



TEXAS TORTOISE

Photo: Edd Paradise

The Texas tortoise (*Gopherus berlandieri*) is one of the four species of tortoises found in North America, and the only one living in Texas. It can be found throughout southern Texas and northeastern Mexico. Texas tortoises are characterized by a small shell size which reaches 8½ inches, cylindrical and columnar hind legs, and by the yellow-orange scutes (plates) on its carapace (upper shell). Unfortunately, Texas tortoises face many threats that affect their survivorship, including: habitat loss, illegal collection, roadside mortalities, predation and exotic pathogens. As a result, the Texas tortoise is a state-listed threatened species protected by Texas law, making it illegal to collect, possess, or harm a Texas tortoise. Violators may be subject to fines of \$273.50 per tortoise.



TEXAS TORTOISE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPS)

- 1) Hire a biologist that has or can obtain a Scientific Collecting Permit from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.
- 2) Texas Tortoise home range is from 5–10 acres in size. If a tortoise is located prior to ground disturbing activities, the tortoise should be moved as far from the proposed construction site as is possible, but within that 5–10 acre range.
- 3) For projects where the disturbance is linear (county and state roads and highways, pipelines, transmission lines) after tortoise removal, the area that will be disturbed during active construction and project specific locations should be fenced off to exclude tortoises and other reptiles. The exclusion fence should be constructed and maintained as follows:
 - a. The exclusion fence should be constructed with metal flashing or drift fence material.
 - b. Rolled erosion control mesh material should not be used.
 - c. The exclusion fence should be buried at least 6 inches deep and be at least 24 inches high.
 - d. The exclusion fence should be maintained for the life of the project and only removed after the construction is completed and the disturbed site has been revegetated.
- 4) Any open trenches should be covered over night or inspected every morning to ensure no tortoises or other reptiles have been trapped. Remove any wildlife that is trapped in the trench.
- 5) Avoid or minimize disturbing or removing downed trees, rotting stumps and leaf litter where feasible.
- 6) Apply hydromulch/seeding in areas for in areas for soil stabilization and re-vegetation of disturbed areas where feasible.

These BMPs are applicable to other state threatened and endangered reptile species (Texas horned lizard, Texas indigo snake, and reticulate collared lizard) that may occur in areas occupied by the Texas tortoise.

