

**Section 1****Public Vehicular Access****Purpose**

May 1 through October 31 is defined as sea turtle nesting season in which adult sea turtles are emerging from the ocean to nest and hatchlings are emerging from their nests heading to the ocean. Prior to implementation of the HCP/ITP all recorded take of sea turtles and turtle nests due to vehicles or vehicular activities in St. Johns County occurred between sunset and sunrise. Public vehicle access between May 1 and October 31 was reduced from allowing vehicles from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. to allowing vehicles from 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. for the general public.

**Relevant ITP Condition - G.1.b., c. & e.**

- b. Public Driving.** “From May 1 through October 31, each year, and only after completion of daily sea turtle nesting surveys, the Permittee may authorize public vehicle access outside of the Conservation Zone between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. On July 4 and July 5, each year, the Permittee may also authorize public access onto the beach south of the Vilano Road beach access ramp and north of St. Augustine Inlet, from 8:00 p.m. July 4 to 1:00 a.m. July 5. From November 1 through April 30, each year, the Permittee may authorize public vehicles access outside of the Conservation Zone at any time.”
- c. Commercial Fishermen.** “The Permittee may authorize eligible commercial fishermen vehicle access outside of the Conservation Zone from May 1 to October 31, between 5:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Between November 1 and April 30, each year, the Permittee may authorize eligible commercial fishermen access outside of the Conservation Zone at any time.”
- e. Sea Turtle Monitoring.** “Vehicle access for properly permitted sea turtle monitoring is not limited, including access within the Conservation Zone.”

**HCP Performance During 2008**

**Implementation:** Prior to the start of the 2008 sea turtle nesting season multiple media releases through local papers, Government Television stations and radio announcements were made informing the public that beach gate closures would begin on May 1 at 7:30 p.m. and gates would open by 8:00 a.m. through October 31. St. Johns County beaches have nine toll booths that are manned throughout the beach season from March 1 to Labor Day. Toll booth attendants were staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and were responsible for opening the gates by 8:00 a.m. each day of the week. Monday through Thursday staff of Beach Services including the Manager of Beach Services, HCP Coordinator, Beach Lighting Officer, two HCP Field Assistants and two toll operators

were tasked with the duty of clearing beaches and closing the gates. Usina, Surfside, Vilano and Porpoise Point vehicular access points were cleared by one staff member in either a 4x4 vehicle or by ATV. All other access points were cleared by two Beach Services staff members and two interns in 4x4 vehicles. Friday – Sunday and including holidays were staffed by deputies of St. Johns County Sheriff’s department and officers of the City of St. Augustine Beach Police Department. Staff would begin to clear the beaches each evening starting at 6:30 p.m. by approaching vehicle owners informing them of the beach gate closures. The initial south beach closings were conducted on occasion by one City Police officers in one vehicle and up to four Sheriff’s deputies in four vehicles. The north beaches including Vilano and Porpoise Point were conducted in the same manner. This was achieved with the support of one or two Sheriff’s deputies.

**Assessment:** Prior to the implementation of the HCP the beaches were open from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. during sea turtle season. After approval of the HCP St. Johns County beaches decreased the driving time to 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., thus decreasing the driving hours on beaches by 5 hours. Beach clearings began by 6:30 p.m. each evening to ensure all beaches were cleared of vehicles by the required time of 8:00 p.m. That time was further decreased in 2007 to 7:30 p.m. by the Board of County Commissioners through an amendment to Beach Code 2007-19. This further reduced the driving time on the beaches by an extra half hour per day. This continued until the end of the sea turtle season, a total of 140 days. Compared to the 2007 nesting season the challenges faced during gate closures were decreased over the course of 2008. A total of 90,645 daily beach driving passes and 10,604 annual beach driving passes totaling \$995, 323 in toll sales during the 2008 beach season of March 1 to Labor Day were reported. Most of the vehicle access ramps were busiest during the month of August. Ocean Trace and Vilano ramps exhibited higher sales than the other ramps.

**Table 1. Beach parking fees**

**Beach Parking Fees**

Year	Daily Fees		Annual Fee	
	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident
2007	\$6.00	NA	\$40.00	NA
2008	\$6.00	\$7.00	\$40.00	\$50.00

**Table 2. Summary**

**Summary**

Year	Total Daily Passes Sold	Total Annual Passes Sold	Total Amount	Vehicles Entered
2007	101,953	12,512	\$1,055,688.03	164,513
2008	90,645	10,604	\$995,720.00	143,665

During the beach season beach gates were closed a total of 5.5 times due to inclement weather and soft sand conditions.

Not all staff and personnel reported when vehicles were locked on beaches at night. However, a total of 76 citations were issued by the sheriff's department for nighttime driving violations.

**Program Improvements:** We will continue to work closely with other County departments to ensure the beaches are cleared and secured by the required time. In addition, a better effort to collect more data regarding vehicles left on the beach during gate closures will be made.