

Communique

Edition 26 Summer 2009

Florida Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agents at Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc.

Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc. is a firm on the fore front of providing multi-faceted consulting services to its clients. We have recently expanded our capabilities by fulfilling the requirements set forth by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission. Recent changes to the protection status and mitigation requirements for the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) have been adopted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). These changes affect every level of potential gopher tortoise involvement from single-family home owners to major land developers, and from relatively small infrastructure improvement projects to the major roadway improvement and alignment projects. Of the recent changes, the most broadly reaching are the requirement to relocate all impacted gopher tortoises not otherwise able to be avoided, establishment of new mitigation contribution fees, and the creation of an authorized gopher tortoise agent permit.

About Us

Scheda is a DBE/WBE firm with more than 20 years of experience assisting clients with their protected species permitting needs and staff biologists have closely followed the evolving development of gopher tortoise management rules, regulations, and policy. Our staff biologists were some of the first authorized gopher tortoise agents in the area and are prepared to guide you and your project through the regulatory process in a way that best fits the needs of the project while, at the same time, following the guidelines set forth by the FWC for the continued conservation of this Florida species.



What's this all about?

On April 22, 2009 the FWC implemented the permitting changes described in the Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines following the uplisting of the gopher tortoise from a species of special concern to a threatened species. The new gopher tortoise permits substantially alter or replace all previous gopher tortoise permits by the FWC. In addition, new permits were established for gopher tortoise recipient sites, authorized gopher tortoise agents, and temporary exclusion of gopher tortoises for utility easement activities. Settlement permits, or permits issued after the conclusion of an enforcement case, have not been finalized and still fall under the previous rules.



Communique

Edition 26 Summer 2009

How does this affect me?

The biggest change under the new guidelines is the advent of the Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent. Gopher tortoises are still protected, as before, from impacts within a 25-foot radius of their burrow. More emphasis has been placed on excavation of gopher tortoises from their burrows where impacts to existing burrows cannot be avoided. Changes to mitigation fees, the number of gopher tortoises relocations allowable under different permits, and requirements for mitigation banks are also addressed under the new guidelines. However, for the first time, participants in the gopher tortoise permitting process are being required to be experienced and approved by the FWC through an authorization process. This means that for most gopher tortoise relocation activities you will be required to have a FWC Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent on site. Some activities that do not require a permit will only be accepted if performed under the supervision of an authorized agent (for example, gopher tortoise surveys). Therefore, it is important to involve an Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent on projects with gopher tortoise concerns as soon as possible to avoid inadvertent impacts to gopher tortoises or costly delays.

How can Scheda help?

Scheda biologists are FWC authorized to assist you with your gopher tortoise permitting needs, including surveys, excavation of burrows, and relocation of gopher tortoises. We can complete your permitting needs, from start to finish, and advise you how to most appropriately plan for the presence of gopher tortoises on your property or within your project boundary.



*For more information contact an
Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent at
Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc.
today,*

Tampa
813.989.9600
Sarasota
941.373.1547
West Palm Beach
561.689.9198

www.scheda.com

