



# 2016 Gopher Review General Process Information

UPDATED: November 2, 2016

## SITE REVIEW SEASON IS CLOSED

You may submit a permit application anytime. Applications are prescreened to see if projects can be excluded from gopher review. Gopher reviews are conducted between June 1 and October 31.

This document outlines the 2016 gopher site-screening process. The 2017 process will be posted in June 2017.

### STEP 1: Find out if a Property Requires Gopher Review

Email a property address to the Permit Assistance Center ([permit@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:permit@co.thurston.wa.us)) and ask staff to look it up on a County soils map. Soils are the main screening tool for possible gopher presence. The County receives more than 4,000 permit applications each year. Typically fewer than about 10 percent require review.

- Properties on or near gopher soils get up to three site visits with a minimum of 30 day separation between visits. Last visit must be in September or October.
- Gopher reviews are NOT required for interior remodels, or other excluded project types. Staff will let you know if your property or project type is excluded from gopher review.
- Timeline: Expect a reply to your email about this topic within five business days.

### STEP 2: Submit a Permit Application in Order to Get a Gopher Review

If gopher review is required, you must submit a permit application before the County will conduct site reviews for gophers. Which application is right for you?

- **Submit a building permit or land-use application** if your project is planned, drawn, and ready to permit. Staff conduct a full application review, including site visits for gophers by County and USFWS staff, with no additional fees for the gopher review. Permit application fees vary by project type, size and location. Ask staff about your project.
- **Submit an 'Other Administrative Action' application** if you only want to know whether or not the property has gophers/gopher habitat. Project plans are not required, but approximate drawings are helpful. This is ONLY a gopher review, not a permit review process or a review of other critical areas. Determination typically expires a year after it is made. Fee is \$177 per parcel.
- Timeline: See 'TIMELINES' section below for details.



### STEP 3: How to Prepare a Property for a Site Visit

- Mow tall Scotch broom after applying. Mowing instructions vary by season. Get details at [www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting), select 'Gopher Review Process.'
- Remove piles of debris and dangerous materials.
- Expect a call: Reviewers attempt to contact applicants/owners before visits. A site visit will still occur if staff is not successful reaching anyone.
- **Do not clear or grade the property or conduct any earth disturbing activities.**

### STEP 4: What Happens During a Site Visit?

- Staff will be respectful of property.
- They will not enter homes or buildings or disturb manicured lawns or gardens without permission.
- Staff may walk entire property observing soils, vegetation, and other land features.
- Staff may dig a hole using a small hand shovel to evaluate soils. Soil will be put back into the hole.
- Staff on site are conducting biological reviews only, they do not make permit decisions.

### STEP 5: When to Expect Information after a Site Visit

- **IF GOPHERS ARE NOT FOUND (This is the typical result for about 90% of reviewed sites.)**  
The County and USFWS will continue conducting the required number of site visits. The County will notify you *after the final site visit*, and after USFWS provides a determination letter to the County.\*
- **IF GOPHERS ARE FOUND**  
Applications will be processed in accordance with the County's Critical Areas Ordinance. To read the ordinance and learn more about it go to [www.ThurstonPlanning.org](http://www.ThurstonPlanning.org) and select 'Critical Areas Update' from the left.

**\*The USFWS determination letter is not permit approval to develop a property.** USFWS provides scientific technical assistance which the County uses in its biological review of sites, but USFWS guidance is not a permit decision. USFWS determination about gophers will be in effect until 10/31/2017. Submitting a County building or subdivision permit application before that date means no additional County gopher review is required. However, if gophers are found during construction, you should notify USFWS immediately.

### STEP 6: How to Get Information after a Site Visit

- Check online anytime: [www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting/permit-lookup.asp](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting/permit-lookup.asp).
- Contact your case manager if you submit a building or land-use application.
- Leave a message for the on-call planner if you apply for an 'Other Administrative Action.' Expect a call within two business days. The on-call number is (360) 754-3355 ext. 6299.



## Timelines: How long the process takes and what to expect

- Gopher site reviews are only conducted between June 1 and October 31, 2016.
- Site review schedules fill fast. In 2015, the County guaranteed site reviews for applications submitted before August 3. Those submitted after, did not get reviewed in 2015, but are scheduled for 2016.
- For 2016, the review schedule is full. The County will continue to conduct an internal in-office review of every new application that comes in. Those that are on the County and federal exclusions lists will not require a gopher review. Those with a low-risk for gophers – like manufactured home replacements in the same footprint, or building replacements or additions on top of an existing impervious surface – will get a visit from County staff. If the County determines the site is not likely gopher habitat, the gopher review for that property will be complete.

## Get more information or contact us

- Online**      [www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting) select ‘Gopher Review Process.’ Select ‘Subscribe to email list’ to have departmental notifications, including gopher review updates, emailed to you.
- By email**      [permit@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:permit@co.thurston.wa.us) include application number. We reply within two business days.
- In Person**      Thurston County Permit Assistance Center in the Thurston County Courthouse Complex  
2000 Lakeridge Dr. SW, Olympia, WA 98502, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of Building 1  
Office Hours: Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
- By Phone**      Permit Assistance Center message line (360)754-3355 ext. 7288 (Calls returned within 2 days).  
On-call planner (360) 754-3355 ext. 6299 (Calls returned within two business days).  
Please speak clearly. Provide a call back number and name. Leave address, parcel number or permit number. Let us know your questions. We’ll look up the answers and call you back.