

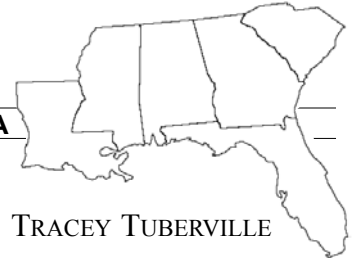


# The TORTOISE BURROW

Newsletter of the  
**Gopher Tortoise Council**

[www.gophertortoisecouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org)

Volume 21, No. 2  
Summer 2001



ALABAMA FLORIDA GEORGIA LOUISIANA MISSISSIPPI SOUTH CAROLINA

## Notes from a Co-chair

Since the last issue of the Tortoise Burrow, there have been two significant developments that I'd like to share with our members. First, our new website debuted in April thanks to the initiative and creative efforts of Mark Bailey, our newsletter editor and now our website manager (thank you, Mark!). We hope you will find useful information regarding the conservation of gopher tortoises, their habitat, and other upland species. We also want this to be a dynamic website--one that will keep members up to date on upcoming GTC events and activities and current issues relating to upland habitat conservation. The site is still under development, but some of the features you can look forward to are upland habitat recommendations and descriptions of ongoing research related to tortoises and other species. Please visit us at [www.gophertortoisecouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoisecouncil.org) and let us know what you think.

Another important initiative that GTC has recently undertaken is the drafting of a position statement on the

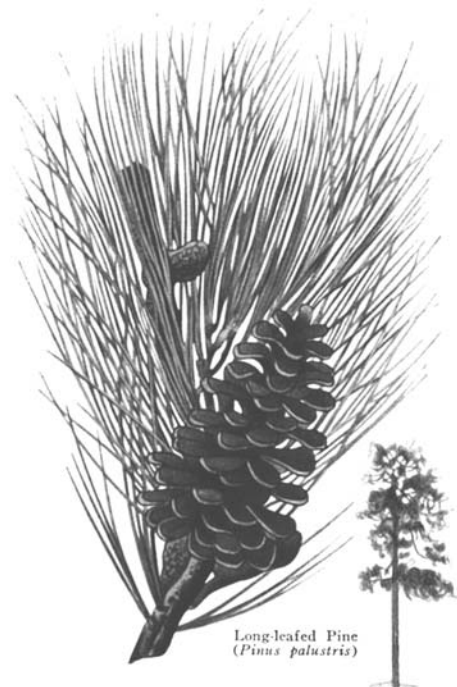
translocation of tortoises. Translocation is an increasingly urgent issue--and a potentially divisive one. There are wide ranges in opinions regarding the circumstances, if any, under which translocation of tortoises is an appropriate action. Obviously, these opinions vary depending on personal views and experiences, the circumstances surrounding the translocation, and on the available alternatives. The GTC officers decided it was time to articulate our position, as an organization, on translocation and how it relates to the long-term conservation of the gopher tortoise and its habitat. The draft position statement is included in this issue. We welcome your comments on this statement.

There are several other exciting projects and activities currently in the planning stages. We will keep you posted in upcoming newsletter issues and on our website. Stay tuned!

## The 2001 J. Larry Landers Student Research Awards

The Gopher Tortoise Council annually presents the J. Larry Landers Student Research Award to the best student research project concerning the biology of the gopher tortoise or any aspect of its sandhill community. Last year \$500 awards were presented to each of two recipients to partially support their projects.

Recent awards have averaged \$500. Students interested in applying should submit a concise description of their project with a detailed budget and a brief curriculum vitae to Bob Herrington, Research Advisory Committee Head, Dept. of Biology, Georgia Southwestern State University, Americus, Georgia 31709. Deadline for receipt of proposals to be considered for the 2001 award(s) is August 21, 2001.



Long-leafed Pine  
(*Pinus palustris*)

# Gopher Tortoise Council Draft Position Statement Regarding Translocation of Tortoises

JUNE 2001

Given the increasing controversy associated with the use of translocation/relocation as a conservation tool for gopher tortoises, the board of directors and other concerned members of the Council felt it was necessary to clarify our organization's position on this issue. We ask that all members of the Council review the draft statement below and submit comments to either Tracey Tuberville or Lora Smith at the addresses below.

Tracey Tuberville  
Savannah River Ecology Lab  
P.O. Drawer E  
Aiken, SC 29802  
[tuberville@srel.edu](mailto:tuberville@srel.edu)

Lora L. Smith  
U.S. Geological Survey  
7920 NW 71st Street  
Gainesville, FL 32653  
[lora\\_smith@usgs.gov](mailto:lora_smith@usgs.gov)

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## Draft Position Statement

This position statement was prompted by recent discussions within the Gopher Tortoise Council, a group of concerned scientists and laypersons working to conserve and manage the gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*). Our primary goal is to preserve resident gopher tortoise populations in intact, managed, native habitats. However, because of the widespread occurrence of upland habitat destruction and its resulting impact on gopher tortoise populations, we must address the issue of tortoise translocation. The objectives of this statement are to define translocation, as it applies to the gopher tortoise, and to outline scenarios where we should support (or not support) this endeavor.

Translocation is the deliberate movement of wild gopher tortoises-whether to fulfill a conservation need or to remove individuals from impending harm. The goal of translocation for conservation purposes is to enhance severely depleted gopher tortoise populations or reestablish extirpated populations. Translocations that salvage tortoises displaced by development have historically been referred to as relocations. Although efforts are made to find "suitable" recipient sites for the displaced tortoises, the urgency of the development activities often forces tortoises into less desirable sites that are not permanently protected or appropriately managed. Thus, these labor-intensive and costly salvage efforts rarely serve a valid function in conserving species. Moreover, such translocations result in an ever-decreasing habitat base and an ever-increasing number of refugee tortoises.

Biological concerns associated with translocation of gopher tortoises include mixing of locally adapted gene pools, transmission of diseases, disruption of resident populations, and the tendency for translocated individuals to disperse from targeted recipient sites. Of particular current concern is the potential for transmission of upper respiratory tract disease (URTD). This recently discovered disease is transmitted by close contact between tortoises and may be responsible for major declines in some populations of the desert tortoise in California. Several different species of the bacterium (mycoplasma) that causes this disease have been detected; some species or strains are more virulent and thereby possibly pose a greater threat to naive populations. Tortoises with URTD may or may not exhibit clinical signs, i.e., nasal and/or ocular discharge and swollen eyelids, thus increasing the chance of inadvertently translocating carriers of this disease. A blood test is presently the most effective, rapid, and cost-effective way to detect exposure to this disease; however, this test only indicates whether a particular tortoise has developed antibodies and does not indicate current infection.

Considering the above concerns, we do not advocate off-site translocation (relocation) of gopher tortoises as a solution to tortoise/development conflicts. Specifically, we do not support translocation of displaced gopher tortoises from development sites to recipient areas that have existing populations of tortoises in unmanaged (or poorly managed), unprotected habitat. Management for gopher tortoises includes prescribed burning, tree-thinning, and other habitat manipulation methods that foster an open tree canopy with abundant herbaceous ground cover. We support the retention of tortoises on-site in suitable habitat that has a permanent management and protection commitment, especially in areas where gopher tortoise populations are rapidly declining due to urbanization. We also support mitigation efforts that result in the acquisition, permanent protection, and long-term management of upland habitats in the Southeast. In those regions where tortoises are extremely rare (e.g., south Florida or South Carolina) or where they are federally protected (southeastern Louisiana, Mississippi, and part of Alabama), the value of each individual is extremely high; therefore, we would condone the consolidation of isolated individuals through translocation to managed, protected sites that have no resident population or a severely depleted population. Testing for exposure to URTD prior to consolidation should be mandatory in these situations. We also support translocation of gopher tortoises for conservation purposes, i.e., to restock suitable, managed habitats on public lands (or other lands protected by conservation easement) where viable tortoise populations had been extirpated due to past human predation or habitat degradation. However, the need to restore this keystone species should be the driving force in these restocking efforts, and the best available source (genetically, socially, and geographically) of gopher tortoises should be used.

We realize that the examples outlined in this statement will not encompass all possible scenarios involving translocation of gopher tortoises. However, we strongly urge that each case be evaluated with the goals of retaining tortoise populations in managed, protected habitat and avoiding translocations that could adversely affect other resident populations.

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## Silent Auction Items Needed

GEORGE L. HEINRICH

The silent auction held at last year's annual meeting raised funds to assist Georgia DNR with the production of eastern indigo snake signage. That project is well underway and we expect signage will be in place some time in the coming year. Like last year, we have earmarked the proceeds from this coming fall's auction for a specific project. We would like to sponsor an extended visit to the southeastern United States by an Asian turtle biologist. This will provide an opportunity for this person to learn about gopher tortoise field research techniques, captive collection management, and educational efforts. We hope to partner with the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society which already has the Asian Scholarship Program in place.

Please visit <http://nyttts.org/wetlands/buildingcapacity.htm> to learn more about this exciting conservation program. George L. Heinrich is currently organizing this Gopher Tortoise Council project and we plan to have a detailed

announcement in the fall newsletter.

This project will only succeed with your help! We need items with a herp theme including artwork, jewelry, posters, books, scientific publications, field equipment, shirts, and any other related items. Also, nights at cabins, hotels, and other "vacation" packages have raised a tremendous amount of money at the past two annual auctions. For additional information, please contact George L. Heinrich at (727) 865-6255 or by e-mail at [highpine3@aol.com](mailto:highpine3@aol.com). If you can mail items before the meeting, it will save the auction organizers a lot of time! Items can be mailed to: Gopher Tortoise Council, c/o George L. Heinrich, 1213 Alhambra Way S., St. Petersburg, FL 33705-4620. If you have any ideas of people, organizations, or companies to contact for donations you can also e-mail that information to George or Laura Wewerka ([laura.w@mindspring.com](mailto:laura.w@mindspring.com)).

# Gopher Tortoise Council Annual Meeting Notice

Friday 26 October - Sunday 28 October  
Reitz Union, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Theme:

## The Impacts of Roads on Upland Species in the Southeast

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### Friday, 26 October:

#### **Special Topic: The Impacts of Roads on Upland Species in the Southeast:** 9:00 am - 5:00 pm

This session will focus on issues related to the impacts of roads on upland fauna in the southeast and will include a series of presentations about recent projects to mitigate these impacts. Topics will range from the effects of roads on red-cockaded woodpeckers and scrub jays to an overview of Department of Transportation mitigation projects for Florida panther, black bear and herpetofauna of Paynes Prairie State Preserve.

**Social:** 5:30 pm - 9:00 pm. Join us for a relaxing social gathering hosted by the Florida Museum of Natural History, at Powell Hall. Drinks and light snacks will be provided.

**GTC Business Meeting:** 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm.

### Saturday, 27 October:

**Special Topic: The Impacts of Roads on Upland Species in the Southeast and Gopher Tortoise Council Annual Meeting Presentations:** 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. Presentations on the impacts of roads will continue. There also will be a series of speakers providing an update on the current state of Gopher Tortoise research.

**Banquet:** 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm. The banquet will be held in the upstairs dining room at the Reitz Union. The meal will consist of a buffet with a variety of entrees (including options for vegetarians). Pre-registration for the banquet is required.

**Silent Auction:** Friday and Saturday. The silent auction will open during the morning break on Friday and will continue through the afternoon break on Saturday. Once again, George Heinrich and Laura Wewerka will organize this year's auction. If you wish to donate items, please see information provided elsewhere in the newsletter. The proceeds of the auction will go towards funding a training opportunity for a Southeast Asian turtle researcher.



Black pine snake, *Pituophis melanoleucus lodingi*, dead on road in DeSoto National Forest, Mississippi.

Photo by Deborah Epperson.

Sunday, 28 October: Optional Field Trips (register at the meeting):

Trip #1: **Paynes Prairie Ecopassage**, 9:00 am - 11:00 am. This field trip will include a visit to the Paynes Prairie "ecopassage", a wildlife barrier/underpass system on Hwy 441 ca. 5 miles south of Gainesville. The ecopassage was designed specifically to reduce road mortality of the herpetofauna and is currently the focus of a two-year study to evaluate the effectiveness of the ecopassage. Lead by Lora Smith and Jamie Barichivich (USGS).

Trip #2: **Katharine Ordway Preserve**, 9:00 am - 1:00 pm.

This field trip will include a tour of the ca. 10,000 acre Preserve in Putnam County, FL. The trip will be lead by the Steve Coates, the manager of the Preserve and will include a visit to longleaf pine sand hills and striped newt breeding ponds. The field trip is free, but participants must provide their own transportation. The Preserve is about 25 miles east of Gainesville. The trip will be limited to 15 participants on a first come-first serve basis.

Lodging: Attendees must make their own arrangements for lodging. Make reservations as soon as possible. All the motels listed are on SW 13th Street (U.S. 441), south of the University of Florida.

Super 8 Motel	(352) 372-3654	Single: \$44, Double: \$45.
Scottish Inn	(352) 376-4423	Single: \$35, Double: \$45.
Econolodge	(352) 373-7816	Single: \$49, Double: \$53.
Comfort Inn	(352) 373-6500	Single or Double: \$54.
Cape Cod Inn	(352) 371-2500	Single: \$43.95, Double: \$46.95.
Sheraton Gainesville Hotel	(352) 377-4000	Single or Double: \$99.

Meals: Lunches are not included in the registration- there are numerous restaurants inside the Reitz Union and within walking distance of the auditorium. Light food and drinks will be provided at the Friday night social. Pre-registration is required to guarantee dinner on Saturday night. Tickets for the dinner cannot be purchased after the pre-registration deadline- so order now!

Camping: Paynes Prairie State Preserve, Micanopy, FL (352) 466-3397.

Airports: Gainesville Regional Airport (20 minutes from UF campus); Jacksonville International Airport (1½ hr).

Directions to UF's Reitz Union and Parking Information:

From the north or south:

From I-75 take exit 76 (SR 26 or University Ave.) and head east toward the University of Florida. After you pass 34th Street look for the University campus on your right. Enter the campus by turning right on North-South Dr. (you'll see the football stadium at this intersection). Follow North-South Dr. to Museum Rd. and turn left. The Reitz Union will be on your left. The conference will be held in the second floor auditorium. Parking is available opposite the Union (on the south side of Museum Rd.).

From Jacksonville:

Take U.S. 301 south to Waldo. In Waldo bear to the right on SR 24. Follow SR 24 south to University Ave. and turn right. Stay on University Ave. until you reach the University Campus. Then turn left on North-South Dr.. Follow North-South Dr. to Museum Rd. and turn left. The Reitz Union will be on your left. The conference will be held in the second floor auditorium. Parking is available opposite the Union (on the south side of Museum Rd.).



From The Gainesville Airport:

Turn right when exiting the airport and then take a left at the first stop light (this is SR24). Follow SR 24 south to University Ave. and turn right. Stay on University Ave. until you reach the University Campus. Then turn left on North-South Dr. Follow North-South Dr. to Museum Rd. and turn left. The Reitz Union will be on your left. The conference will be held in the second floor auditorium. Parking is available opposite the Union (on the south side of Museum Rd.).

# Meeting Registration Form

Photocopy this page or cut from newsletter or print from [www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org](http://www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org), complete, and mail

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## 2001 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL

REITZ UNION, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

### Fri 26 Oct

8:00 am - 12:00 pm Registration for meeting & field trips  
9:00 am - 5:00 pm Special Topic Presentations- The Impacts of Roads on Upland Species in the Southeast  
10:30 am - 5:00 pm Silent Auction  
5:30 pm - 9:00 pm Social (Powell Hall Museum)  
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm GTC Business Meeting

### Sat 27 Oct

8:00 am - 10:00 am Registration for meeting & field trips  
9:00 am - 5:00 pm Special Topic Presentations- The Impacts of Roads on Upland Species, GTC Paper Presentations  
8:30 am - 3:00 pm Silent Auction  
6:30 pm - 9:00 pm Banquet (Reitz Union)

### Sun 28 Oct

see descriptions Optional Field Trips #1 and #2

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Pre-register by September 30, 2001! Pre-registration is required to guarantee the Saturday banquet!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_; Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Pre-registration costs*

Friday Special Topic: \$15 \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday Annual GTC meeting: \$15 members \_\_\_\_\_  
\$20 nonmembers \_\_\_\_\_

Saturday Night Banquet: \$20 \_\_\_\_\_

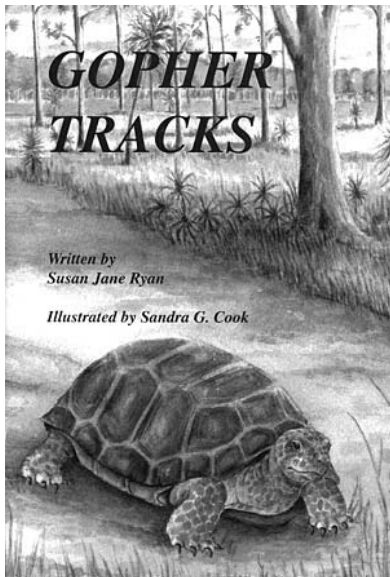
Membership dues (\$10 student; \$15 individual;  
\$25 contributor; \$50 corporate/society; \$100 sustaining;  
\$250 life- one time payment). \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if : \_\_\_\_\_ new \_\_\_\_\_ renewing member

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to the Gopher Tortoise Council and mail with pre-registration form by **September 30** to: Lora Smith, Gopher Tortoise Council, c/o Florida Museum of Natural History, P.O. Box 117800, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-7800.

Thanks to the donors who made the reprinting of "Gopher Tracks" possible. Your generosity helped us exceed our goal of raising \$6,500!



**\$1,300 CONTRIBUTOR**  
Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission

**\$500 PATRONS**  
Audubon Society of Southwest Florida, Coastal Wildlife Club, Lemon Bay Conservancy, Seminole Audubon Society, Southern Ecosystems Research, The Tortoise Reserve, Inc.

**\$250 SPONSORS**  
Eagle Audubon Society, Florida Environmental, Florida Turtle Conservation Trust, Gainesville Herpetological Society, Jacksonville Herpetological Society, Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society, Max, Lauren, Rick, Miren and Chuck Schaffer, Suncoast Herpetological Society, Suncoast Native Plant Society, Tampa Bay Herpetological Society, Betty Wargo

**ADDITIONAL DONORS**  
Dr. Harold Albers, Rebecca Bockoven, Kenneth Brain, Nadja Chaimberlain, Rebecca Christoffel, Marcie Clutter, W.T. Davis, Dr. David Deitz, Egmont Key Alliance, Inc., Nadine Foley, David & Leslie Gale, Mrs. W.J. Grant, Laura Hackenbrock, Eve Haverfield, Bob Herrington, George Jacobs, Sharon Karsen, Jerry Kennedy, Cynthia Machupa, Bob Mount, Henry Mushinsky, Native Nurseries of Tallahassee, Inc., Nature's Focus, Donn Nieder, Fred Perrotta, Mary Reynolds, Renee Turner, Tuscany Trading Company, Mary Lee Vasquez, Elizabeth Wagner, Dr. Donna Wear, Whidden Family

## **Directory of Gopher Tortoise Council Officers, Committee Chairs, and State Representatives**

### **Co-chairs**

Tracey Tuberville: (803) 725-2472, tuberville@srel.edu  
Lora Smith: (352) 475-5953, lora\_smith@usgs.gov

### **Secretary**

Colleen Heise: (601)558-2797 or -2931, cheise@tnc.org

### **Treasurer**

Matt Dinkins: (904) 645-9900, sandmatt1@hotmail.com

### **Membership Secretary**

Colleen Heise: (601)558-2797 or -2931, cheise@tnc.org

### **Merchandise/Publication Sales**

*vacant*

### **Newsletter Editor/Website Manager**

Mark Bailey: (334) 727-2040, mbailey@conservationsoutheast.com

### **GTC Representative to PARC**

George Heinrich: (727) 893-7328, highpine3@aol.com

### **Standing Committee Chairs**

#### *Nominating Committee*

Joan Berish: (352) 955-2230, berishj@fwc.state.fl.us

#### *Public Information & Education Committee*

Laura Wewerka: (941) 275-3435, laura.w@mindspring.com

#### *Rattlesnake Conservation Committee (Co-chairs)*

Karl Studenroth: 850-482-8739, kstu@hotmail.com  
Bruce Means: (850) 681-6208, dbm5647@garnet.acns.fsu.edu

#### *Research Advisory Committee*

Bob Herrington: (912) 931-2331, bherring@canes.gsw.edu

### **State Representatives**

#### *Alabama*

Ed Wester: (334) 745-3025, edwester@mindspring.com

#### *Florida*

Joan Berish: (352) 955-2230, berishj@fwc.state.fl.us

#### *Georgia*

William Birkhead: (706) 569-3016 or (706) 628-5196, birkhead\_bill@colstate.edu

#### *Louisiana*

Steve Shively: (504) 765-2800, shively\_sh@wlf.state.la.us

#### *Mississippi*

Colleen Heise: (601)558-2797 or -2931, cheise@tnc.org

#### *South Carolina*

Deborah Epperson: (864) 656-3117, deppers@clemson.edu

**GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL**  
c/o Florida Museum of Natural History  
University of Florida  
P. O. Box 117800  
Gainesville, FL 32611-7800

The Gopher Tortoise Council is a nonprofit and tax-exempt organization under IRS Code Section 501(c)(3). ID #59-2010727

## Public Information & Education Committee Report

LAURA WEWERKA

"Gopher Tracks" has definitely been the busiest project for this committee. I'm very excited to report that it looks as though we have exceeded our goal to raise enough money to send at least two copies to every public elementary school within the range of the tortoise! Please note the list of donors in another section of the newsletter. This summer George Heinrich and I will be very busy coordinating both the printing and distribution of this book, but I am looking forward to it. I hope that by the annual meeting we can say that we do not have any books left sitting at our houses because every last one has been distributed. I also want to thank those that responded to the special mailing for book orders. I think we will definitely make the most of this "one time only" reprinting thanks to all of you!

After a very busy spring, the GTC display board will be in storage until October. For a while there, it was traveling more than me! We experimented with sending it via Greyhound bus from Ft. Myers to West Palm Beach and then from there to Tampa. The experiment was quite successful, and we will probably use that system in the future. Without the assistance of several GTC members, we would have never been able to get the board to so many events. If you know of an event between now and the end of September, please let me know about it and perhaps we can coordinate getting the display board to you. During the summer, I will also be working to update a couple of panels that have become slightly dated.

Lora Smith has put an incredible amount of time into the slide presentation. It is looking very professional, and I think that the GTC members will be very impressed with the final result. Once reprinting "Gopher Tracks" is closer

to completion, the slide show will become my top priority and hopefully will be close to completion by the annual meeting.

Thanks to everyone who has helped with the variety of Education projects. The support from so many members has really made this position in the Council very rewarding for me!

*The Tortoise Burrow* is published quarterly (March, June, September, December). Deadlines for submission of announcements and articles are the 15th of the preceeding month. Send materials to the editor: Mark Bailey, 2040 Old Federal Road, Shorter, AL 36075, telephone (334) 727-2040, fax (334) 727-1005, mbailey@conservationsoutheast.com. Decisions concerning publication of submitted material rest with the editor and co-chairs. Please send address changes to membership secretary Colleen Heise, Camp Shelby Field Office, CSTS-ENV, Bldg. 6678, Camp Shelby, MS 39407, or e-mail at cheise@tnc.org.

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"Gopher toilets" is an anagram for what word that describes the profession of many GTC members?