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Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative



May 24, 2017

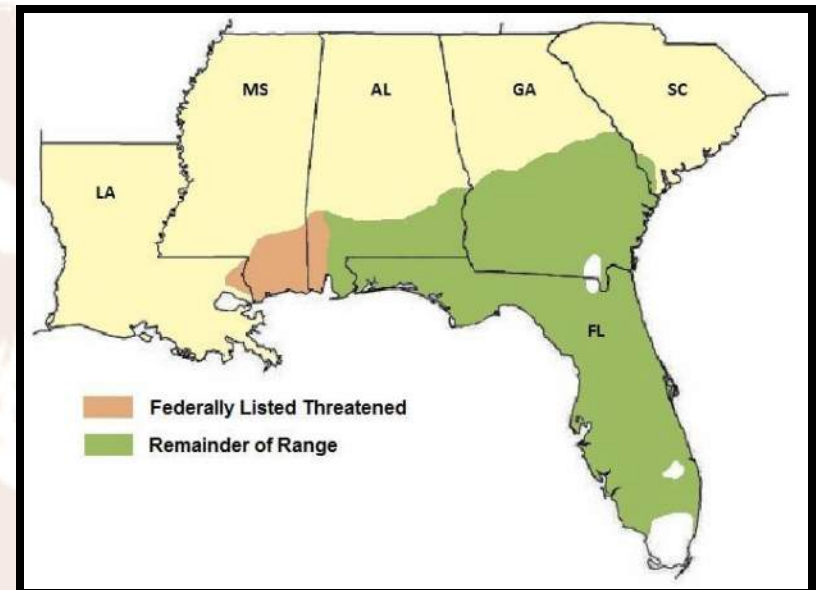
Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Division

Jon Ambrose

Gopher Tortoise Status



- State protected species
- Candidate for federal protection under Endangered Species Act
- Impacted by habitat loss and fragmentation
- Federal listing could result in economic impacts in Georgia




Gopher Tortoise Population Viability



- Criteria developed in 2013 by working group
- Viable = Likely to persist for 100+ years
- Minimum of 250 adults
- Minimum density of 0.4/ha (1 per 6.2 acres)
- Population may cross property boundaries

June 2013

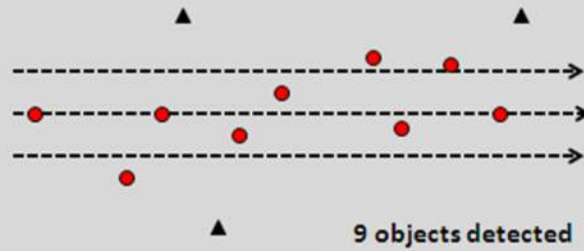
Range-Wide Conservation Strategy for the Gopher Tortoise



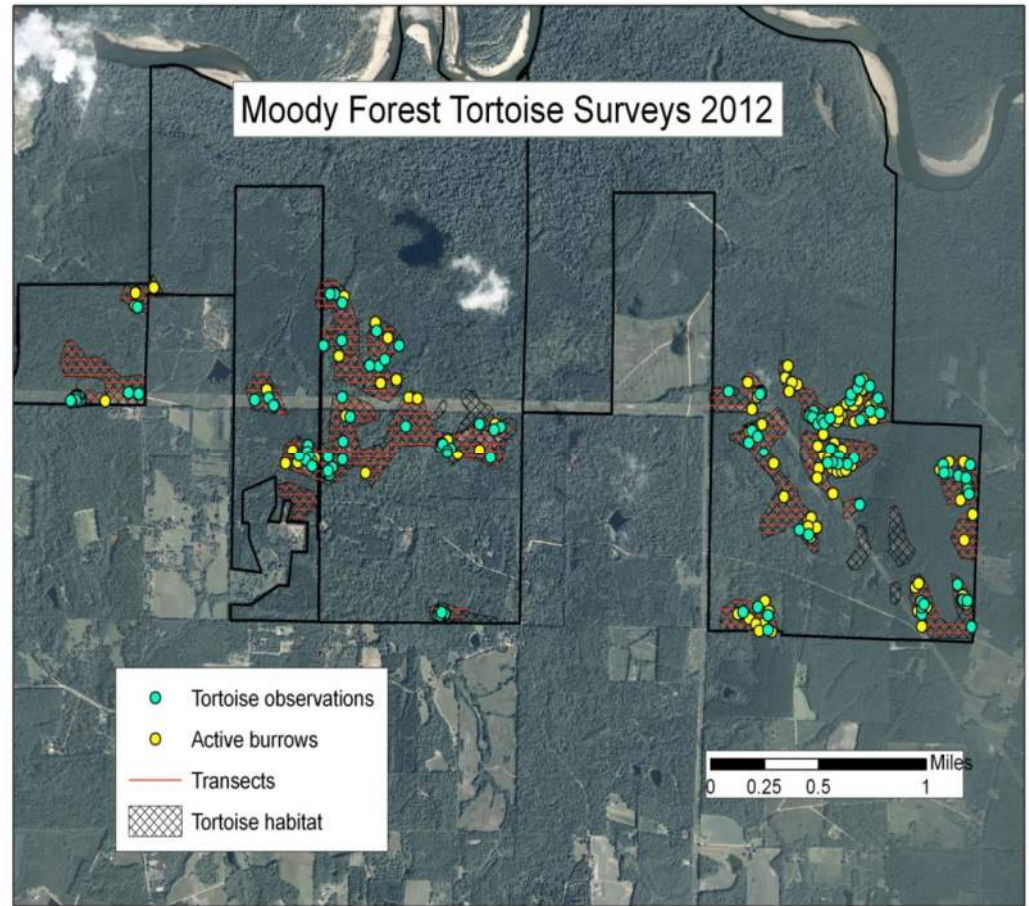
Common Name: Gopher Tortoise
Scientific Name: *Gopherus polyphemus*
Listing Status and Date:
Threatened: (populations west of the Mobile and Tombigbee Rivers in AL, MS.

Gopher Tortoise Surveys

Three Observers



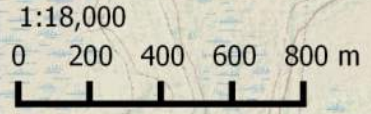
- Object observed
- ▲ Object missed



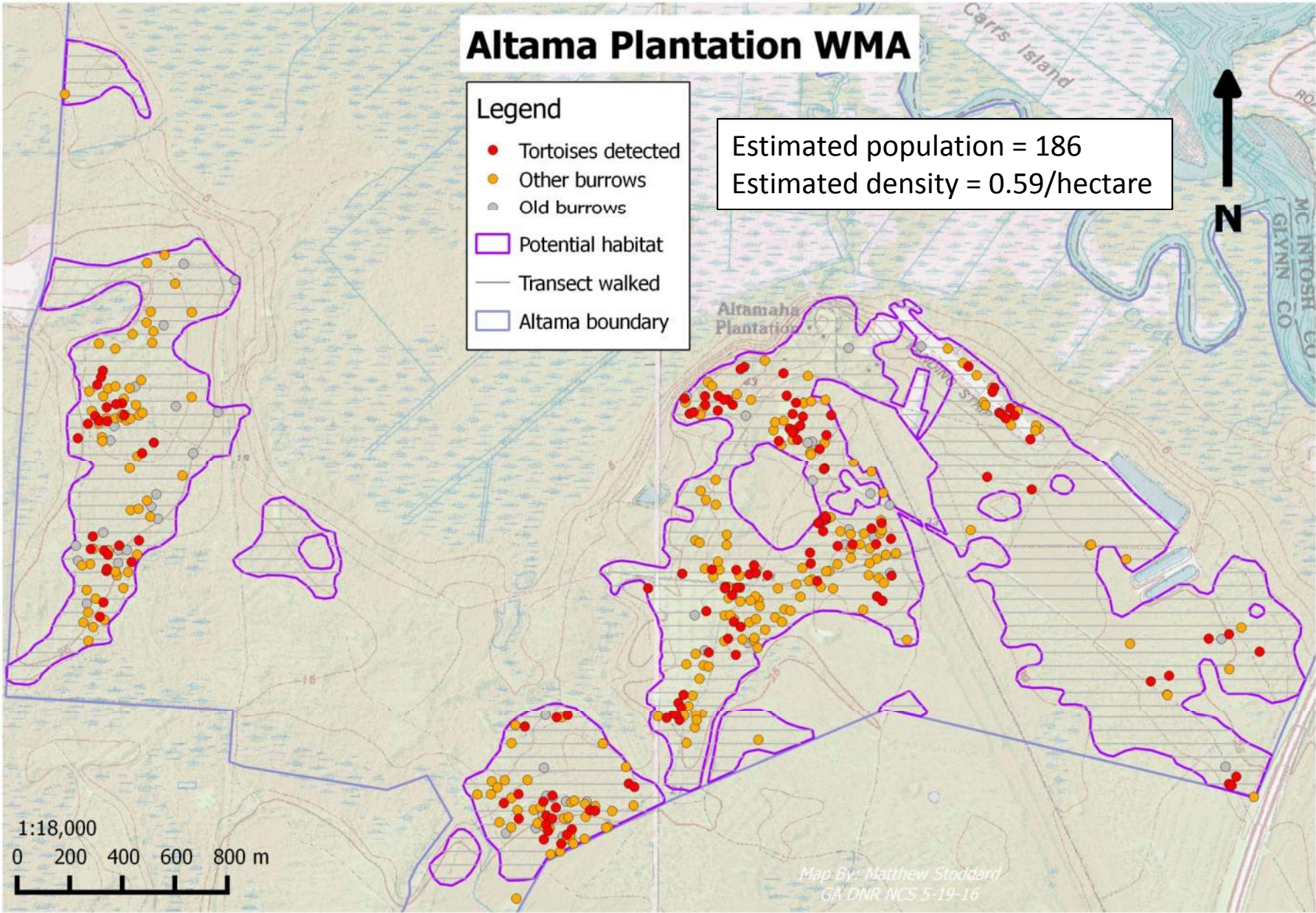
Altama Plantation WMA

- Legend**
- Tortoises detected
 - Other burrows
 - Old burrows
 - Potential habitat
 - Transect walked
 - Altama boundary

Estimated population = 186
Estimated density = 0.59/hectare



Map By: Matthew Stoddard
GA DNR NCS 5-19-16



Gopher Tortoise Populations as Determined by Line Transect Distance Sampling, 2008-17

Georgia DNR/Jones Center Completed Survey Sites

Ownership

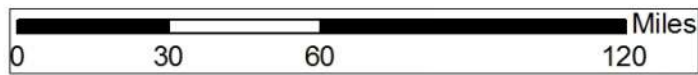
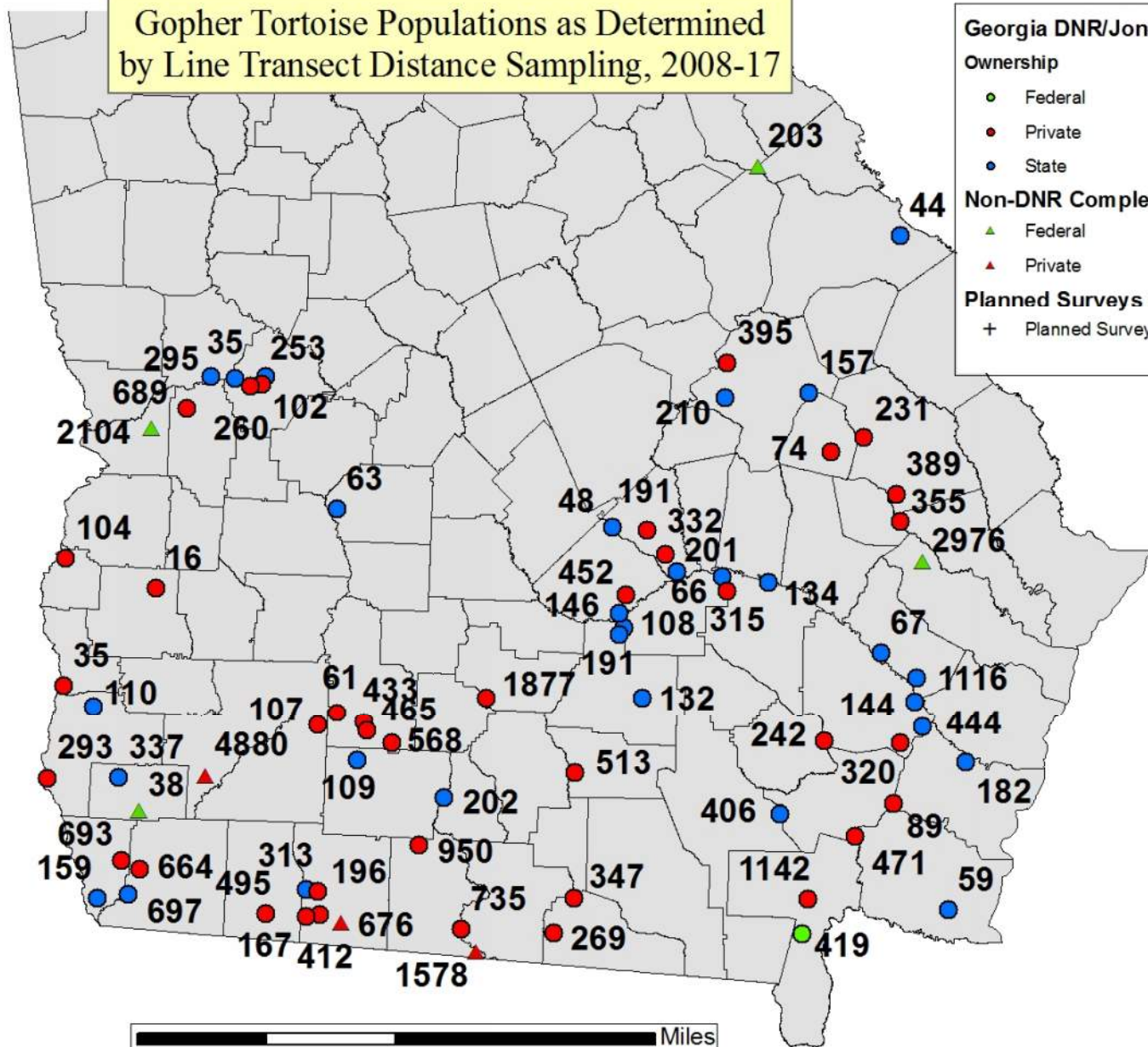
- Federal
- Private
- State

Non-DNR Completed Survey Sites

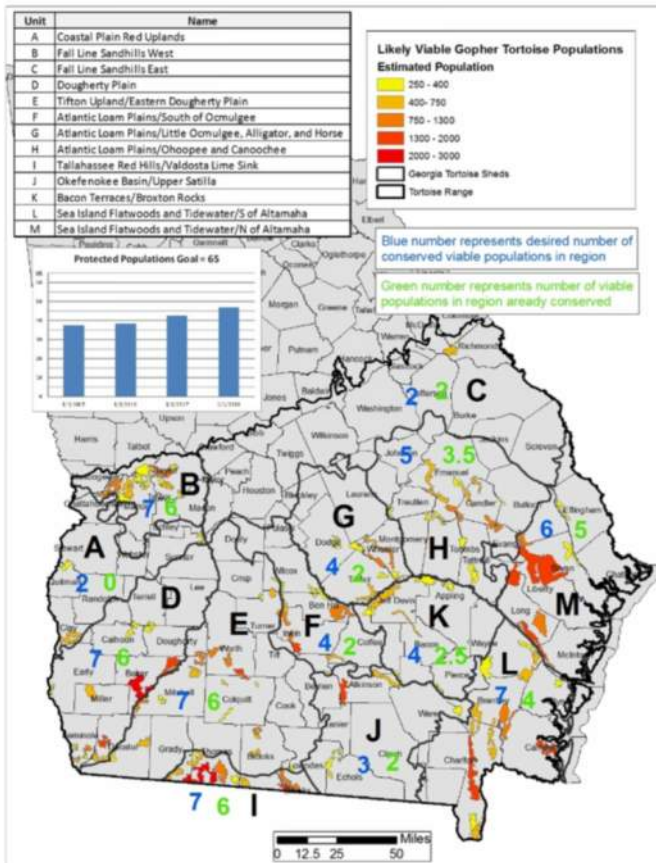
- ▲ Federal
- ▲ Private

Planned Surveys or In Process

- + Planned Surveys/In Process



Progress to Date



- Currently at 47 protected populations, up from 36 at the inception of this effort in 2015. Goal is 65 populations.
- Conserved 46,214 acres
- Bobolink Foundation pledged \$5 million. If other partners can raise \$1.5 million, Bobolink will donate an additional \$1 million!

Voluntary Conservation Agreements



- Working Lands for Wildlife
- Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances
- Department of Defense Conservation Credit Strategy



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Working with Developers



- Partnering with Georgia Power, EMCs, USFWS, and Georgia Solar Energy Association on solar projects
- Encouraging early consultation with WRD and USFWS to avoid sensitive sites
- Coordinating tortoise rescues from development sites



Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative



- Provide permanent protection for at least 65 viable populations
- Work with private landowners to encourage conservation of gopher tortoise habitat
- Facilitate agreements to provide off-site conservation credits and funding for habitat restoration
- Minimize and mitigate impacts from development projects
- **GOAL: Preclude federal listing of gopher tortoise**

Why?

