

Section 12
Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan

Purpose

Since prior to the HCP when horseback riding was not monitored a protected species training and registration program has been instituted to minimize impact to nesting sea turtles, sea turtle hatchlings and to protect AIBM habitat.

Relevant ITP Conditions - G.2.d., l. and o.

- d. Local Ordinance Amendments.** “Within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall amend applicable local ordinances as described in Chapter 7 of the HCP to ensure effective implementation of the HCP and terms of this Permit.”
- l. Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan.** “Within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and submit for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan as described in Chapter 7 of the HCP. Beginning no later than May 1 during the second full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall implement such Plan. The Permittee shall ensure that each person, or in the case of a company providing horseback riding services, a representative of the company, complete training specified in Condition 11.G..2.o. The Permittee may amend the approved Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan both prior to and after is implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”
- o. HCP and Protected Species Training.** “Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and provide for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a training program. Such program shall provide information regarding applicable HCP conditions and Permit terms and local ordinances necessary to assist individual members of the public in understanding beach driving restrictions provided pursuant to this Permit. The Permittee shall implement use of the HCP and Protected Species Training Program within two (2) months of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval. The Permittee may amend such program both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

HCP Performance During 2012

Implementation: In September 2006, a Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan (see below), the proposed Ordinance amendments (Section 19 Local Ordinance Amendments) and the HCP and Protected Species Training were approved by USFWS. Each document introduced new horseback riding rules and provided a tool in which the County was able to monitor the number of riders. The Horseback Riding Plan provides three different categories for permits; a Master Beach Equestrian Guide, a General Beach Equestrian Guide Class I and a General Beach Equestrian Guide Class II. The following excerpt from the Plan explains the permitting process:

Master Beach Equestrian Guide

- A. An individual completing protected species training and certified by the County Administrator of St. Johns County as an expert equestrian beach guide (see G below).
- B. All training materials shall be provided by the County at no expense to the equestrian beach rider.
- C. Each Master Beach Equestrian Guide shall be issued a permit identifying the individual as such and shall be authorized to lead up to 10 individuals on guided beach rides.
- D. The Master Beach Equestrian Guide may issue a day pass for equestrian beach riding to an individual who has completed the required education prescribed by the County (See 3. General Beach Equestrian – Class II).
- E. The County shall maintain a list of Master Beach Equestrian Guides and shall be responsible for updating the list at least annually. Contact information and day pass issuance data shall be provided to the County by each Master Equestrian Beach Guide at least monthly if there is activity to report.
- F. The Certification of Master Equestrian Beach Guide shall be contingent upon continued compliance with protected species management and valid for the life of the Threatened and Endangered Species Incidental Take Permit TE091980-0.
- G. An Individual seeking certification as a Master Beach Equestrian User may apply to the County Administrator with written recommendations from no less than three Master Equestrian Beach Guides or by the written recommendation by the St. Johns County Horse Council.

General Beach Equestrian Guide – Class I

- A. An individual intending to ride on the beach regularly and frequently who completes Protected Species Training but not certified as a Master Beach Equestrian Guide.
- B. All training materials shall be provided by the County at no expense to the equestrian beach rider.
- C. Shall be issued a permit by the County designating the individual as such, and shall be authorized to lead up to 10 individuals on guided beach tours.
- D. The County shall maintain a list of General Beach Equestrian Permits and shall be responsible for updating the list at least annually. Contact information should be provided to the County by each Equestrian Beach Permit holder at least annually.
- E. The Class I Permit shall be contingent upon continued compliance with protected species management and valid for a period of five years from the date of issuance.

General Beach Equestrian Guide– Class II

- A. An individual desiring a one-time or infrequent horseback ride on the beach may be issued a daily-use pass by the County or Master Beach Equestrian Guide.
- B. The individual seeking a daily-use pass may obtain the necessary education and credentials either from a Master Beach Equestrian Guide, through a learning program, or on-line training course. The on-line course is accessible at www.sjcfll.us/HCP/.
- C. All training materials shall be provided by the County at no expense to the equestrian beach rider.

Training is available on an as needed basis and either through a classroom training session or on line. Master Equestrian Beach Guide permit requests are done so through approval Assistant County Administrator. Applicants shall provide documentation of their extensive riding experience on St. Johns County Beaches. Once approved, permittees are sent a small laminated permit (Appendix N) that must be affixed to the external portion of their saddle bags and Master Guides are also provided two laminated day passes (Appendix O) that can be issued to their guests.

The Board of County Commissioners adopted Ordinance # 2009-60 (Appendix P) on December 15, 2009 allowing horseback riding from the northern border of the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve to the Duval County line between April 15th and September 15th of each year, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, Sunday, and Federal holidays. The Ordinance is effective in separating the large number of visitors that are present at the beach to enjoy horseback riding and sunbathing.

Sea Turtle Nesting

Sea turtle patrol volunteers are responsible to document when horse tracks are present on the beach in front of a nest on the morning of a nesting event as well as when the nest hatches. Out of the 698 nests documented 1 report was noted that tracks of horses were present on their nesting data sheets for both initial nesting and the hatching event. Not all indications of the presence of horse tracks were marked therefore the number may actually be higher. It should be noted that when information such as this is lacking it is hard to evaluate the impacts of horseback riding.

Assessment

For calendar year of 2012 a total of 82 General Equestrian and 0 Master Equestrian permits were issued (Table 13). Additionally, and upon request by the permit holders the County will replace a permit for various reasons. A total of 3 Master Equestrians and 5 General Equestrians requested replacements for their permits.

Table 13. Horseback Riding Permit Summary

Year	General	Master	Total
2007	111	30	141
2008	6	80	86
2009	102	5	107
2010	100	0	100
2011	81	0	81
2012	82	0	82

Program Improvements: The St. Johns County Beach Code 2007-19 continues to be under review for formal updates. County Ordinance 2009-60 will be incorporated into the new document when those changes occur. No other changes to policy are anticipated at this time.