary exclusion for major linear utility corridor permit processes and the launch of public access to the online permit system for the conservation and 10 burrow or fewer permits. As specified in the permitting guidelines, mitigation contributions will be required for gopher tortoises relocated under these permits. The use of permitted authorized gopher tortoise agents and permitted gopher tortoise recipient sites will also be required in many instances (i.e. on-site relocations).

[Note: The FWC has been accepting and processing submitted paper copies of applications for Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent and Recipient Site permits since June 2008 and September 2008, respectively. Those who will need an Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent or a Recipient Site permit as of the April 22, 2009 implementation date but have not yet applied for the permit should submit the appropriate completed application form to the FWC as soon as possible.]

The FWC will not accept any new applications for standard relocation, interim incidental take, or special tortoise relocation permits (for 5 or fewer

tortoises) after **5 p.m. on April 21, 2009**. Applications for standard relocation or interim incidental take permits that are received by the FWC, 620 S. Meridian Street, M.S. 2A, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600, or for the special tortoise relocation permits (for 5 or fewer tortoises) that are received by the appropriate regional FWC office, by 5 p.m. on April 21, 2009, and that contain all the required information to be determined by the FWC to be complete applications not requiring the submittal of additional application information will be reviewed and have standard relocation, interim incidental take, or special tortoise relocation permits issued consistent with the current requirements and conditions associated with those types of permits.

Applications for standard relocation, interim incidental take, or special tortoise relocation permits that either were initially received by the FWC at the above-mentioned addresses on or before 5 p.m. on April 21, 2009, but the applications remain incomplete after that date and time, or are received by the FWC after that date will be: 1) converted, with the applicant's approval, to an application for the comparable succeeding permit process (i.e., either the conservation, 10 burrows or fewer, or temporary exclusion for major utility corridor gopher tortoise permits) and be approved or denied in accordance with the requirements of that comparable succeeding permit process; or 2) denied, and the applicant will need to submit a new application for one of the available types of gopher tortoise permit.

**For additional questions please contact the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Office at (850)410-0656 ext. 17327 or refer to the web site.**