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## St. Johns County Daytime Nesting and Washback Hatchling Event Survey Guidelines and Policies

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The purpose of daytime nesting and hatchling event surveys are to eliminate or minimize impacts to daytime sea turtle nesting activities and washback hatchling events from vehicular activities on County beaches. The following guidelines and policies are meant to accompany the guidelines set forth in the St. Johns County Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and conditions of the section 10 Incidental Take Permit (ITP) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), approved August 4, 2006. All FWC authorized personnel, including FWC Principal Permit Holders (PPH), and county personnel involved in beach operations will receive extensive HCP training.

### Daytime Nesting Events

1. In the event that a female sea turtle emerges from the ocean during daylight hours to nest, the County will notify the PPH and remain at the incident location for crowd control;
2. County staff will instruct the public to keep a distance of at least 30 feet on either side of nesting turtle. The path leading to the ocean shall be temporarily barricaded with traffic cones;
3. Lane closure and traffic flow will remain in effect until the turtle has re-entered the ocean and is out of sight;
4. Beach users may not move a parked vehicle within 100 feet until after the turtle has returned to the ocean;
5. County authorized personnel will remain at site until PPH has arrived to inspect and/or mark the nest;
6. Upon completion of the nesting event the PPHs will properly stake the nest according to FWC and HCP guidelines;
7. If nest is located in traffic lane and PPH is not permitted to relocate or chooses not to relocate the nest, the traffic lane must be rerouted seaward of the nest;

### Daytime Emerging Hatchling Events

1. If hatchling sea turtles are observed or reported on the beach during daylight hours the Division of Beach Operations and appropriate PPH will be notified immediately and remain at the incident location for crowd control;
2. Clearance for vehicular traffic closure or flow will follow the conditions set forth in Chapter 3, section 3-2.4 Extreme High Tide Events in the Operations Manual for Beach Toll & Traffic Control Operations;
3. If a daytime emergence occurs during the hours of the day at which it is the hottest (sand is hot to touch) the hatchlings must be collected and placed in FWC authorized containers and transferred to the appropriate PPH for later release;
4. County staff will instruct the public to keep a distance of at least 30 feet on either side of emerging hatchlings, the hatchlings path leading to the ocean should be temporarily barricaded with traffic cones;

5. Lane closure and traffic flow will remain in effect until all turtles have safely entered the ocean and are out of sight;
6. Beach users parked within 30 feet of the hatching nest shall not be permitted to operate their vehicles until advised to do so by authorized County personnel;
7. Authorized County personnel or sea turtle monitoring personnel will monitor the nest site for at least 1 hour to ensure that no additional hatchlings emerge. Any new emergencies will be managed in the same manner as noted above.

### **Daytime Washback Hatchling Event**

1. Areas where driving is permitted are established as greatest potential for conducting systematic surveys of wrack lines (the zone at the high tide line where seaweed and flotsam accumulate) for live and dead sea turtle post-hatchlings (washbacks) following mass seaweed events;
2. The County will obtain a letter from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) allowing authorized County personnel to collect, receive and/or temporarily hold washback hatchlings, the County will renew with FWC annually prior to the start of sea turtle season;
3. From July 1<sup>st</sup> through November 30<sup>th</sup> of each year, when the wind has been predominantly onshore, during large storm events, and large amounts of seaweed are expected to be washed onto the beach systematic surveys of the wrack line will be conducted by County personnel authorized by FWC;
4. Surveys will be conducted during first 24 hours following the above listed events;
  - a. Subsequent surveys will be conducted during the earliest outgoing tide as determined by the HCP Coordinator;
5. Clearance for vehicular traffic closure or flow will follow the conditions set forth in Chapter 3, section 3-2.4 Extreme High Tide Events in the Operations Manual for Beach Toll & Traffic Control Operations (attached);
6. County personnel authorized by FWC will conduct surveys in county authorized vehicles with individuals walking in front of vehicle surveying the wrack line and placing hatchlings in hatchling safe containers, as approved annually by FWC;
  - a. Hatchling safe containers consisting of a non-transparent, rubber or plastic container, a ventilated lid will be lined with a thin layer of damp sand with no free standing water. Lids shall remain on containers until they are ready for release or rehab to an authorized facility;
7. Any live and/or dead sea turtle less than 20 cm (8 in) long are considered as a washback hatchling and will be treated as such. Live and/or dead hatchlings larger than 20 cm (8 in) will be treated as a normal stranding, and the PPH will be notified immediately;
8. A roving announcement at time of washback event will advise vehicle owners that they will not be allowed to move vehicles until survey is complete and not to handle any encountered sea turtles;
9. Washback hatchlings will be retrieved and/or transferred by permitted personnel to the nearest facility for rehabilitation and release;
10. The following information will be recorded at time of survey:
  - a. Name of surveyor(s)

- b. Date/Time
  - c. Starting/Ending location
  - d. Starting/Ending time
  - e. No. of live/dead hatchlings
  - f. Facility transferred to
  - g. Any comments relating to the event
11. The county will respond to all washback events on non-driving beaches as required.