

Section 11 Beach Driving at Summer Haven

Purpose

Summer Haven is a unique and extremely narrow sliver of sandy beach situated between the Atlantic ocean and the Intracoastal waterway with 26 houses located westerly of the Old A1A right-of-way. It is a very dynamic beach resulting in one of the most critically eroded beaches in St. Johns County, exhibiting recurring wash over zones and repeated inlet formation and filling. Approximately four homeowners use a way-of-necessity trail behind a minimal fore dune to access their homes. Historically, the demarcation between this trail and the beach proper is ill-defined and vehicles may drive on the beach.

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.n.

n. Management of Beach Driving at Summer Haven. “The Permittee shall continue to maintain and manage a locked gate barricade along old U.S. A1A immediately south of the terminus of the existing rock revetment along the Atlantic Ocean coastline in the town of Summer Haven. Ingress and egress through such barricade shall only be authorized for owners and/or residents of homes along old U.S. A1A.”

Per Chapter 7.3.4 of the HCP, Measures to Mitigate Unavoidable Impacts, Restoring the primary dune along Summer Haven. The County periodically restores the fore dune along Summer Haven to preserve and enhance the nesting habitat along Summer Haven for both nesting sea turtles and least terns.

HCP Performance During 2012

Implementation: According to the permit condition above whereby beach driving at Summer Haven is an allowable and lawful activity it has all but ceased to exist since the breach in the dune system that occurred on Wednesday, October 10, 2008, during an extreme high tide and storm event. This breach occurred on the northern end forming a new inlet with water flowing in and out of both the Summer Haven River as well as from the ocean. This event completely eliminated the possibility for driving beyond the way-of-necessity trail that currently still exists behind the homes located on the northern portion of Summer Haven. The breach has since filled in with sand (Object 19) and is now mostly dry with pioneering vegetation. It has also become a popular nesting site for the seasonal arrival of least terns and Wilson’s plovers and for year round residents such as gopher tortoises. Least terns and Wilson’s plovers have utilized this area for seasonal nesting activity for the last three years. Each year prior to their return the County and FWC along with volunteers from Audubon stake off the assumed seasonal nesting site (Map Figure 13) for the Least terns and Wilson’s plovers. Pre-posting occurred on April 10th and remained intact until August 1st when it was determined by both agencies that all birds had departed from the area. Volunteers from Audubon and staff from FWC conducted routine visits to conduct surveys and bird stewarding. Approximately 60 survey hours over a 22 day period with 4 volunteers collected information nest counts, downy and feathered chicks. The maximum number of nests recorded was 121, 14 downy chicks, 4 feathered and 7 flight capable chicks.

Object 19. Summer Haven Breach 2011

Assessment: No citations or infractions were reported during the 2012 sea turtle nesting season associated with restricted driving at Summer Haven. However, during the sea turtle nesting season and beach nesting bird season reports of dogs off leashes were made by sea turtle patrol and bird surveyors. As a result law enforcement spent time investigating the complaints which resulted in verbal and written warnings as well as citations issued to individuals with dogs off leashes.

Program Improvements: The County will continue to coordinate with the Public Works Engineering Department and state agencies on coastal projects and protected species management in this area.