



Voluntary Best Management Practices for Solar Development Compatible with Conservation of Gopher Tortoises

Preliminary Site Evaluation

Determine if the land has potential habitat for gopher tortoises or other at risk species:

- Is the site located within the range of the gopher tortoise?
- Is the site adjacent to an existing protected area?
- Does the site have sandy and well-drained soils?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it is recommended that a preliminary survey for gopher tortoises and their burrows be conducted. Contact your state fish and wildlife agency for guidance and technical assistance about surveying and what to do if you find tortoises on the property.



**Alabama Department of
Conservation & Natural Resources**
(334)242-3469

<http://www.outdooralabama.com/gopher-tortoise>

**Georgia Department of Natural
Resources, Wildlife Resources
Division;** (770)761-3035 or (478)994-1438; www.georgiawildlife.org

**Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission, Gopher
Tortoise Management Program;**
(850)921-1030 or (850)921-1031
<http://MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise>

**Louisiana Department of Wildlife
and Fisheries, Natural Heritage Program**
(225)765-2809 or (225)765-2800; www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/louisiana-natural-heritage-program

Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Natural Heritage Program
(601) 576-6046; <https://www.mdwfp.com/seek-study/heritage-program/data-requests.aspx>

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division; (803)734-3886; <http://dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/herps/turtle.html>



Conservation Awareness

As solar energy investments come to the southeastern United States, there is growing need for conscientious development of utility-scale projects in a manner consistent with environmental protection. Often, lands that are undeveloped and being considered for solar arrays are native habitats for protected species and support other valuable ecological resources. In keeping with the environmental benefits of solar energy, we urge the solar industry to consider conservation when moving forward with projects. We believe this awareness should apply broadly to all energy development, not solar alone; however, as the newest and emerging source of green energy in the Southeast best management practices relevant to solar development are urgently needed.

The following resources provide Voluntary Best Management Practices for the solar industry to minimize and possibly avoid impacts to at-risk species and habitats, like the gopher tortoise and sandhills. It is important to note that some states, such as Florida, have regulatory requirements for impacts to gopher tortoises and other wildlife on sites proposed for solar farm development.

Principles for Responsible Solar Development

- Seek to minimize impacts to native habitats consistent with the positive environmental attributes of renewable energy.
- Awareness that foresight and timeliness in identifying and developing solar sites is critical to the industry's success.

Voluntary Best Management

- Attempt to avoid sites with species or habitats of concern and sites adjacent to existing protected areas.
- Consult with natural resource agencies before selecting undeveloped sites (see above).
- If it is not possible to avoid sites with species of concern, evaluate opportunities for mitigation and/or species relocation. Developing in native landscapes results in a net loss of habitat, mitigation options include contributing to protection of native habitat elsewhere.
- Evaluate options for fencing that allow for conservation corridors for wildlife.
- Participate in industry forums and workshops that promote conservation awareness.

Additional Resources

Gopher Tortoise Council: <http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org>

Longleaf Alliance: <http://www.longleafalliance.org/>

Orianna Society: <http://www.oriannesociety.org/eastern-indigo-snake-1>

Solar Energy Industries Association, Habitat Conservation Planning: www.seia.org/policy/power-plant-development/utility-scale-solar-power/habitat-conservation-planning

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) - Gopher Tortoise Species Profile:
http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=C044

Range-wide Conservation Strategy for the Gopher Tortoise:

<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/examples.html>

Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Gopher Tortoise:

<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/candidateconservation/examples.html>