

St. Johns County Sea Turtle Hatchling Washback Survey Protocol

The purpose of sea turtle hatchling Washback surveys is to eliminate or minimize impacts to sea turtle hatchlings from July 1st through November 30th, that have washed back due to high onshore winds, during large storm events, and when large amounts of seaweed have washed onto the beach.

1. Only St. Johns County and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) authorized personnel and volunteers are permitted to handle and hold sea turtle hatchling Washbacks;
2. Personnel and volunteers seeking to become authorized to conduct Washback surveys must attend Washback survey training prior to implementing protocol;
3. Beaches where driving is permitted are established as a priority, other beaches will be surveyed as necessary, to conduct systematic surveys of the wrack line for live and dead sea turtle post-hatchling Washbacks during mass seaweed events;
4. Driving beaches will be broken into zones and assigned Zone Captains;
 - a. HCP Coordinator notifies Zone Captains that wrack line is present and that systematic survey of wrack line must be conducted;
 - b. Zone Captains will notify authorized personnel to conduct a survey, upon completion HCP Coordinator must be contacted to inform location of Washbacks;
 - c. Principal Permit Holders (PPH) will be notified that Washback hatchlings were found in their Marine Turtle Permit Zone;
5. The seaweed wrack line is defined as the zone at the high tide line where seaweed and flotsam accumulate as a result of predominately high onshore winds and large storm events;
6. Washbacks are defined as post-hatchling sea turtles, with a carapace length between 5 and 10 cm (2 – 4 inches). The carapace often contains algae or gooseneck barnacles. Washbacks are primarily found on top of seaweed, mixed in among the seaweed, nearby on the sand, or trying to crawl back to the water;
7. During Washback surveys if a sea turtle larger than 10cm is found, the PPH for that area will be notified immediately to complete a Stranding survey and data form, at which time FWC will be notified;
8. Only hands are permitted to thoroughly survey the seaweed by turning it over; no probes, sticks or poking devices are allowed;
9. Large holding containers stationed at holding stations or on HCP vehicle will be of non-transparent plastic material, 66 quart, lined with damp towel, and labeled “Sea Turtle Hatchling Washbacks Only”;
10. Each Washback surveyor will carry two buckets that are labeled 1) Dead/Sick Washbacks, divided into two compartments to separate Dead from Sick and 2) Live Washbacks;
11. From July 1st through September 30th when toll booths are manned by County staff these location will serve as Washback collection stations;
 - a. The above mentioned holding containers, buckets, data sheets, measuring devices, and towels will be located inside each toll booth station;

- b. Each collection station vehicle access ramp is as follows: Vilano, A street, Ocean Trace, Dondanville, Matanzas Avenue, Mary Street, Crescent Beach, and Fort Matanzas ramps (http://www.co.st-johns.fl.us/BCC/growth_mgmt_services/planning/Environmental/media/TurtleBrochure3.pdf);
 - c. Toll booth collectors will not be authorized to touch the Washbacks or open the containers;
 - d. Sea turtle holding containers will be placed inside toll booth until picked up by FWC authorized personnel;
 - e. A letter of authorization from FWC must be posted at each collection stations;
12. From October 1st to November 30th the collection station for Washbacks will be located at the Beach Services office at 2175 Mizell Road, or on the Habitat Conservation vehicle, which is located at the above mentioned address and is used by County staff to conduct daily patrols of the beaches, at which point authorized County staff will be in contact with Washback surveyors to pick up Washbacks in a timely manner;
 13. No unauthorized personnel are allowed to transport or handle Washbacks at any given time;
 14. Washbacks cannot be held at ones home or an unauthorized location;
 15. All Washbacks must be transported to nearest sea turtle rehabilitation facility within 3 hours of collection;
 16. Washback personnel will complete Washback log with the following information: Observed by, Date, Starting/Ending Time, Starting/Ending Location, #Live, #Dead, Facility Transported To, and Comments.