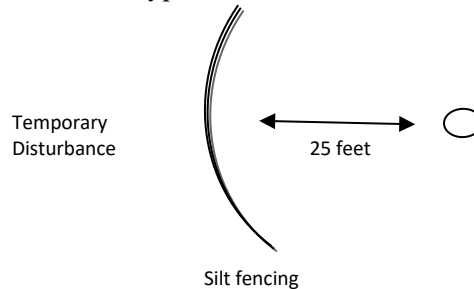


Gopher Tortoise Best Management Practices

Guidance for Establishment and Maintenance of a Buffer Zone

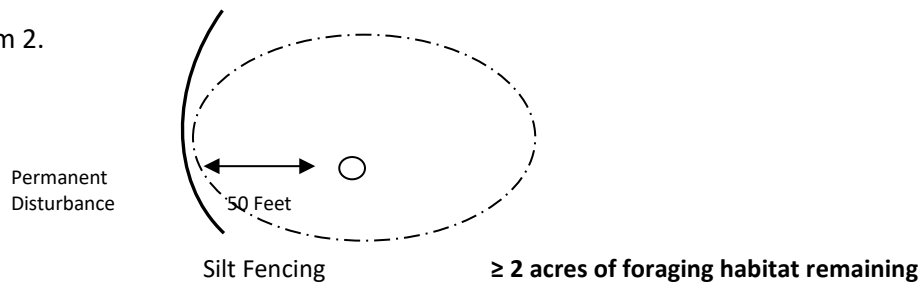
1. **Temporary or minor habitat disturbances:** (such as small road construction (neighborhood roads, log roads), pipeline or powerline construction, or timber harvest activities) A 25 foot buffer between work activities and all burrows will be established to prevent the collapse of burrows from construction equipment (see Diagram 1). Temporary barrier fencing (silt fence) will be installed for all appropriate activities and must be removed immediately upon project completion. Fencing should not be placed within 25 feet of burrows, should be buried 6-12 inches to prevent tortoises from pushing under the barrier fence, and will never completely enclose the tortoise burrow (i.e. tortoise should be allowed to travel freely away from construction activities). Fencing in general should be a minimum of 200 feet in length (100 feet each side of burrow), and preferably end in a wetland boundary, heavy timber stand, or other similar barrier that tortoises will not be inclined to enter. If such natural barriers do not exist, the ends of the silt fence should be turned toward the burrow to discourage the tortoise from walking around it. Additional analysis may be required if fencing will fragment a tortoise colony (2 or more active/inactive burrows within 600 feet of each other). Such factors to consider include the type, duration, and season of the proposed activity.

Diagram 1.



2. **Permanent or major habitat disturbances:** (such as residential or commercial development) Complete avoidance (i.e., no adverse effects) may be assumed when an undisturbed vegetated buffer is established and maintained around active/inactive burrows (colonies remain together). This undisturbed vegetated buffer will consist of two (2) acres of suitable foraging and burrowing habitat per tortoise, along with a minimum buffer width of 50 feet between the tortoise burrow and the permanent construction activity (i.e. house pad, parking lot, etc). A biological assessment, field evaluations, and other sources of information will be required to determine if buffer limits less than this are acceptable. Temporary barrier fencing may also need to be in place between the buffer edge and the proposed permanent construction activity, depending on the nature of the activity and the likelihood that tortoises may migrate into the construction area.

Diagram 2.



Potential Avoidance and Minimization Measures

1. Instruct work crews about the status of the tortoise and the need to protect its habitat.
2. Mark all areas to be avoided during construction activities.
3. Brief contractors on the need to avoid damaging the burrow area and the possible penalties for not complying with these requirements.
4. Onsite erect signs every 50 feet along the edge of the avoidance area with the following information: "This area is habitat of the gopher tortoise, a threatened species, and must not be disturbed. This species is protected by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Violators are subject to prosecution, fines, and imprisonment." The signs should be clearly readable from a distance of 20 feet, and must be maintained for the duration of construction.
5. If possible, activities within gopher tortoise occupied habitat should be planned to occur during the dormant season (i.e., October through April) when tortoises are least likely to be encountered above ground.