

Section 1 Public Vehicular Access

Purpose

May 1st through October 31st is defined as sea turtle nesting season in which adult sea turtles are emerging from the ocean to nest and where 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. With the implementation of the HCP/ITP, general public vehicle access between May 1st and October 31st was reduced from allowing vehicles on the beach from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. to allowing vehicles on the beach from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. This was further reduced in 2007 to allowing general public vehicle access only between 8:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Applicable ITP Condition - G.1.b., c. and 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 2012

Implementation: Prior to each sea turtle nesting season the County actively informs the public of beach gate closures through local newspapers, news channels, Government Television stations and radio announcements. There are nine toll booths in the County located at the following vehicular access ramps starting from north to south; Vilano Road, Genoa Road (Porpoise Point access), A Street, Ocean Trace Road, Dondanville Road, Matanzas Avenue, Mary Street, Cubbedge Road (Crescent Beach access), and Fort Matanzas National Monument beach access ramp. Large black and white signs were installed in 2007 at all beach access ramps (Object 1) to inform beach users of the times and dates for beach gate closures. Additionally, during the sea turtle nesting season a large green aluminum sign is attached to the back of the trash contractor’s vehicle informing visitors of beach driving hours. All of the beach access points are manned throughout the beach season from March 1st to Labor Day by toll booth operators. Two

additional access ramps, Usina access ramp and Surfside Avenue access ramp are unmanned throughout the year. Usina beach access ramp is located at the most northern part of the driving beaches in the parking lot of the “Reef” restaurant. It traditionally has been an access ramp for North Beach 4x4 permittees. However, due to extreme storm events the Usina ramp has been closed and is only used for emergency access and by sea turtle patrol. Surfside Avenue beach access ramp has been affixed with a combination lock and is only accessed by permitted individuals, law enforcement and County staff. Toll operators are responsible for collecting daily and annual pass money as well as checking for annual passes on the windshields of vehicles for beach access.

Toll attendants are responsible for opening the gates by 8:00 a.m. each day of the week during the sea turtle season. County staff is responsible for gate closures Monday through Thursday. The staff is comprised of a Beach Enforcement Specialist, Beach Enforcement Technician, and five Field Assistants. Usina, Surfside Avenue, Vilano Road and Genoa Road vehicular access points were cleared by one staff member in either a 4x4 vehicle, Mule or ATV. All other access points were cleared by three Beach Services staff in similar vehicles. On weekends from Friday through Sunday, and on holidays, St. Johns County Sheriff’s deputies were responsible for clearing the beaches. NRDs begin informing vehicle operators around 6:30 p.m. of gate closing times and continue until all vehicles are cleared off the beach. This was completed with at least two NRDs on south beaches and one deputy or NRD on Vilano and north beach.

Object 1. Beach driving entrance signs



Assessment: Prior to the implementation of the HCP the beaches were open to driving from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. during sea turtle season. After approval of the HCP, the driving time was restricted to 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., decreasing the beach driving hours by 5 hours. Beach clearings began no later than 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 reduced in 2007 to 7:30 p.m. by the Board of County Commissioners through an amendment to Beach Code 2007-19. This further limited the driving time on the beach by an additional half hour per day. This continued until the end of the sea turtle season - a total of 140 days.

On January 1, 2010, Fort Matanzas National Monument discontinued beach driving on their 0.9 miles of federal beach. Federal land begins at the Fort Matanzas beach access ramp and continues south and around the western side of the Matanzas inlet bridge. This event resulted in the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners passing Resolution 2009-369 to support the continuation of beach driving at Fort Matanzas National Monument. At this time, driving on Fort Matanzas National Monument property is prohibited.

Beach parking fees have not increased since 2008; however there have been additions to the types of available beach driving passes. In 2011, three new beach driving passes were added which included Annual Handicap, 3-Day Resident and 3-Day Non-Resident passes. In 2012, two additional passes were added, Daily Handicap and 3-Day Handicapped (Table 1). The 2012 beach season resulted in 76,104 daily passes, 1,786 three-day passes and 5,536 annual passes issued. The total sales for the 2012 season were \$873,447.00 from March 1st to September 30th (Table 2). The month of July was recorded as having the most sales while September had the least. The A-Street and Ocean Trace toll ramps exhibited higher sales than the other ramps. Vilano Road, Cubbedge Road and Dondanville ramps were next highest, followed by Matanzas Avenue and Mary Street. The Fort Matanzas National Monument and Genoa Road ramps had the least amount of sales revenue recorded for the season.

Table 1. Beach parking fees

Year	Daily Fees			3 Day Pass		Annual Fee (October 1-March 1)		Annual Fee (March 2-September 30)	
	Resident	Non-Resident	Handicapped	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident	Resident	Non-Resident
2007	\$6.00	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$40.00	NA	\$40.00	NA
2008	\$6.00	\$7.00	NA	NA	NA	\$40.00	\$50.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
2009	\$6.00	\$7.00	NA	NA	NA	\$40.00	\$50.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
2010	\$6.00	\$7.00	NA	NA	NA	\$40.00	\$50.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
2011	\$6.00	\$7.00	\$5.00	\$15.00	\$18.00	\$40.00	\$50.00	\$40.00	\$50.00
2012	\$6.00	\$7.00	\$5.00	\$15.00	\$18.00	\$30.00	\$40.00	\$40.00	\$50.00

Table 2. Annual Beach Parking Fee Summary

Year	Total Daily Passes Sold	Total Annual Passes Sold	Total 3 Day Passes Sold	Total Amount	*Vehicles entered beach season	**Vehicles entered annually
2007	101,953	12,512	NA	\$1,055,688.03	164,513	190,001
2008	90,645	10,604	NA	\$995,720.00	143,665	166,326
2009	107,511	10,702	NA	\$1,111,025.50	161,021	187,899
2010	88,942	9,919	NA	\$954,800.00	138,537	160,773
2011	78,376	10,210	1,879	\$912,559.00	129,426	149,020
2012	76,104	5,536	1,786	\$873,447.00	103,784	122,810

Beach tolls were closed a total of six times due to inclement weather and high tide events during the 2012 beach season. Below is a summary of those events:

Full Moon High tide: 5/8, Fort Matanzas National Monument ramp locked. Driving restricted from 100 yards south of Crescent Beach Ramp to Fort Matanzas National Monument ramp.

Tropical Storm Beryl: 5/27 & 5/28, St. Augustine Beach from A street access ramp to Fort Matanzas National Monument locked for approximately 48 hours.

Tropical Storm Debbie: 6/27 & 6/28, St. Augustine Beach from A street access ramp to Fort Matanzas National Monument locked for approximately 18 hours.

Tropical Storm Isaac: 8/26 & 8/27, St. Augustine Beach from A street access ramp to Fort Matanzas National Monument locked at 3:30 pm on 8/26 and remained closed until reopening on 8/28.

Hurricane Rafael Swell: 10/15, Mary Street to Fort Matanzas National Monument closed throughout the day due to long period ground swell coinciding with high tides.

Hurricane Rafael Swell: 10/17, Second long period swell filled in from storms westerly movement. Matanzas Avenue to Fort Matanzas National Monument closed to vehicles for the day.

Hurricane Sandy: 10/25-10/29, Matanzas Ave to FMR locked at 3:00pm. North end of SAB beach remained open until 7:30 pm that evening. Remainder of beach (A-street to Mat Ave) locked down on 10/26 late morning. Vilano locked by SJSO on 10/26. Area access ramps remained locked until 11:30 pm on 10/29. Very large long period swell flooded beach through high tide cycle, swell peaked on 10/27 coinciding with 25kt + North winds. Substantial erosion noted at former toe of slope dunes across all area beaches. All beach services infrastructure was pulled in anticipation of this event.

Program Improvements: The Division of Beach Services, Habitat Conservation Section and the Sheriff's Department will continue to work closely to ensure the beaches remain safe during significant events and they are open, cleared and secured by the required time as set forth in the ITP, HCP and Beach Code.