

What's Happening to Georgia's Gopher Tortoise?



Background: The forest is a complex ecosystem where trees, plants, and animals interact. Production of wood materials is Georgia's largest manufacturing industry. Additionally, the forest ecosystem supports animals that are becoming endangered because of habitat loss. The endangered gopher tortoise is Georgia's official state reptile and protection efforts to save the tortoise will not only benefit the tortoise, but many other species and the health of the long leaf pine forest ecosystem where the gopher tortoise lives. The gopher tortoise is classified as a threatened species in Georgia. The gopher tortoise is also a keystone species, which means its survival is important for hundreds of other animals' survival. For this reason, the tortoise is protected under state law.

Activity: The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division has hired you and your team on ecologists to help spread the word about the importance of protecting the threatened gopher tortoise. You will research and create a brochure about the gopher tortoise and its role in the Georgia pine forests. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Environmental Protection Division will use your brochure to educate the community about our state's official reptile.

Criteria: Base your research on the activities and lessons taught in class.