



## PROCLAMATION

### The Board of Directors of The Friends of Split Oak Forest

has partnered with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, League of Women Voters of Orange County Florida, Swamp Girl Adventures, Bear Warriors United, Pine Lily Chapter and Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Art by Mary Nesler, Photography by Vincent, Alianza and Alianza Center and has received support from Gopher Tortoise Council to recognize April 10th as Florida Gopher Tortoise Day in the State of Florida.

Whereas, the Gopher Tortoise has been living on the earth for over 500,000 years; and

Whereas, the Gopher Tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is listed as a Threatened wildlife species and is protected in the State of Florida; and

Whereas, the Gopher Tortoise is considered a keystone species in upland habitats, providing refuge in their burrows for more than 350 commensal wildlife species, including other imperiled species; and

Whereas, Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area located in Orange and Osceola Counties, Florida, and managed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission provides a healthy habitat to ensure that resident and relocated Gopher Tortoises continue to thrive on site, exceeding the current criteria for a Minimum Viable Population, despite being a species in decline; and

Whereas, raising awareness and conducting community outreach activities helps the public understand their important role in conserving Gopher Tortoises and their habitat; and

Whereas, The Friends of Split Oak Forest has adopted the Gopher Tortoise as its official mascot; and

Whereas, the Gopher Tortoise's habitat needs protection, and having them and other species in Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area sustains the area's ecology and provides human visitors with a source of joy and appreciation for nature.

Now, therefore, we encourage all citizens to learn more about Gopher Tortoises and to support the continued protection of Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area.

We, The Friends of Split Oak Forest, do hereby proclaim April 10th as Gopher Tortoise Day.

**Dated this 4th day of April, 2023**



Approved by Sheldon,  
Tortoise Mayor  
(Digital Signature)

*Sheldon, Species Ambassador  
Mayor of Gopher Tortoise Day at  
Split Oak Forest since 2019*

*Valerie Anderson, President  
Dave Wegman, Vice-President  
Gretchen Robinson, Secretary  
Mary Nesler, Director*