

Groundhogs/Woodchucks

Groundhogs are a large rodent native to North America that typically weigh between 5 to 12 pounds and can be up to 2 feet long. Groundhogs inhabit a variety of habitats, but specifically require areas where they can construct burrows without risk of flooding. Groundhogs are herbivorous and prefer the tender parts of new growth from a variety of wild and cultivated plants. They hibernate during the winter from November until February.

What kind of damage is caused by groundhogs? Groundhogs can create extensive burrow systems extending 15-25 feet underground and having multiple holes/entrances. These holes can be hazardous to people or livestock who may accidentally step in them, or cause damage to agricultural equipment operating in areas where burrows are present. Additionally, groundhogs may chew through underground wires if they encounter them while creating a burrow system. Groundhogs eat a variety of vegetation and can cause substantial damage to crops, gardens, and flower beds that are located within the vicinity of their burrows.

Can a WCA write a depredation permit? Yes, if property damage has occurred, a depredation permit can be issued by a WCA.

Can they be relocated? Groundhogs cannot be relocated in North Carolina. They must be released on site, euthanized at the capture site, or taken to a facility designed to humanely handle the euthanasia.

What can I do with sick or injured groundhogs? Groundhogs can be rehabilitated by licensed wildlife rehabilitators. Alternatively, if the animal is suffering and will not recover, it can be humanely euthanized and disposed of in a safe and sanitary manner.

Are there any safety concerns? No, however it is good practice to wear gloves when handling any animal.

Non-lethal Options:

- Exclusion
 - Fencing can be installed to prevent groundhogs from accessing agricultural or crop areas when damage to vegetation is occurring. Make sure the lower edge of the fence is buried at least 12 inches into the ground to prevent burrowing underneath.
 - If burrows are relatively new, filling them can be an effective way to encourage groundhogs to move on to other areas. Filling burrows is less effective when the animal already has a well-established tunnel system.

Lethal Options:

- Groundhogs may be taken via hunting at any time during the year if the WCA is a licensed hunter. A landowner is not required to purchase a hunting license to hunt on his/her own property.
- Groundhogs may be trapped during the trapping season with a valid trapping license. A landowner is not required purchase to a trapping license to trap on his/her own property.
- Outside of the trapping season groundhogs may be trapped/taken if a depredation permit has been issued.