

## *Managing Pocket Gophers*

Pocket gophers are herbivores preferring to feed on grasses, shrubs, trees and forbs or flowering plants. Alfalfa and dandelions are their preferred food. Gophers will feed on above-ground portions of vegetation during the height of the growing season when vegetation is green and succulent, but target roots as a year-round food source. Densities for pocket gophers in Colorado vary but average 16 to 20 per acre.



Pocket gophers are consumed by bull snakes, rattlesnakes, skunks, coyotes, dogs, foxes, cats, bobcats and raptors.

### How to find a Pocket Gopher

Pocket gophers leave soil mounds on the surface of the ground. The mounds are usually fan-shaped, 12 to 18 inches wide, and up to four inches tall. Tunnel entrances are plugged, keeping various intruders out of burrows.

### Damage Caused by Pocket Gophers

- Destruction of underground utility cables and irrigation pipes
- Direct consumption and smothering of vegetation by earthen mounds dug up by pocket gophers
- Damage to trees through stem girdling and clipping, root pruning and root exposure
- Loss of surface irrigation as a result of gopher tunnels causing channel water runoff

### Damage Prevention and Control Methods

- **Exclusion** – Pocket gophers can be deterred from shrubs or trees by placing a ¼ to ½ inch mesh hardware cloth fence buried at least 18 inches deep around the desired area.
- **Weed Control** – Chemical or mechanical control of flowering plants can be an effective method of minimizing damage by pocket gophers.
- **Toxicants** – Several rodenticides are federally registered and available for pocket gopher control. The most widely used and evaluated is strychnine alkaloid on grain baits. To poison pocket gophers, bait must be placed in their tunnel systems by hand or by a

special machine known as a burrow builder. The key is locating the burrow system and placing the bait within it.

- **Trapping** – Trapping is an effective method to control pocket gophers in small areas. Traps should be placed inside a tunnel. To locate a tunnel find a fresh mound of dirt and with a trowel or shovel, dig several inches away from the mound on the plug side. Traps should be marked above ground with a flag and should be anchored with a stake and wire or chain so a predator does not carry off the catch and the trap. Trapping can be done year round but is most effective when gophers are pushing up new mounds in the spring and fall.

Individual management of pocket gophers is permitted ONLY on a resident's property. Managing pocket gophers in parks and open space is the responsibility of the Metro District. For more information review [Pocket Gophers](#), published by the Department of Agriculture, or call Nick Adamson, open space supervisor, at 720-240-5917 or [nadamson@highlandsranch.org](mailto:nadamson@highlandsranch.org).

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