



Credit: AGFD



**City of Phoenix**  
OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

---

## **Sonoran Desert Tortoise**

*(Gopherus morafkai)*

---

The purpose of this flyer is to provide City of Phoenix employees and contractors working on City projects with basic knowledge to reduce the risk of impacting Sonoran Desert tortoise.

### **Legal Status:**

The Sonoran Desert tortoise is a Tier 1A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the State of Arizona, as defined by the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD).

### **Species Description:**

- Length: 8-15 inches
- Bottom shell yellowish and not hinged
- Hind limbs stocky and elephantine
- High-domed, brownish shell with a pattern and prominent growth lines
- Flattened forelimbs for digging, covered with conical scales

### **Where are they found?**

- Rocky, steep slopes and lower mountain slopes
- Native desert scrubland
- Between 904 and 4,198 feet in elevation
- Washes and valley bottoms may be used in dispersal

### **Where are they active?**

- Sonoran Desert tortoise spend the bulk of time in burrows, which provide protection from heat and cold
- Emerge from burrows on rocky slopes, deserts scrub or grassland to feed, bask and breed, mostly during the monsoon season

### **How to avoid impacting Sonoran Desert tortoise:**

- Scan ahead as you work
- ***If Sonoran Desert tortoise observed, STOP WORK, call the contact below and allow the tortoise to leave under its own power***
- Do NOT pick up or handle the Sonoran Desert tortoise unless the tortoise is in imminent danger. Improper handling can result in tortoise death. If a tortoise must be moved, strictly adhere to the following AGFD guidelines (rev. 9/22/2014): <https://s3.amazonaws.com/azgfd-portal-wordpress/PortallImages/files/wildlife/2014%20Tortoise%20handling%20guidelines.pdf>.
- When working in Sonoran Desert tortoise habitat, check for tortoises under parked vehicles before driving

**Questions? Concerns? Think your project will impact Sonoran Desert tortoise?** Contact the City of Phoenix Office of Environmental Programs, Environmental Programs Coordinator, Tricia Balluff at (602) 534-1775 or [tricia.balluff@phoenix.gov](mailto:tricia.balluff@phoenix.gov).