

Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent Training Course Information



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COURSE DESCRIPTIONS AND PREREQUISITES

The courses described herein are designed to provide Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent training to professionals working in the fields of environmental consulting, natural resources management, conservation, or land planning.

Classes will focus on training and certification in six FWC- approved activity groupings: 1) Surveying; 2) Mark, Transport, Release; 3) Hand Shovel Excavation; 4) Live Trapping; 5) Bucket Trapping; and 6) Mechanical Excavation.

As deemed appropriate by FWC guidelines, once a student has passed the appropriate courses, then the training received can be used to satisfy necessary requirements to apply to become permitted as an Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent for those activities. They are designed to be delivered at a difficulty level equivalent to courses taught at an average state university, owing to the substantial amount of information needed to fully educate students in the topics expanded upon below as well as imparting the working skills required to successfully perform the activities in which students will be certified. Because (in most cases) passing these courses can be substituted for valuable field experience, it is important that the responsibility of providing these courses is taken seriously. Courses are rigorous and evaluation is thorough; these features are designed to prevent individuals from passing simply by paying a fee and attending.

Common Ground Ecology's goal is to provide a training that dramatically minimizes the likelihood that a student would conduct an activity in a manner that would unnecessarily harm or harass a gopher tortoise. Any student that does not pass the training or that passes and is certified by Common Ground Ecology may retake any of the courses that he/she has taken as a refresher training at no cost when an open enrollment course space is available.

Custom and infraction courses can be scheduled by contacting:
gophertortoise@commongroundecology.com

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AVAILABLE COURSES

(Note: Courses are grouped based on the typical student needs)

Group 1: Fundamental Understanding of Gopher Tortoises

Duration of in-person course: 4 hours, but can be customized for certain audiences

Course Included:

✓ **GT101: Ecology and Natural History of Gopher Tortoises**

Prerequisite: *None*

Topics: *Gopher tortoise evolution, distribution, morphology, demography, energetics, ecology and habitat characteristics, and burrow characteristics*

Certification Received: *Important prerequisite to enroll in subsequent sections*

Group 2: Basic Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent Course

Duration of in-person course: 2 days

Courses Included:

✓ **Fundamental Understanding of Gopher Tortoises, *plus***

✓ **GT102: Gopher Tortoise Permitting Process and Guidelines**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT101; or
3. Enrolled in GT101 concurrently

Topics: *FWC permitting Guidelines; FWC Online Permitting System; Proposals*

Certification Received: *None – important prerequisite to enroll in subsequent sections*

✓ **GT103: Gopher Tortoise Survey Techniques**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT102; or
3. Enrolled in GT102 concurrently

Topics: *Gopher tortoise survey methods; Creating Maps and using GIS/GPS*

Certification Received: *Letter Certifying Authorized Agent Training in Gopher Tortoise Surveys. Can be used to apply for an Authorized Agent Permit.*



Group 3: Intermediate Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent Training

Duration of in-person course: 4 days

Courses Included:

- ✓ **Basic Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent Courses, *plus***
- ✓ **GT104: Gopher Tortoise Capture Procedures**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT103; or
3. Enrolled in GT103 concurrently

Topics: *Gopher Tortoise Capture; Bucket Trap; Live Trap; Hand Shovel Excavation; Health Evaluation*

Certification Received: *Letter Certifying Authorized Agent Training in Gopher Tortoise Bucket trapping, Live trapping, and hand shovel excavation. Can be used to apply for an Authorized Agent Permit.*

- ✓ **GT105: Gopher Tortoise Marking, Transport, and Release**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT106; or
3. Enrolled in GT106 concurrently

Topics: *Gopher tortoise measuring and marking; Gopher Tortoise Transport, Holding and Release*

Certification Received: *Letter Certifying Authorized Agent Training in Gopher Tortoise Mark, Transport, and Release. Can be used to apply for an Authorized Agent Permit.*

- ✓ **GT106: Gopher Tortoise Recipient Sites**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT105; or
3. Enrolled in GT105 concurrently

Topics: *Gopher Tortoise Habitat; Assessing the Suitability of Potential Recipient Sites; Gopher Tortoise Diet and Reproduction; Recipient Site Permitting Requirements; Recipient Site Permit application on the FWC Online Permitting System*

Certification Received: *Important prerequisite to enroll in GT105 and 107.*



Group 4: Advanced Authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent Training

✓ **GT107: Mechanical Excavation of Gopher Tortoise Burrows**

Prerequisite:

1. An Authorized Agent Permit; or
2. Passing Grade in GT105; or
3. Enrolled in GT105 concurrently

Topics: *Backhoe Excavation Lecture – rules, penalties, and guidelines*

Certification Received: *Letter Certifying Authorized Agent Training in Mechanical Excavation of Gopher Tortoise Burrows. This letter can be used to reduce the number of burrows excavated/tortoises captured from 50/20 to 30/12 to apply for an Authorized Agent Permit.*