



**St. Johns County
Environmental Division
Habitat Conservation Section**

**Standard Monitoring Protocol
for
Nesting and Hatching Sea Turtles**

This protocol was developed by the St. Johns County Habitat Conservation Section in coordination with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), sea turtle permit holders, and other stakeholders. It is consistent with the current FWC Marine Turtle Conservation Guidelines and meets the requirements set forth in the County's Federally-approved Habitat Conservation Plan and Incidental Take Permit (ITP TE091980-0) issued by the USFWS August 4, 2006.

This protocol will be re-evaluated annually and changes made as needed or warranted by circumstances.

Purpose: To provide guidance to personnel involved in the survey, marking, observation, and reporting of sea turtle nesting and hatching activities within the coastal beaches of St. Johns County, Florida. All procedures will conform to current or future Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Marine Turtle Conservation Guidelines and can be found at <http://www.myfwc.com/seaturtle/Guidelines/Guidelines.PDF>. St. Johns County will provide the following necessary materials to carry out official sea turtle monitoring and staking responsibilities per the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP):

- Field Data Sheets
- Notebook for holding data sheets
- Service of making copies of data sheets
- Flagging Tape
- Wooden Stakes
- GPS units and batteries
- Digital Camera, holding case and rechargeable battery
- Laminated maps of each zone with addresses and beach access points

St. Johns County (SJC) sea turtle monitoring personnel are defined as Principal Permit Holders (PPHs), sea turtle patrol volunteers, and St. Johns County staff. Sea turtle monitoring personnel will coordinate conservation efforts through the St. Johns County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Incidental Take Permit (ITP) by following the subsequent monitoring protocol:

General Procedures

- While conducting official duties monitoring personnel should display in an obvious location on vehicle, ATV, or clothing, the organizations name and/or logo (if available);
- Sea turtle monitoring personnel must obtain annual parking permits to place in dashboard of vehicle while parking in County Right of Way to conduct authorized activities;
- Sea turtle monitoring personnel must obtain annual HCP driving permits to access and park on County beaches;
- Beach driving permits can be obtained after the completion of annual HCP training;
- Carry at all times a copy of the FWC marine turtle permit, HCP beach driving permit and proper identification while conducting authorized activities.

Training

- Sea turtle monitoring personnel annually attend HCP and Protected Species training;
- PPHs hold the responsibility to thoroughly and properly train all monitoring personnel listed on the FWC marine turtle permit to conduct the activities authorized on the permit;
- PPHs that operate their organizations ATV(s) for official surveys should seek a safety course that provides useful information pertaining to proper use of vehicle on beach environment and safety instruction.

ATV Operation

- Maintain tire pressure less than 5 psi;
- While driving the ATV ride below high tide line;
- Maintain a 15' buffer between the ATV and dune vegetation;
- Obey speed limit of 10 miles per hour and directions of travel;
- Avoid disturbing shorebirds and seabirds to the maximum possible extent;
- Avoid making sharp turns and leaving ruts.

Data Management

- Utilize daily nesting data sheets to record sea turtle nesting activity and impacts to sea turtles including, but not limited to, false crawls, species, date, estimated emergence date, descriptive location, GPS coordinates in dd.dddd, actual emergence date, date of evaluation, reproductive success, hatchling disorientations, turtles and/or nests impacted by vehicles, and hatchling/rut interactions, tidal inundation, horse track/rider interactions, predation, and human disturbance;
- Transfer daily information from nesting data sheets onto the mandatory reporting form supplied by the County on a weekly basis to

- the SJC Environmental Coordinator by 5:00 pm the next Monday;
Retain daily data sheets for submittal to Environmental Coordinator at annual end-of-season SJC marine turtle permit holder's meeting;
- Report to Beach Lighting Officer lighting violations and disorientations on date of violation via email jmiller@sjcfl.us and/or phone call at 904-209-0323, provide location, description of light and person to contact if necessary;
 - Report GPS coordinates in dd.dddd of nest location and for nest that have been relocated, the location, and cause for relocation, prior to and after relocating nest.

Nest Marking

- Conspicuously mark and barricade all nests deposited on SJC beaches;
 - High use beaches that permit driving and horseback riding are required to be staked with 4 wooden stakes.
 - Medium to low use beaches that permit only horseback riding or have no other permitted uses except pedestrians are required to be staked with 3 wooden stakes.
- Mark nest with date, nest number, and species code (i.e. Loggerhead=Cc, Green=Cm, and Leatherback=Dc);
 - A coded version of the date may be used if provided to Environmental Coordinator prior to nesting season.
- Mark the entire area of the sea turtle nest with at least three stakes, bright flagging tape, and FWC issued yellow sea turtle signage;
- Reflective numbers will be applied by County staff for nest located on driving beaches where routine rut removal procedures are needed;
- Nest located in designated traffic lanes should be barricaded with bright green cones in addition to items mentioned above, this can be done by SJC staff at the request of sea turtle monitoring personnel or placed by monitoring personnel;
- The track of a non-nesting emergence or false crawl should be obliterated by sweeping through the sand to remove any signs of the crawl. It is suggested to utilize an additional method to indicate a false crawl has been documented by placing a wooden or flagging stake in the track, labeled with "Sea Turtle False Crawl", stake should be removed no later than two days after crawl;
- Conduct daily nesting surveys between May 1 and September 30 (or after last nest has emerged) by 8:00 am each morning;
- Report to Environmental Coordinator immediately if daily nesting survey on driving beaches are not complete by required time;
- Environmental Coordinator will insure that in the event the daily sea turtle nesting survey is not completed by required time, beach opening to vehicular traffic will be delayed until completion of the survey;
- Report to Sheriff's Department dispatch (**904-824-8304**) HCP or Beach Code violations on date of violation, when reporting provide specific location, what you are observing, and description of vehicle or individual.