

Section 12**Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan****Purpose**

Prior to the HCP, horseback riding was not monitored. A registration program will improve species management and minimize impact to nesting sea turtles and AIBM. Monitoring, evaluating and documenting the extent of beach horseback riding on County beaches through a registration program will minimize impacts on protected species and their habitat.

Relevant ITP Conditions - G.2.d., l.& 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 its 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 2008

Implementation: In September 2006 a Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan, proposed Ordinance amendments and the HCP and Protected Species Training was submitted to the USFWS for approval. The Horseback Riding Plan offers three (3) different types of Permittees; Master Beach Equestrian Guide, General Beach Equestrian Guide Class I and General Beach Equestrian Guide Class II.

1. 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 should 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.

2. 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. Class I General Beach Equestrian 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 General Beach Equestrian Guide Permit shall be contingent upon continued compliance with protected species management and valid for a period of five years from the date of issuance.
3. 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.sjcfl.us/HCP/.
 - C. All training materials shall be provided by the County at no expense to the equestrian beach rider.

The HCP Coordinator provides the training on an as needed basis or it can be taken online through the HCP website. If an individual is seeking to obtain a Master Equestrian Beach Guide permit they must submit the required information. It is sent to the Assistant County Administrator for approval. These individuals are proving they have extensive riding experience on St. Johns County Beaches. After approval individuals are sent a small laminated permit (Appendix M) that must be affixed to the external portion of their saddle bags and two laminated day passes (Appendix N) that can be issued to guest of the Master Guide.

In the past signage indicating horseback riding rules and regulations have not been posted. However, new black and white signage has been placed at the entrance of Mickler's Landing located in Ponte Vedra beach and Surfside access ramp located in Vilano beach indicating the new rules and regulations per the HCP and ITP.

Assessment: No complaints have been reported regarding the new online HCP and Protected Species training. In 2009 only six Master Beach Equestrian permits, eighty Class I General Beach Guide permits and three Class II General Beach Guide permits were issued through Beach Services. There have been no denials by the St. Johns County Assistant County Administrator for Master Beach Equestrian Guide permits.

Program Improvements: No formal changes to policy or procedure are contemplated at this time.