

THURSTON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

2019 GOPHER REVIEW PROCESS

NOTICE OF IMPORTANT DATES

September 13 – If you need County staff to conduct a gopher review in 2019, submit a building permit application by **September 13**. Applications submitted after then are not guaranteed on-site review by County staff in 2019.

October 18 – If you hire your own consultant for gopher review, their completed report should be submitted by **October 18** to give staff time to review it before October 31.

THE PROCESS

- Building permit applications for projects on gopher soils may require on-site review to rule out the presence of Mazama pocket gophers.
- On-site visits start June 1 and end October 31.
- Properties are visited two times, 30 days apart.
- Site visits may be done by County staff for a fee, or you may hire a consultant. (Consultants must be trained by USFWS & follow County protocols).
- Reviewers walk the entire property examining the ground, soils and vegetation.
- Prepare for a site visit by mowing. Details online.

FAST FACTS

The County accepts permit applications year-round.

Applications are pre-screened in the office to determine if a project requires gopher review.

A County planner can answer questions anytime.

Mazama pocket gophers are protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act, which is one reason for this review process.

IF GOPHERS ARE FOUND

Property owners have options that comply with the County's Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO, Title 24 in County Code):

- Owners may adjust their project footprint to avoid impacts.
- Owners may apply for a federal permit with USFWS.
- Owners may wait for the County's HCP, which will cover most County permit applicants.

WWW.THURSTONPERMITTING.ORG



THURSTON COUNTY
WASHINGTON
SINCE 1852

LOOK ONLINE

ThurstonPermitting.org
click **Gopher Review**

ASK STAFF

Check a parcel number or address to see if the property is on gopher soils.

SEE THE CODE

Title 24: Critical Areas Ordinance. Online at www.thurstoncountywa.gov/tcho/me/Pages/countycodes.aspx

STATS

Typically, only about 10% of all permit applications require gopher review.

And

Only about 10% of sites reviewed for gophers are found to be occupied.



Why the County conducts gopher reviews.

Thurston County is home to the threatened Mazama pocket gopher species. The federal Endangered Species Act protects these animals and their habitat. That means property owners who build on protected habitat may have federal hoops to jump through before they break ground.

The largest of these hoops is a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), a technical study detailing how to offset project impacts to the habitat of protected animals. It's now required from every person who can't avoid such impacts. The County government isn't requiring an HCP, the federal government is. If the County does not implement a county-wide HCP, permit applicants may have to develop their own HCP specifically for their project.

Gopher Reviews are a temporary process.

The County has not yet completed its umbrella HCP, but while the plan is being developed, it has implemented a temporary habitat screening process which allows the County to keep issuing permits to applicants who want to build on protected habitat. This is called the gopher review process as described on the front of this page.

Gopher Review & the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)

When completed, under the County HCP most building permit applicants will no longer have to undergo a gopher review process. An umbrella HCP from the County would provide applicants with one-stop permitting to cover most County and federal approvals in a single process. Find details about the County's HCP on the County website.

**www.ThurstonPermitting.org See Gopher Review Process
or see Habitat Conservation Plan at www.ThurstonPlanning.org**