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**Notes From a Co-Chair****Terry Norton**

This year's annual meeting was hosted by Margaret Gunzburger and was a great success. Over 100 participants gathered at Adventures Unlimited in Milton, Florida for the 2007 GTC meeting. The meeting started Thursday night with a very well-attended business meeting. On Friday we enjoyed presentations from a wide variety of great speakers which really broadened the horizon of our meeting by discussing habitat management and unique species of the longleaf pine ecosystem. Saturday the meeting continued with contributed talks and posters. The location was beautiful and the food and company were great. We all enjoyed the crisp fall weather around the campfire each night. For the full 2007 schedule of speakers, visit <http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org/events.php>.

We would like to thank Mitch Lockhart for all of his hard work over the last two years. He has done an amazing job as Co-Chair.

Some of you may not know who I am and wonder why a veterinarian would be interested in serving as Co-Chair so I thought it might be helpful to provide you with some background information about myself. I received my DVM degree at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine and completed a post-DVM residency in Zoo and Wildlife Medicine at the University of Florida. After the residency, I focused on predominantly zoo based work and dabbled in free ranging wildlife. In 1989, I started to provide veterinary services for the Wildlife Conservation Society programs on St. Catherines Island, GA while still being based at other zoos. In 1997, I moved to Georgia and by 2000 I was full time at St. Catherines Island. Since that time my career has slowly evolved into a free ranging wildlife health focus. Chelonian veterinary care and conservation has always been a major passion of mine. The St. Catherines Island Wildlife health program has focused on a number of reptiles species including the gopher tortoise, alligator snapping turtle, Barbour's map turtle, diamondback terrapin, sea turtles, and eastern indigo snakes. One of the most satisfying components of this work is the interactions I have had with wildlife biologists and other professionals and integrating health into the overall management plans for native wildlife. The recently opened Georgia Sea Turtle Center (www.georgiaseaturtlecenter.org) has evolved from these programs and I am now spending half my time at the center.

I have always enjoyed attending the GTC meetings and interacting with a lot of very nice down to earth professionals. **(Cont. on next page)**

State Reports

Florida State Report 2007

Joan Berish

After being listed as a Species of Special Concern for the last 28 years, the gopher tortoise was reclassified as threatened by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) this fall; the revised status classification will become official in early November (8 Nov or shortly thereafter). In addition to approving the listing reclassification at their 12 Sept meeting, the Commissioners also gave a unanimous 'thumbs up' to the long-awaited gopher tortoise management plan. The plan was the result of intensive efforts by 2 FWC issue teams and a dedicated stakeholder advisory group. Boyd Blihovde, a former co-chair, represents GTC on this advisory group which includes a wide diversity of interests, ranging from humane organizations to the development industry. The collaboration of agency staff and stakeholders to create this blueprint for gopher tortoise conservation is unprecedented and has been highly commended. The first FWC tortoise issue team (dubbed "GT-1") of 21 members met in 2004; a smaller 11-person "GT-2" team convened in 2005 and worked with the stakeholders, who also first convened in 2005. Stakeholders and FWC staff will be hammering out the detailed permitting and relocation guidelines over the next 4-6 months. The timing is critical to assure that scientifically-based, user-friendly guidelines are in place to facilitate responsible, humane relocations during the 2008 tortoise activity season and beyond.

The management plan's overall conservation goal is to restore and maintain secure, viable populations of gopher tortoises throughout the species' current range in Florida. Specific objectives include increasing the amount of protected habitat; conducting appropriate vegetation management to maintain tortoise habitats (e.g., prescribed fire); restocking tortoises to protected, managed, suitable habitats where densities are low; and drastically decreasing tortoise mortality on lands proposed for development. Numerical targets for these objectives are given to help measure progress. A suite of conservation actions are proposed for the plan's first 5 year cycle: general categories include regulations, permitting, law enforcement, local government coordination, habitat preservation and management, population and disease management, landowner incentives, education and outreach, and monitoring and research. An adaptive management approach will be used to implement the many actions proposed in the plan, allowing easy adjustments to policies, guidelines, and techniques, based on observed conservation benefits/detriments and sound science. The plan is available on the agency website: MyFWC.com, under Imperiled Species, Management Plans.

This year is also noteworthy for an *interim* incidental take policy that will greatly reduce tortoise entombment associated with urban development until the new permitting system outlined in the plan can be implemented. Under this policy, all incidental take permits issued for applications received by the FWC after 30 July 2007 will include a provision requiring developers to relocate tortoises out of harm's way. Although this relocation requirement does not apply to existing incidental take permits, the FWC is contacting those developers holding current permits to determine the status of construction, and, if development has not yet occurred, FWC staff will encourage developers to relocate tortoises and will expedite the review process to facilitate such relocations.

Notes from a Co-Chair (cont.)

I am very excited to serve as Co-Chair over the next two years. My primary duty over the next 10 months is to organize the 2008 annual meeting. We have selected Jekyll Island as the site for the meeting and the Georgia Sea Turtle Center has agreed to assist with the event. We should have more details for you in the next few months regarding the meeting.

Mississippi Report 2007

Tom Mann

At our annual meeting, Dick Franz told an enthralled audience that Gopherus has been burrowing in the southeastern U.S. for at least 30 million years, but in Mississippi tortoise viability is more tenuous than ever. The torrent of federal funds associated with various aspects of 'Katrina Recovery' has hastened the pace of permanent usurpation of tortoise and gopher frog habitat (and as I said last year, it is still open season on wetlands), and has compromised proper management of forest lands not destroyed outright. Shortly after Katrina passed through, Mark Bailey presciently observed that this would come to pass, based on his experiences with hurricane recovery .

Threats to Mississippi tortoises include fire suppression and mis-management, predation of eggs and/or small juveniles, habitat conversion to industrial, suburban/urban development, roads, sand pits, and agriculture; invasion of cogon grass; and continued predation of tortoises by humans dwelling in certain pockets of ignorance/insularity. Fire exclusion and inappropriate burning are probably the most significant problems, though the impact of various habitat conversions is increasing rapidly and threats vary by region. Also, since some habitat conversion is irreversible, these tracts will be lost in perpetuity even should we come to our collective senses in some future golden era. Habitat conversion and road proliferation greatly complicates or even prevents fire management, destroys or fragments habitat, leads to vehicle-caused tortoise mortality, facilitates development of flanking tortoise habitat, and expedites fire ant and cogon grass invasion. At least six tortoises injured on roads ended up at rehab centers or veterinary clinics this year, and most were euthanized.

A disturbing recent trend is the use of aerially applied herbicide instead of fire (or as site-prep for fire) for vegetation management on industrial forest lands. This year I visited one such site, a private sandhill tract which had been sprayed, post-harvest, with One-Step in June to create a 'brown up' intended to facilitate a burn (no earlier than six-weeks post-herbicide application) prior to a replanting with longleaf. While longleaf re-establishment is laudable, use of a spray combination that effectively kills all of the herbaceous plants for an entire growing season denies tortoises food.

In previous years, sandhills got something of a pass, save for longleaf removal (and sometimes even sand), as their excessively-well drained soils didn't lend themselves to agriculture. Thus many sandhills have served as de facto Arks for species with a predilection for xeric habitats. But now, armed with new technologies, we have returned to subvert the formerly useless parcels to 'higher' uses. Application of fertilizer and herbicide permits conversion of nutrient-challenged, sparsely vegetated (but biologically diverse) sandhill tracts to dense, near-monocultures of off-site species. Here and there in Mississippi, sandhills are being transformed into arable land better suited to conventional agriculture via the application of petroleum industry drilling wastes, a procedure with the Orwellian name "land farming". This slurry of drilling muds adds some plant nutrients to the soil, but more importantly improves the water holding and fertilizer retention capacity at these previously excessively well-drained sites. Sandhills subject to this makeover may grow better grass, cows, and watermelons. However, fire ant infestations may not be far behind, leaving an uncertain future for Mississippi's best tortoise nurseries and Florida Harvester Ant refugia. For more information on land farming, check the following link: <http://web.ead.anl.gov/dwm/techdesc/land/index.cfm>

In Katrina's wake, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has bestowed 33 million dollars upon the Mississippi Development Authority/Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality to develop sewage infrastructure in the six coastal counties to accommodate/encourage an inland building boom. Installation of this infrastructure, and construction of associated development, will negatively affect thousands of acres of tortoise habitat. Biologists with the Jackson, MS, Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Will McDearman, David Felder, Ray Aycock, Sabrina Chandler, Shauna Ginger, Gil Ray, Randy Browning, Kathy Lunceford, and Paul Necaie) in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (represented by me), is feverishly working to develop guidelines for a tortoise mitigation banking system to deal with the tortoises to be displaced by these developments. Two private entities have shown interest in establishing such banks. It should be remembered though, regardless of the quality of the banking system that emerges from this planning, we will still be party to the permanent closure, with respect to tortoise habitation, of thousands of acres of habitat formerly occupied by this species in Mississippi.

State Reports

Mississippi Report 2007 (cont.)

This may not seem like such a big deal to Floridians, who have paved over tens of thousands of tortoises, more than remain in the area of Federal listing. Ron Concoby's crews have probably moved more tortoises and gopher frogs from phosphate mine sites in Florida than remain on all private lands in Mississippi. But here on the edge of the tortoise's range there is a comparative scarcity of deep sands, and we cannot be so profligate with our remaining populations. If the 'Trail of Tears' approach to tortoise conservation is really the best our culture can do, it reflects a short-sighted, collective failure to properly appraise the value of our biological 'commons', and the lack of political will necessary to do other than continue to discount the future.

Research (Information provided by researchers and edited as necessary)

1) Baseline hatching success in priority soils on the Chickasawhay Ranger District of the DNF. Researchers: Shea Hammond and Dr. David Beckett (University of Southern Mississippi). Hatching success of nests protected, in situ, from vertebrate predators was evaluated. In 2007, 300 active burrows were searched for nests on a 72-96 hour rotation. Forty-four nests were discovered across 7 discrete sites. Hatching success in 2007 was 40.60%. Partitioned by soil type, 2007 success was as follows: Priority (n=18, mean= 50.71%), Suitable (n=16, mean=46.10%), Marginal (n=10, mean = 13.58%). In 2006 and in 2007 nesting success was strongly bimodal, with peak numbers of nests with no success or with 100% success. A high percentage of eggs which fail to hatch contain late-term embryos; an explanation for this is not apparent.

2) Hatching success on well-drained vs. excessively well drained soils. Researchers: Thomas Smith (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory), Dr. Carl Qualls) Joshua Ennen, Danna Baxley, Will Selman, Thomas Mohrman, and Lauren Caviezel (University of Southern Mississippi). Tortoise eggs from freshly deposited clutches were moved into man-made nests for purposes of determining baseline fertility levels and for assaying the comparative merits of well-drained (suitable) soils and excessively well-drained (priority) soils as incubation, hatching, and emergence media. Temperature, moisture, and gas exchange conditions (oxygen and carbon dioxide levels) in these experimental nests were monitored throughout incubation.

Sixteen clutches containing a total of 81 eggs were excavated and used for experiments. These yielded a total of 48 hatchlings. Two of these clutches were found too late to be moved, so were left in place to monitor hatching (7 of the 9 eggs produced hatchlings). Each of the other 14 clutches was split among experimental paired nests in sandy versus high-clay aprons. A total of 62 eggs were placed in these experimental nests. Thirty-seven eggs hatched successfully. For clutches with an odd number of eggs, one egg was removed and incubated in the laboratory and used to take measurements of metabolic rates (oxygen consumption and CO₂ production). Ten eggs were incubated in the lab (one of which was cracked, apparently during oviposition), and of these, 5 hatched. Hatchlings were either given to the Camp Shelby headstart project, or were released at the burrow where the egg was found.

3) Headstarting Project. Researcher: Matt Hinderliter (The Nature Conservancy, Camp Shelby Tortoise Biologist) Camp Shelby Field Office (CSFO), Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center (CSJFTC) A predator-proof enclosure was built on CSJFTC, and 31 hatchlings were released into starter burrows within the enclosure in early October 2006. One-third of the hatchlings will be fitted with transmitters and returned to their source sites each fall for three years. Data to be compared among juveniles will include: 1) growth; 2) home range; 3) burrow use and construction; 4) movement patterns; and 5) cause and extent of mortality. In 2007, 70 gopher tortoise eggs were collected in the field in May and June and artificially incubated at CSFO. Total hatching success was 70% (49 out of 70 eggs). This is by far the best hatching percentage ever observed at Camp Shelby. An additional 17 hatchlings were obtained from a University of Southern Mississippi study (N = 11) and from the field (N = 6), for a total of 66 hatchlings. These hatchlings came from sites all across Camp Shelby. All were measured, photographed, PIT tagged, and released into starter/natural burrows within the headstarting enclosure.

Ten of the yearling tortoises released as hatchlings into the headstarting pen in October 2006 were recaptured, re-measured, fitted with radio-transmitters, and released into Training Area 44 (Camp Shelby) on September 26 & 27, 2007. All ten dug at least one burrow, and as of October 29, 2007 were all thought to still be alive (32 days). Of the 31 hatchlings released in October 2006, one is known to have died on 17 August 2007 of unknown causes. This headstarting study will provide a better understanding of the survivorship and behaviors of the younger age classes, and lead to a more complete conservation strategy that addresses tortoise protection from egg to adult. If recruitment is significantly depressed, headstarting may prove an essential technology permitting bridging of the recruitment gap until the factor(s) responsible for the recruitment deficit can be satisfactorily addressed.

4) Monitoring of tortoise activity (spatially and temporally) at Camp Shelby. Researchers: David Delaney, Joe Hackler, Blair Madden, and Tom Radzio (all of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Construction Engineering Research Lab). As part of the US Army Corps of Engineers Construction Engineering Research Laboratory (USACE-CERL) project involving automated telemetry of gopher tortoises at five sites on the Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center (CSJFTC), in 2006 sixty adult tortoises were trapped, measured, fitted with radio-transmitters, fitted with Tidbit temperature loggers on the underside of the rear marginal scute, and fitted with light loggers on the carapace. Field work for this project ended in early October 2007; all study animals were trapped again and all equipment was removed. Results from this project will provide extremely detailed (and previously undocumented) information on daily and seasonal activity patterns, social interactions, home range, disturbance (including military) response, and inter-specific interactions.

5) Genetic population structure. Researcher: Rachel Wallace (University of New Orleans). Using nasal flushes and 2 cc blood samples, genetic population structure will be assessed via mitochondrial and nuclear microsatellite markers, and the relationship between tortoises and the pathogen *Mycoplasma agassizii* will be evaluated. In 2007, 18 tortoises were sampled on the Marion County Wildlife Management Area (MCWMA) and 12 on the Chickasawhay Ranger District (CRD) of the DeSoto National Forest (DNF). Two of the MCWMA animals were positive for *M. agassizii* exposure, and all of the CRD tortoises were positive. ELISA tests were negative for tortoises sampled at Little Florida in 2006. Gene flow between tortoises in the southern and northern portions of the DNF is evident. However, the Little Florida population of the DNF appears to be genetically distinct from other populations in Desoto, and in fact seems more similar to the sampled Louisiana population. No tortoise ticks were observed on any of the tortoises sampled (this was true of all tortoises handled by researchers and relocation consultants this year with the sole exception of tortoises sampled by Josh Ennen at the Wiggins airport).

6) Genetic analysis to identify genetic bottlenecks. Researcher: Josh Ennen and Dr. Carl Qualls (University of Southern Mississippi). Trapping and blood collection netted a total of 140 individual DNA samples from Mississippi tortoises at 10 different sites. DNA samples were also collected from 24 tortoises in Alabama, and 30 in Florida, yielding a total of 194 blood samples in 2007. *Amblyomma tuberculatum* (gopher tortoise tick), a species of special concern in Mississippi (known from only four sites), was collected at the Wiggins Airport.

7) DeSoto National Forest priority soil tortoise surveys. Mark Bailey, Jeff Holmes, and crew headed out into the wilds of the DeSoto National Forest to count and map all tortoise burrows in the priority soils thereof. Their intrepid team has completed transect work, but is still georeferencing flagged burrow localities.

8) Mitigation Bank Candidate/Florida Harvester Ant surveys. I visited 24 sandhill sites in Lamar, Pearl River, Stone, Harrison, Perry, and Jackson Counties to ground-truth potential mitigation bank sites, test speculations about the superiority of priority soils for tortoise recruitment, and survey for Florida Harvester Ants, recently rediscovered on the mainland of Mississippi after a hiatus of approximately 70 years. All but five of the sites were on private land. Only one of the sandhills was in good condition in terms of community structure. The remainder were underburned (if burned at all), and were degraded by various combinations of overgrowth of brush and hardwoods, sand pits, and/or dog-hair stockings of loblolly. Yet tortoises persist at each site, though generally in small numbers, and often in anthropogenic clearing. Small tortoise burrows generally comprised a higher percentage of the total burrow population than I have observed on the suitable soils on which most tortoises occur in Mississippi. Only 11 of the sites supported Florida Harvest Ants (*Pogonomyrmex badius*), and generally no more than one or two mounds were observed per site, with a maximum of five.

9) DeSoto National Forest- Habitat restoration has begun on a number of priority soil sites inhabited by tortoises on the DeSoto Ranger District. Hand-sprayed herbicide is being used to thin selected hardwoods and shrubs present in excessive densities, probably an artifact of the prevalence of dormant season burning regimes, but in some instances due to or exacerbated by release accompanying removal of all or most pines.

Mississippi Report 2007 (cont.)

10) Relocations. On-site relocations at two pipeline projects have been conducted in 2007 by Wendell Neal and his subcontractors. It is evident from monitoring that the tortoises have fine-scaled memory of the locations of widely-distributed burrows. Chuck Walters conducted on-site relocations of three tortoises at two highway right-of-way sites, of nine tortoises at a construction site adjoining Hwy 67, and remote relocation of three tortoises from an industrial park in Purvis. All three of these tortoises had positive ELISA tests, and have not been released from enclosures on the recipient site pending test results for tortoises already present on the site. To date, no positive animals in MS have been symptomatic for URTD. Tortoise waifs continue to materialize at sites well beyond the natural range of this species in Mississippi. The 16 lb female found in Senatobia in 2006 was relocated to a patch of excessively well-drained soil on the Old Fort Bayou Wetland Mitigation Bank by me, as was a male found running track at Pearl High School during September. Another male found on Hwy 49 somewhere in the vicinity of McHenry, and brought to Pearl by a well-intentioned albeit ignorant fellow, was relocated to Little Florida on the DNF by me.

Seeking Invertebrates

Dale Jackson

As the state natural heritage program, the Florida Natural Areas Inventory tracks biological information and specific occurrence data for more than 1000 species of rare plants and animals, including nearly 470 invertebrates. Although our invertebrate efforts have always lagged for lack of dedicated staff and funding, we have begun to rectify this the last two years thanks to a State Wildlife Grant obtained through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. With more than 300 species, invertebrates known from gopher tortoise burrows comprise an important component of our biodiversity. Because the precise distributions of most are poorly known, we are now soliciting specimens and data from anyone who works with tortoises. Although we are most interested in Florida specimens, we will also accept those from other states. Attached is a one-page description of how to collect, handle, and send specimens. We thank all persons who are willing to help contribute to scientific knowledge and potentially conservation of this fauna.

Beetle commensals are associated with tortoise dung deposits in the burrows and are quite small, with the largest reaching up to 1 cm in length and most of them being much less than that (see Figure 1). Dung deposits and some of the surrounding soil can be put into zip lock bags and stored in coolers for future sorting. Beetles may also be present near burrow entrances, and scooping some soil from inside the burrow mouth and examining it closely may be productive. Any visible beetles can be placed in small containers such as vials, film canisters or small zip locks for temporary storage in the field. They may be picked up using fingers, springy forceps or a dampened artist's paintbrush.



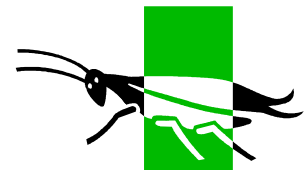
Figure 1: Approximate size of a medium-sized gopher tortoise commensal beetle in comparison to a penny. Some other commensals are about half this size.

Preservation:

Most arthropods may be killed and preserved in one of two ways. Seventy percent isopropyl alcohol, which is commonly available at pharmacies as rubbing alcohol, can be used to kill and preserve specimens in airtight containers such as film canisters. Specimens may also be killed by freezing and stored in a freezer with care taken so that they are not crushed, such as within individual zip lock bags inside a plastic food container. The latter method is preferable for moths.

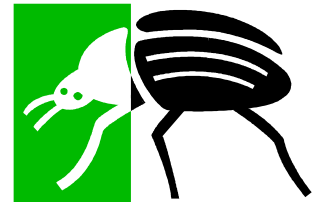
**Labeling:**

A paper label should be included INSIDE the container with the specimen(s). Please do not write information on the outside of bags or vials, as this may become illegible or lose its association with the specimens by becoming detached. The label should be typed or written on good quality paper or cardstock. If a printer is used, an inkjet printer that has alcohol-insoluble ink is best, although laser printers are adequate. Labels may also be handwritten with alcohol-insoluble ink, such as Rapidograph or Micron Pigma pens, or using pencil (Note that most pens, including “permanent” markers, usually have alcohol-soluble ink and are not suitable for labels). As much locational and other information as possible should be included. Please spell out dates using at least a three letter abbreviation for the month rather than a Roman numeral or number.



A sample of ideal information:

USA, Florida, Marion County, Ocala National Forest, Compartment 58, Stand 2834, 29.263993°N, 81.778464°W. 3 September 2007. Collected by JJ Smith and JK Doe. Found inside mouth of an active 30 cm wide gopher tortoise burrow in sand pine scrub habitat.

**Packaging:**

The best method to mail most insects is to wrap them gently in paper toweling that has been dampened with rubbing alcohol. They can then be placed inside a small container such as a vial, film canister or small zip lock. Do not use any more alcohol than is absorbed by the toweling, as this may cause problems with leakage or issues related to flammability. The separate containers can then be put in multiple zip locks, one inside the other inside the other, to prevent any possible leakage. Moths should be gently packed in tissues or cotton with no alcohol.

**Mailing and contact information:**

David Almquist, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, 1018 Thomasville Rd, Suite 200-C, Tallahassee, FL 32303.

Email: dalmquist@fnai.org

Phone (850) 224-8207 x223

Tortoise Meets Governor

Margaret Gunzburger



A group of tortoise conservationists, and a hatchling tortoise, met with Florida Governor Charlie Crist in April 2007 to discuss the new FFWCC gopher tortoise management plan and the issue of previously issued incidental take permits which are still valid after the state ceased issuing new incidental take permits in July 2007. Pictured, left to right are: Jennifer Hobgood (Humane Society of the US), Diana Sawyer-Crane (Governor's Aide), MC Davis (Conservationist, owner of Nokuse Plantation, and winner of the 2006 GTC Auffenberg and Franz Conservation Award), Governor Charlie Crist, Matthew Aresco (Director of Nokuse Plantation), and Rebecca Eagen (Public representative to FFWCC gopher tortoise stakeholders group). The small tortoise the governor is holding was one of over 1,200 tortoises relocated to Nokuse Plantation in 2007.

2007 Education Report

Laura Wewerka

The education committee has some exciting projects on the horizon! Our environmental education grant has been renamed to honor an amazing and dedicated environmental educator who worked towards teaching thousands of people the importance of gopher tortoises and all natural systems. Donna J Heinrich, who died this past year, will be remembered by both the grant and the conservation/education award. The first recipient of the Donna J. Heinrich environmental education grant is the Chinsegut Nature Center in Brooksville, Florida. The money will be used to develop an interpretive gopher tortoise trail.

Hopefully I'll be able to share pictures of the trail and educational signs at the next annual meeting.

We are well on our way to having a new brochure entitled "Living with Tortoises". This will be a full color brochure with lots of pictures and hints for home/land owners on simple things they can do to help tortoises living in their areas. A part of this project will include having additional information on our website, such as suggested native plants that might be added to the landscape. I hope to have a few thousand brochures printed by January, as well as a PDF for the website.

Do you remember the book *Gopher Tracks*, that GTC had reprinted and distributed to public school libraries throughout the range of the tortoise? Well, the book has been out of print for a few years now, but we have obtained permission to reprint it! If that wasn't exciting enough, the GTC board voted to match up to \$5,000 towards printing and distribution! To kick it off, we almost raised \$800 at the silent auction, but I have a long way to go. I'm working out the details, but hope to raise funds between now and the next annual meeting (October 2008) and then have the books printed. As before, I plan on providing the books gratis, but this time I believe we will offer them to environmental educators and nature centers. Once the details are worked out I'll be sending out an email to let you know how you can help.

And finally, regarding our regular tortoise brochure, *The Gopher Tortoise, a Species in Decline*, the text has been updated and the brochure has been reprinted. I'm now working with George Heinrich to see if we can get them, the GTC organizational brochure and the *Minimizing Conflict with Venomous Snakes* brochure (check it out on our website) distributed to Florida state parks and county extension offices. We hope to secure funding and complete this in early 2008. After that I want to tackle the rest of the tortoise's range. From all the requests I get, I know that these brochures are quite popular and hopefully we'll be able to get the word out to new educators that they are available.

As always, I want to thank the membership for their continued support in the Council's educational projects.

Tortoises now Threatened in Florida

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*), is hereby declared to be threatened, and shall be afforded the protective provisions specified in this subsection. No person shall take, attempt to take, pursue, hunt, harass, capture, possess, sell or transport any gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) or parts thereof or their eggs, or molest, damage, or destroy gopher tortoise burrows, except as authorized by Commission permit or when complying with Commission approved guidelines for specific actions which may impact gopher tortoises and their burrows. A gopher tortoise burrow is a tunnel with a cross-section that closely approximates the shape of a gopher tortoise. Permits will be issued based upon whether issuance would further management plan goals and objectives.

New LEEF Website Launched

Fred Weichmann

The League of Environmental Educators in Florida (LEEF), Inc., is committed to environmentally educating Florida's citizens. LEEF provides a network for awareness, communication and growth about Florida's natural environment. The mission of LEEF is to promote environmental education in Florida at all levels and through a variety of methods and resources. The objectives include: To promote community-based support for environmental issues. To support positive government action on environmental issues. To increase community involvement with the environment through education. To facilitate communication among environmental educators. To use education as a change mechanism toward a society that lives on renewable resources. Check out their new website at: www.leef-florida.org

Newsletter of The Gopher Tortoise Council

Directory of 2008 Gopher Tortoise Council Officers,
Committee Chairs, and State Representatives
Please view the GTC website (below) for contact information

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South Carolina

Steve Bennett
Tracey Tuberville

The Tortoise Burrow

<http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org>

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