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# **GOPHER TORTOISE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE™**

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## **HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS & MITIGATION RESERVE MANAGERS**

**The Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative (GTCI)** is a proactive program to encourage and support private citizens, landowners, individuals, corporations, scientists, and governments that are concerned about or are interested in gopher tortoise and upland wildlife conservation in the state of Florida. As part of this program, a major effort is being made to work with private landowners, land managers and homeowners associations to become an important part of the conservation of gopher tortoises across the state.

### **THE GOPHER TORTOISE RESERVE PROGRAM**

**Any land can become listed through this program as a Tortoise Reserve simply by the landowner agreeing that land use and management on their property will be done in a fashion that will attempt to protect gopher tortoises and other upland species and their habitat.**

**The Gopher Tortoise Reserve Program is part of The Tortoise Reserve, Inc. (P.O. Box 7082, White Lake, NC 28337). Thousands of acres of private and public land in a number of states and at least six countries have signed on to this program to protect habitat of a large number of turtle and tortoise species.**

**All lands in the Gopher Tortoise Reserve Program will receive one metal Tortoise Reserve Sign (see membership category benefits sheet) and can purchase others.**

### **Home Owners Associations - Who is responsible for the Tortoises?**

After the landowner or developer has met the “mitigation” requirements and has built out the subdivision, someone or some organization becomes responsible for the management agreements, which were approved by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Or, individual landowners within the subdivision may be directly responsible for protecting and managing protected species on their property. This can be a problem since normally neither has expertise in wildlife management. GTCI can help provide information and recommendations on available experts to help.

### **What is Mitigation and Who Manages Mitigation Parks and Reserves?**

In many developments there are areas that have been set aside for various “mitigation” purposes. The term “mitigation” refers to agreements made by the developer with state or local governments to make up for the impacts the development will have on populations and habitat of protected species like the gopher tortoise or for removal of trees or wetlands or other such environmental impacts. Many of these mitigation areas can be potential conservation sites for tortoises within the community. Frequently the management of these areas can be compatible with providing good habitat for tortoises. These tortoises would come from within the community itself.

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## **PAGE 2 - Fact Sheet for Homeowners Associations**

The tortoises to be placed in these management areas would come from parts of the development that are to be built on within the local community. Under the Tortoise Reserve Program, it is possible for local communities to protect their “resident” tortoises that otherwise would have been harmed or relocated to other areas due to development.

### **What is the obligation of the Homeowners Association to protect tortoises and other species?**

Both the homeowner and the Homeowner's Association may have specific management requirements. These are often spelled out in deed restrictions or covenants, which were established in agreement with FWC, and/or county at the time the development was being permitted. If there are mitigation parks, there should be a Habitat Management Plan on file with FWC that outlines specifically the management requirements. This can be a shock to many Homeowners Associations and certainly to the small land or homeowner that moves in after the development has been completed. If you are not clear about your obligations, you should contact FWC. If there is a Mitigation Plan for your development, contact the FWC Office of Environmental Services at 850- 488-6661 for more information. If you are a private landowner, check the GTCI Florida Agencies and Regulations Fact Sheet or contact your local FWC office. That number is in the state pages in the blue section of the phone book.

### **How can GTCI be of assistance?**

GTCI will do a cursory site visit to tell member landowners what species they may have on the property and suggest some possible methods of mitigation. We can possibly provide other services to the landowner or developer depending on the situation.

GTCI will be happy to review for members the responsibilities of Home Owner Associations or others responsible for managing wildlife in mitigation preserves, greenways and other areas set aside by the developers under Development Orders or agreements with FWC. We can make recommendations on the best way to handle these responsibilities.

GTCI is developing a list (to provide to members) of environmentally friendly biological consultants, land clearers and other service providers that work with gopher tortoises and other uplands species. These people will have completed GTCI workshops or demonstrated appropriate practices on projects in the past.

### **How can we obtain GTCI services?**

The responsible organizational representative should fill out the GTCI application form (attached) and return it with the membership fee. GTCI will require that the organization responsible for the property being considered for The Gopher Tortoise Reserve Program complete an agreement that the property will be managed in a tortoise friendly manner and that tortoises will be protected there.

**QUESTIONS? Call GTCI at (352) 495-7449 or FAX (352) 495-7433**