

Washback Volunteer Program Frequently Asked Questions

What is expected of me as a Washback volunteer?

As a volunteer, you will be expected to remain in close contact with your Zone Captain and assist in surveys whenever possible. Surveys require that you walk the coastline and examine the wrack line or seaweed washed up on the beach. To do this, volunteers must be able to bend and turn over the wrack by hand to search for washbacks. This is a tedious process and you may be expected to walk as much as two to three miles depending on the number of volunteers in your zone.

How do I know what to do to complete a survey? Will there be additional training?

To become a Washback Program volunteer, it is mandatory that you complete the **online Orientation** session and the **Beach Survey training**. At these trainings you will be provided an overview of the program, a basic understanding of sea turtles, a detailed explanation of your role in the program, and your responsibilities for completing a survey.

How do I know when the surveys need to be performed?

Wrack lines are formed as storms push large amounts of seaweed onto the beach. As this does not happen at specific times, please be aware this is an on-call volunteer program. You will be contacted by your Zone Captain as soon as the decision has been made that surveys need to be performed.

Additional expectations are to join your team the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month from September to November to do a beach cleanup.

What do we do if we find a turtle?

Contact your Zone Captain immediately, so they can make appropriate arrangements. The Beach Survey training will explain, in detail, what volunteers need to do when they find a turtle.

If you find a turtle as a part of the general public and not as a washback volunteer please contact the St. Johns County Sheriff's office 904-824-8304.

Do not put the turtle back into the ocean as they are exhausted and need medical attention.

How long do the surveys last? How far am I expected to walk?

Surveys can take up to 2 or 3 hours, but will vary depending on the amount of wrack present on the beach and the number of people conducting the survey. Surveys are called according to weather patterns and the amount of new wrack lines on the beaches, and therefore are not able to be scheduled ahead of time.

What is involved in a survey?

When performing a survey, you will be walking down the beach carrying the appropriate equipment (buckets, towels, trash bags) while visually and manually looking for turtles. You will bend over and manually turn the seaweed or wrack with your hands. We ask that you do this by hand to prevent accidental injury to the turtles.

Where will I be performing my survey?

You will be assigned a zone when your application is processed which will remain the same for the entire season. We try to accommodate zone requests, but due to the high number of volunteers, we cannot guarantee a specific zone.

What are the age requirements to participate in the Washback program?

There is no age requirement to be a volunteer for the Washback program, however, both adult and child volunteers must be able to walk long distances in extreme weather conditions as temperatures are very high during washback season. Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian and the parent / guardian must complete a volunteer application for each child.

What are the possibilities of groups working together?

Groups are allowed and encouraged to assist one another in the survey process as long as their assigned zones are properly surveyed. If you would like to request to be assigned to the same zone as a friend, please indicate this on your volunteer application.

What if my family member is in town, can they participate without the survey?

If your family member has not filled out the appropriate paperwork and attended an orientation, and Beach Survey training, they may only accompany you on the survey walk. They may not handle any turtles, as this may only be done by a trained volunteer.

Can I bring my pet for a survey?

We do not allow pets to be present during the survey process. Pets may inadvertently injure the turtles.

Can I use my time as a Washback volunteer to complete community service hours?

In order to receive credit for your volunteer hours please email Tara Dodson at tdodson@sjcfl.us for the validation form. Please include your survey zone, the hours you participated, and the name of your zone captain.

What if my schedule changes?

Notify your Zone Captain immediately of any changes in your availability.

Why do you need my personal information such as my social security number and drivers license for the application?

The County conducts background checks, and you must have a valid Florida driver's license. The County understands the potential privacy and security concerns. Your information is kept strictly confidential and is only processed through one approved County employee who shreds the information immediately following the background check.

Why do you need to perform a criminal background check on me as a volunteer?

This is a County policy and is for the safety of you and the general public.