



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington Fish and Wildlife Office
510 Desmond Dr. SE, Suite 102
Lacey, Washington 98503



APR 20 2018

Dear Interested Parties:

Subject: Guidance for Assessing Potential Take of Mazama Pocket Gophers in
Thurston and Pierce Counties

In the absence of an approved Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) recommends the following approach to assess the likelihood of take of three subspecies of Mazama pocket gophers (*Thomomys mazama*) protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (ESA) in Thurston County and one subspecies of Mazama pocket gopher in Pierce County (attachment). Unauthorized take of Mazama pocket gopher (MPG) could result from construction and other ground disturbing activities under the permitting authorities of local jurisdictions in Thurston and Pierce Counties in the absence of an incidental take permit from the Service. The recommended screening approach will assist local jurisdictions in minimizing the risk of unauthorized take of MPG associated with local land use permit programs. This recommendation covers the field season that runs from June 1 to October 31. Recommendations are based on the best available science incorporating the knowledge and experience developed over the previous four years through our partnerships with Thurston County and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). The Service recommends that jurisdictions use qualified biologists who have completed training provided by the Service.

MPG Screening

MPG screening is an interim tool for local jurisdictions without an ESA incidental take permit associated with an approved HCP. MPG screening will help inform local jurisdictions regarding their risk of permitting projects that may lead to unauthorized take of MPG. Negative screening results (no MPG mounds identified) that follow the recommended protocol are expected to result in a low likelihood of take and local jurisdictions could follow their normal permitting processes. Negative screening results from a given field season that allow projects to move forward would be valid through October 31 of the following calendar year (e.g. 2018 field season results would be valid thru October 31, 2019).

Where positive screening results (MPG mounds found) are encountered, proceeding with normal permitting processes could result in the take of listed species. Additional coordination with the Service is recommended prior to the issuance of building permits that would approve ground disturbing activities where occupancy has been determined. Landowners with MPG on their property can move forward with their proposed development by: 1) participating in their local jurisdiction's HCP once completed; or 2) contacting the Service directly to discuss developing an individual HCP including review, assessment, and mitigation options most appropriate for their site and proposed activities. Currently Thurston County, City of Tumwater, and the City of Yelm are considering or are developing HCPs to meet the needs of their residents.

Some landowners may have properties that would be of interest to conservation entities. These landowners may choose to forego development and instead seek a conservation option for their property. The Service can assist landowners who are interested in this option. We recommend those landowners talk to the Service directly.

We look forward to working cooperatively with local jurisdictions in Thurston and Pierce Counties to help address your potential liability for unauthorized take under the ESA. We appreciate your continued communication and conservation planning efforts with us. Please contact Curtis Tanner (360-753-4326) of my staff for further coordination on this recommended approach, including more detailed protocol information and training opportunities.

Sincerely,



Eric V. Rickerson, State Supervisor
Washington Fish and Wildlife Office

Attachment



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Washington Fish and Wildlife Office

<http://www.fws.gov/wafwo>

(360) 753-9440



Mazama Pocket Gopher Screening Protocol Checklist

- Mazama pocket gopher (MPG) determinations made during the screening season (June 1 through October 31) will assess the risk of take to the listed MPG subspecies in Thurston and Pierce Counties associated with building permit applications issued by local jurisdictions in Thurston and Pierce Counties.
- Negative determinations that allow projects to move forward will be valid through October 31st of the following calendar year.
- Positive determinations will require coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to address the risk of take.
- It is recommended that all jurisdictions in Thurston and Pierce Counties with building permit authorities use this protocol to ensure compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act by minimizing risk of unauthorized take.
- All valid site visits must be conducted from June 1 through October 31. Site visits outside that survey window will not be considered valid.
- A site or parcel is considered to be the entire property, not just the footprint of the proposed project. Surveys that only screen the footprint will not be accepted by the Service as evidence of indicating that the site is not occupied by MPG.
- If MPG mounds are observed on a site, that day's survey effort should continue until the entire site is screened and all mounds present identified, but additional site visits are not required.

MPG Survey Protocol Frequency Requirements (see Appendix A for soil preferences)

- ☐ Sites containing more-preferred soils will be visited three (3) times with the visits at least 30 days apart.
- ☐ Sites containing less-preferred soils and within 600 feet of a site with verified MPG occurrence will be visited three (3) times, at least 30 days apart.
- ☐ Sites containing less-preferred soils and more than 600 feet from a known MPG occurrence will be visited two (2) times, at least 30 days apart.
- ☐ Sites containing at least one type of more-preferred soils present on the parcel should be treated using the protocol for more-preferred soils.
- ☐ If MPG mounds are positively identified during a site visit, the remaining recommend site visits are not necessary to complete.

April 19, 2018 version

MPG Protocol – Determining Site Visit Frequency

- ☐ Search for the parcel on the WDFW site (https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/phs/maps_data/) to determine the proximity of documented MPG sites to the edge of the parcel you are screening.
- ☐ Search for the parcel to be surveyed with the NRCS soil map (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/soils/home/>), or for Thurston County parcels look up the parcel on the Thurston GeoData Center (<http://www.geodata.org/pocketgophersoils.htm>) website to determine if the soils on the parcel are more-preferred or less-preferred soils for Mazama pocket gophers (Appendix A).
- ☐ Record both the MPG soil types present on the parcel and the distance from the nearest, known MPG location from the parcel boundary on the data form.
- ☐ Notify the landowner to ensure areas to be surveyed are mowed and animals are contained. Surveyor must have a clear, unobstructed view of the ground and any potential mounds present. Tall grass, shrubs, Scot's broom etc. all impede surveyor(s) ability to see and identify mounds appropriately.

MPG Protocol - Site Condition Requirements

- ☐ Identify if site conditions preclude the site from screening (see Preclusions below).
- ☐ Identify and describe site conditions for the parcel on the data form. Determine which areas of the parcel cannot be screened due to limited accessibility and/or dense understory.
- ☐ The ground should be easily visible to ensure mound observation and identification. Request mowing if necessary to ensure visibility. Wait 30 days after mowing before beginning screening.
- ☐ Determine if rain from previous days or during the survey will interfere with accurate MPG mound identification. Identify any other site challenges and record on the data sheet.

MPG Protocol – Field Visit Methodology

- ☐ Decide upon the planned route to walk the parcel.
- ☐ Start Trimble or GPS to record survey route.
- ☐ Walk the survey transects methodically, slowly walking a straight line and scanning an area approximately 2-3 meters to the left and right as your walk and look for mounds. Transects should be no more than five (5) meters apart when conducted by a single individual (Figure 1).
- ☐ If the survey is performed by a team, walk together in a single line approximately 5 meters apart while you are scanning right to left for mounds (Figure 1).

- ☐ At each mound found, stop and identify it as a MPG or mole mound, using information provided in training. If it is a MPG mound, identify it as a singular mound or a group (3 mounds or more) on the data form.
- ☐ Record all positive MPG mounds, MPG likely mounds, and MPG mound groups in a GPS unit that provides a date, time, and georeferenced point for each MPG mound.
- ☐ If possible, photograph all MPG mounds or MPG mound groups. At a minimum, photograph MPG mounds or MPG mound groups representative of MPG detections on site.
- ☐ Describe and/or quantify what portion and proportion of the property was screened, and record your survey route and any MPG mounds found on either an aerial or parcel map.
- ☐ Send survey results and locations of all MPG mounds found to USFWS, WDFW, and local jurisdiction with building permit authority, as well as georeferenced pictures with time and date stamps. Also include copies of all completed data sheets where MPG mounds were found while screening. Contacts for USFWS and WDFW will be provided at the USFWS training.

MPG Protocol - Training and Qualifications

1. At least one person conducting screening must have completed the training by USFWS. Other person(s) can assist in mound observation, but a trained person must confirm each MPG mound identified.
2. Surveys will only be accepted if the biologist/consultant has completed the necessary training.
3. People completing MPG surveys are subject to random field checks for mound identification accuracy by USFWS.

MPG Protocol – Preclusions (conditions that would not require screening)

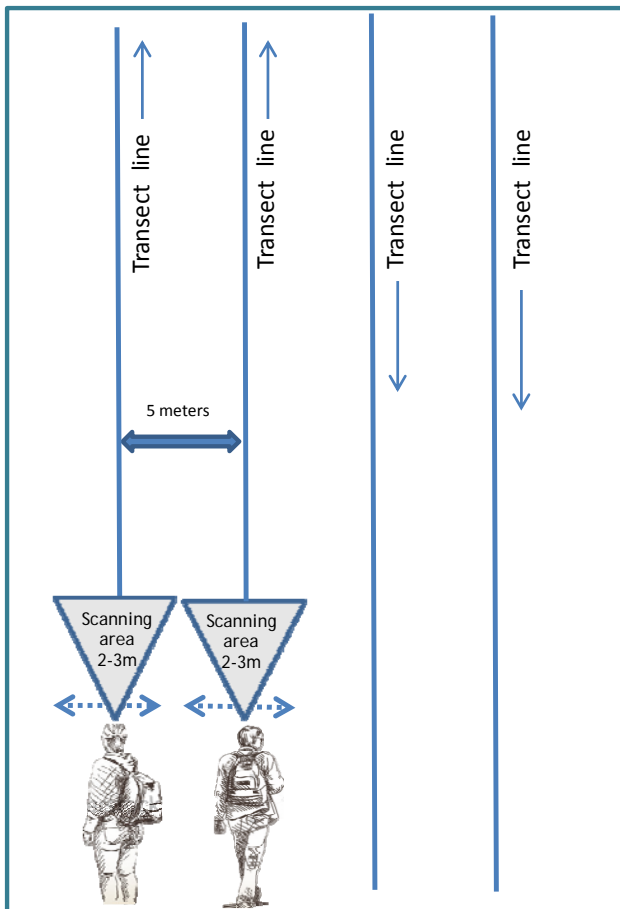
1. Locations west of the Black River, or on Steamboat Island peninsula.
2. Sites on less preferred MPG soils north of Interstate 5.
3. Sites submerged for 30 consecutive days or more since October 31 of the previous year.
4. Sites covered with impervious surfaces.
5. Sites that consist of slopes greater than 40 percent or that contain landslide hazard areas.
6. Sites with greater than 30 percent forested cover with dense understory and no openings.

Appendix A. Summary table of soil preference for Mazama Pocket Gopher.

| Mazama Pocket Gopher Preference | Soil Type | Site Visit Frequency |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| More preferred | <p>Nisqually loamy fine sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Nisqually loamy fine sand, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>Spanaway-Nisqually complex, 2 to 10 percent slopes</p> <p>Cagey loamy sand</p> <p>Indianola loamy sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Spanaway gravelly sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Spanaway gravelly sandy loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Three (3) times, at least 30 days apart</p> |
| Less preferred | <p>Alderwood gravelly sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Alderwood gravelly sandy loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>Everett very gravelly sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Everett very gravelly sandy loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>Indianola loamy sand, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>Kapowsin silt loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>McKenna gravelly silt loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes</p> <p>Norma fine sandy loam</p> <p>Norma silt loam</p> <p>Spana gravelly loam</p> <p>Spanaway stony sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Spanaway stony sandy loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> <p>Yelm fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes</p> <p>Yelm fine sandy loam, 3 to 15 percent slopes</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sites with less-preferred soils and more than 600 feet from a known MPG occurrence will be visited two (2) times, at least 30 days apart.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sites with less-preferred soils and within 600 feet of a site with verified MPG occurrence will be visited three (3) times, at least 30 days apart.</p> |

Figure 1. Transect Illustrations

Protocol for two or more surveyors



Protocol for an individual surveyor

