



**ST. JOHNS COUNTY
HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
2020 ANNUAL COMPLIANCE REPORT
ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA**



Photo Credit: St. Johns County

Prepared for:

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ACRONYMS

AIBM	Anastasia Island Beach Mouse
ASP	Anastasia State Park
BLMP	Beach Lighting Management Plan
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
FWC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
GTMNERR	Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve
HCP	Habitat Conservation Plan
ITP	Incidental Take Permit
MTPs	Marine Turtle Principal Permit Holders
NRDs	Natural Resource Deputies
RS	Restricted Species
PSAs	Public Service Assistants
SJC	St. Johns County
SJSO	St. Johns County Sheriff's Office
SSTMP	Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The St. Johns County (SJC) Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Incidental Take Permit (ITP) is a 20-year plan to protect and improve beach and dune habitat for listed, threatened and endangered species while continuing to manage the beaches for continued public access. The HCP provides the framework for managing vehicular beach access and other related activities on the county's beaches in a manner and extent compatible with the protection of sea turtles and Anastasia Island beach mouse (AIBM). Issuance of the permit was conditioned upon the county's adherence to a variety of measures to minimize and mitigate the potential for incidental take of five species of federally protected sea turtles which utilize county beaches as nesting habitat and the AIBM which inhabits the beach dunes but may also frequent the beach. As a requirement of an ITP application, a HCP was prepared that outlines compliance measures to achieve desired protections. On August 6, 2006, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued the 20 year ITP to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. The permit is in its 14th year of implementation.

The Annual Report was prepared by the environmental supervisor in conjunction with data obtained by the Marine Turtle Principal Permit Holders (MTPs), beach lighting officer, beach enforcement specialist, and the beach superintendent. Administrative review was done by the manager of the environmental division and data processing was done so by the environmental specialist. The Imperiled Species Section of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) provided administrative review of Section 3: Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol. The report summarizes programs, policies and procedures implemented by St. Johns County during 2020 in support of the HCP and ITP. It assesses the effectiveness of these measures, identifies program deficiencies and describes steps that will be taken by the county to further improve HCP/ITP performance.

The nesting season of 2020 was an eventful nesting season with a recorded total of 842 nests; 773 loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), 47 greens (*Chelonia mydas*), and 21 leatherback nests (*Dermochelys coriacea*). Although there was minor storm activity 58 nests were still washed out and 130 did not hatch leaving 712 successful nests. Overall nesting activities lead to an 85% nesting success rate and an 85% hatchling success frequency where 63,182 hatchlings emerged from the sand of St. Johns County beaches.

Nests deposited on driving beaches accounted for 87 nests (10%), 682 nests (81%) on non-driving beaches and 53 nests (14%) on restricted driving beaches, with percentages representing the overall distribution of nesting. Disorientations maintained consistent with past seasons with 16 recorded in 2020. A seasonal review confirms this observation with 14 disorientations in 2019, 12 in 2018, 18 in 2017 and 21 in 2016.

From March through September, weather depending, toll operators are collecting money for the sale of annual and daily passes for the purpose of beach driving and parking access. Historically, the annual compliance report would predict through a previously created formula the number of vehicles that would enter. Over the last several years the conditions have changed such that staff cannot calculate the numbers of vehicles that enter annually but can report on how many beach passes were sold. A more comprehensive study would need to be created.

Although March marks the beginning of the beach toll season due to COVID-19 restrictions tolls were not collected at driving beaches from March 21 to May 11. Even so total revenue increased 22.41% from 2019 (2019 = \$881,852). It is additionally important to note that the Board of County Commissioners voted for all 2020 annual beach passes to be valid through the 2021 season. Therefore, revenue from annual beach passes will be impacted in the 2021 season.

St. Johns County sea turtle patrol is coordinated by six different permit holders and based solely on volunteer efforts with the exception of park rangers in Anastasia State Park. Both FWC and St. Johns County are dependent on the hundreds of volunteers to patrol the beaches seven days a week from the beginning of May until approximately mid-September for the purpose of collecting sea turtle nesting data. Coastal erosion is playing an important role in creating additional challenges for sea turtle patrol for access capabilities and requiring extra documentation of obstacles encountered during nesting activities.

The HCP was prepared to establish compatibility between protected species and beach user groups. The implementation of the HCP requires support and awareness of all aspects of the HCP and ITP from other County departments, outside governing agencies, beach users, and volunteers. The County must coordinate programs within and among numerous County departments, uphold its excellence in public safety, provide training and coordinate the activities of outside contractors, commercial fishermen, north beach 4x4 permittees, horseback riders, and other groups involved in protected species monitoring. Due to the complexity of the HCP, the diversity of program participants and the scope of activities it is expected that unforeseen issues sometimes occur; such issues are quickly and successfully addressed, thereby ensuring the effective implementation of the HCP.

INTRODUCTION

Background on the St. Johns County HCP

St. Johns County prepares an annual report based on the commitments outlined with in the HCP implementation agreement formally known as the ITP. The HCP annual report is composed of programmatic management activities on SJC beaches covered under the HCP, sea turtle monitoring efforts, conservation strategy achievements, enforcement, public access, and other related programs. The purpose of the annual report is to assess the effectiveness of programs implemented by the County to minimize and mitigate impacts associated with beach driving, and other recreational activities related to public access and protected species.

This year's report was prepared by the environmental supervisor with assistance from the environmental division manager, beach services supervisor, and the environmental specialists responsible for data management and management of the lighting program. The geographical information systems department in conjunction with data obtained from other county departments, and the MTPs also provided valuable data which are helpful in summarizing the activities and programs conducted on SJC beaches during the 2020 season.

Enforcement

Through a partnership with the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office (SJSO), full time Natural Resource Deputies (NRDs) are assigned to the beach for the purpose of implementing the HCP/ITP and public safety through enforcement of the Beach Code (SJC Code Ordinance number 2007-19). They participate in informative HCP, shorebird/seabird identification, marine mammal response, and sea turtle stranding training.

Marine Turtle Permit Program

The USFWS Endangered Species Act allows for a Section 6 agreement giving authority to the FWC in providing special authorizations to MTPs. Marine turtle permits are issued annually to qualified individuals for the purpose of patrolling the beaches to collect sea turtle nesting data and to stake off nests. The 41.1 miles of coastline are broken into twelve zones by the FWC marine turtle permit program. All twelve zones are surveyed daily and coordinated by six different MTPs from May 1 to mid September or until the last nest has been removed. Condition G.2.i. of the ITP outlines that a Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol (SSTMP) be created in coordination with MTPs, FWC and USFWS staff. More information on this plan can be found in Section 3: Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol.

SECTION 1: PUBLIC VEHICULAR ACCESS

Applicable ITP Conditions - 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 vehicle 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.”*

Implementation: Ten vehicular access ramps are positioned on the coastline to allow for vehicles to enter driving beaches in the following order starting from North to South; Surfside Avenue, 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 (Map Figure 1).

Public Driving

Beach access fees are collected from March 1st to Labor Day (weather permitting) where nine of the ten vehicular access ramps are manned by toll booth operators. Surfside Avenue beach access ramp is an unmanned ramp, secured with a combination lock, and is only accessed by a special use permit, law enforcement, and county staff. Use and conduct signs are located at the entrance of each beach access ramp. While at the conclusion of each toll collecting day additional signage is placed by toll operators notifying visitors of times and dates for beach gate closures.

July 4th Event

From 8:00 a.m., July 4th until 1:00 a.m., July 5th, NRDs and additional deputies are scheduled at Porpoise Point to patrol the area to ensure compliance with the beach code while the fireworks across the bay from the City of St. Augustine take place.

Commercial Fishermen

Authorized commercial fishermen are permitted to enter the beaches at designated vehicular access ramps if driving conditions allow for access. Permittees must complete HCP training, provide proof of FWC commercial fishing permit with a Restricted Species (RS) endorsement, as

well as provide a vehicle description, vehicle tag number and the annual pass number. Upon approval, individuals are supplied with a hang tag permit, two large magnets that identify them as a Commercial Fishermen, and a combination code to access. To facilitate management of the vehicular access point, the code is changed monthly.

Sea Turtle Monitoring

The HCP necessitates that sea turtle patrol volunteers complete annual HCP training which is provided online. Training outlines the requirements of other user groups and the procedures of implementation of the HCP. Additionally, volunteer groups that drive to complete their daily surveys must obtain a special use permit. The permit application includes completion of protected species training, a copy of their FWC marine turtle monitoring permit, and a vehicle description. Permittees located on driving beaches are provided a beach gate key to access beaches before 8 a.m. when gates are officially opened by County staff.

Assessment: The beach code provides the legal framework in which the beach is managed and echoes the stipulations provided in both the HCP and ITP. To successfully educate, implement, and enforce the code, and the conditions as stated above, a positive working relationship with multiple departments and agencies is necessary setting up the program for success.

Public Driving

Although ten vehicular access ramps are depicted on Map Figure 1, they all have varying degrees of availability due to erosion and lack of legal space for driving. Genoa Road also referred to as Porpoise Point access is tremendously unpredictable with sand accreting and eroding depending on storm and tide patterns and was closed throughout the beach toll season. While A Street, Ocean Trace Road, Dondanville Road, Matanzas Avenue, Mary Street, Cubbedge Road (Crescent Beach access) continue to allow vehicles but with restrictions that depend on coastal flooding conditions. Lastly, the ramp at Fort Matanzas National Monument was closed in 2016 following the impacts from Hurricane Matthew but was reopened over the summer of 2020 as an exit only ramp.

The range of beach pass selections has changed over the years to accommodate the many different types of beach users. Currently they are sold as annual and daily passes with varying fees that relate to resident, non-resident, and handicap. Daily passes are sold at a flat fee of \$10 but at a discounted rate of \$5 for handicap. While annual passes are sold at a flat fee of \$50 for resident, \$100 for non-resident, and \$40 for handicap.

Table 1. Summary of Beach Passes Sold

Year	Total Daily Passes Sold	Total Annual Passes	Total 3 Day Passes	Twilight and Military	Total Amount	Vehicles entered
2007	101,953	12,512	NA	NA	\$1,055,688	164,513
2008	90,645	10,604	NA	NA	\$995,720	143,665
2009	107,511	10,702	NA	NA	\$1,111,026	161,021
2010	88,942	9,919	NA	NA	\$954,800	138,537
2011	78,376	10,210	1,879	NA	\$912,559	129,426
2012	76,104	5,536	1,786	NA	\$873,447	103,784
2013	61,504	5,466	1,640	NA	\$775,771	88,834
*2014	58,878	9,428	2,126	8,457	\$849,587	262,273
2015	49,542	9,812	1,721	9,645	\$803,799	116,151
2016	47,627	10,191	NA	11,187	\$767,475	98,582
2017	36,021	9,030	NA	8,056	\$619,597	NA
2018	39,900	7,329	NA	5,428	\$799,366	NA
2019	41,824	7,458	NA	790	\$881,852.09	NA
2020	53,815	10,839	NA	NA	\$1,079,478.00	NA

*Previous formula: (total annual passes sold*5 + total daily passes sold + (total 3 day passes sold*)) /4 + vehicles entered beach season *2014 Formula: (total annual passes sold*20+total daily passes sold + (total 3 day passes sold*3) + twilight and military) /4 + vehicles entered beach season.

Although March marks the beginning of the beach toll season due to COVID-19 restrictions tolls were not collected at driving beaches from March 21 to May 11. Even so total revenue increased 22.41% from 2019 (2019 = \$881,852). It is additionally important to note that the Board of County Commissioners voted for all 2020 annual beach passes to be valid through the 2021 season. Therefore, revenue from annual beach passes will be impacted in the 2021 season.

The beaches are increasingly reaching maximum capacity and no formal evaluation is being done to summarize the use. Previously it was thought that a season pass holder entered the beach 5 times per year but after further discussion with county staff it is difficult to identify how many vehicles are entering the beach without a formal study.

Gate Openings

At the start of the beach toll season vehicle access ramps were manned until March 20th when the beaches were closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They were reopened to beach driving on May 12th and resumed sea turtle season operating procedures of being manned from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Nighttime Gate Closures

Seasonal staff is responsible for gate closures on gates located on both north and south beaches Monday through Thursday. Signs inform individuals locked on the beach to contact the Sheriff's department to request to have the gate unlocked in order to exit the beach.

On weekends from Friday through Sunday, and on Federal Holidays, SJSO deputies were responsible for clearing the beaches. Deputies began by informing vehicle operators around 6:30 p.m. of gate closing times and would continue until all vehicles were cleared off the beach locking the gates by 7:30 p.m.

July 4th Event

The historic event of setting off fireworks from the downtown area of the City of St. Augustine did not take place this year. Therefore, the beaches were secured with all other gates at 7:30 pm.

Commercial Fishermen

For the 2020 season, 3 individuals received permits to access the beaches from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm. See Section 18: HCP and Protected Species Training for more information.

Sea Turtle Monitoring

Marine turtle permit holders and their volunteers were provided with an online training program to complete prior to the 2020 season. From the 12 designated zones 68 volunteers completed the training. Out of the twelve zones monitored by sea turtle patrol volunteers, eight of the organized groups obtained permits to drive and park on the beach for the purpose of surveying the beaches. See Section 18: HCP and Protected Species Training for more information.

Program Improvements: Beach services, the habitat conservation section, and SJSO 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 HCP/ITP and Beach Code.

SECTION 2: INSTALLING AND MAINTAINING TRAFFIC BARRICADES

Applicable ITP Condition - G.2.a.

- a. Installation, Maintenance, and Operation of Traffic Barricades. “The Permittee shall maintain and/or enhance all existing traffic barricades on public beach access ramps to ensure they effectively exclude public vehicle traffic when closed. The Permittee shall install and maintain additional traffic barricades at locations where vehicles have regularly accessed the beach illegally. The Permittee shall close the traffic barricades to limit public vehicle access as described in Conditions 11.G.1.b and c.”*

Implementation: All vehicle access ramps are affixed with heavy duty steel gates, chain and locks thus meeting Condition 11.G.1.b and c. They are locked during hazardous circumstances such as extreme high tides, storm events, and law enforcement activities. Gates are occasionally opened and closed by sea turtle patrol during their routine morning monitoring activities, County staff, or deputies. Surfside Avenue is the only vehicle access ramp that is locked year round.

Assessment: All through the 2020 nesting season no gates were reported to be vandalized. However, several reports were made regarding gates being “dummy” locked, and several gates were found open upon arrival by both sea turtle patrol and beach staff prior to 8:00 a.m. This will continue to be monitored by staff and law enforcement.

A post and cable was installed at Micklers Landing to discourage special event entry with vehicles and nighttime drivers. This access is only used by marine rescue personnel, SJSO, beach services and for emergency operations.

Program Improvements: There are no improvements scheduled at this time.

SECTION 3: STANDARD SEA TURTLE MONITORING PROTOCOL

Applicable ITP Condition - G.2.i.

- i. Standardization of Sea Turtle Monitoring. “Within (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop, in coordination with State of Florida Primary Permit Holders, a Sea Turtle Nest Monitoring Plan and submit such plan to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval. The Permittee shall implement the Sea Turtle Nest Monitoring Plan no later than the second full nesting season following U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval (beginning on May 1). The approved Sea Turtle Nesting Monitoring Plan may be subsequently amended both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*

Implementation: The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Imperiled Species Management Section is responsible for issuing Marine Turtle Permits (MTPs) through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 6 of the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA). According to their permits a MTP is obligated to follow FWC Standard Conservation Guidelines, and to coordinate with SJC to implement a Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol (SSTMP). The procedures and protocols are laid out in these documents, and give responsibility to the volunteers of the State to collect and report data as it relates to sea turtle nesting and conservation. This citizen-based reporting system allows for both the State and County to evaluate nesting trends, make management decisions based on the evaluation and to implement the HCP and other regulatory plans that are associated with sea turtle conservation.

Standard Sea Turtle Monitoring Protocol (SSTMP)

The SSTMP was developed to create a standardized way of monitoring and conspicuously marking sea turtle nests in the Plan Area and to spatially separate sea turtle nests from vehicular, horseback, special 4x4 permitted activities, commercial fishing, coastal construction, and pedestrian activities. The county has worked closely with the MTPs, FWC and USFWS to create a protocol that accommodates the needs of the plan, the volunteers, and the conservation of our beaches.

The SSTMP provides guidance and standards to the MTPs and their volunteers on how to carry out habitat conservation practices in order to fully implement the HCP/ITP, while also establishing the link to their daily activities on the beach. The goal is to cover all aspects of the SSTMP, while providing updates on the management of the beach. The SSTMP does not manage other duties outside of sea turtle patrol related duties. Therefore, MTPs, volunteers, park rangers and other staff may enter the beach outside of the designated times to respond to other matters.

Survey Method

Each beach exhibits various levels of development, beach access, shore type, and beach user groups. All nests on SJC beaches are marked with stakes, flagging, and a yellow FWC – issued sign. Nests that are observed by sea turtle patrol are staked with either three or four stakes depending on the level of risk (Table 2).

Table 2. Staking Methods Criteria

Sea Turtle Nesting Threat Criteria	Sea Turtle Nesting Protection (At a Minimum)	Additional Protection Actions Taken as needed
<p>High Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South Ponte Vedra Beach - North Beach - Vilano Beach - St. Augustine Beach - Crescent Beach <p>Vehicles, Development, Horseback Riding, Multiple Public Beach Access Points</p>	<p>4 stakes, coded, bright fluorescent flagging and 1 yellow FWC placard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Driving beaches; reflective numbers placed on stakes by County staff, green flagging placed by volunteers at 45 days of incubation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-releasing grids (only after predation and if permitted) - Nest located in driving lanes barricaded with bright green cones on day of event - Dummy nest perimeter staking, only after poaching indicated consult with FWC and HCP for direction
<p>Medium Risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ponte Vedra Beach - Summer Haven <p>Development, Horseback Riding, Limited Public Access</p>	<p>3 stakes, coded, bright fluorescent flagging and 1 yellow FWC placard</p>	<p>Self-releasing grids (only after predation, if permitted)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dummy nest perimeter staking, only after poaching indicated consult with FWC and HCP for direction
<p>Low Risk</p> <p>*GTMNERR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anastasia State Park <p>Emergency and State Vehicle use, limited development, limited public access</p>	<p>3 stakes, coded, bright fluorescent flagging and 1 yellow FWC placard</p>	<p>Self-releasing grids (only after predation, if permitted)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dummy nest perimeter staking, only after poaching indicated consult with FWC and HCP for direction

* Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve

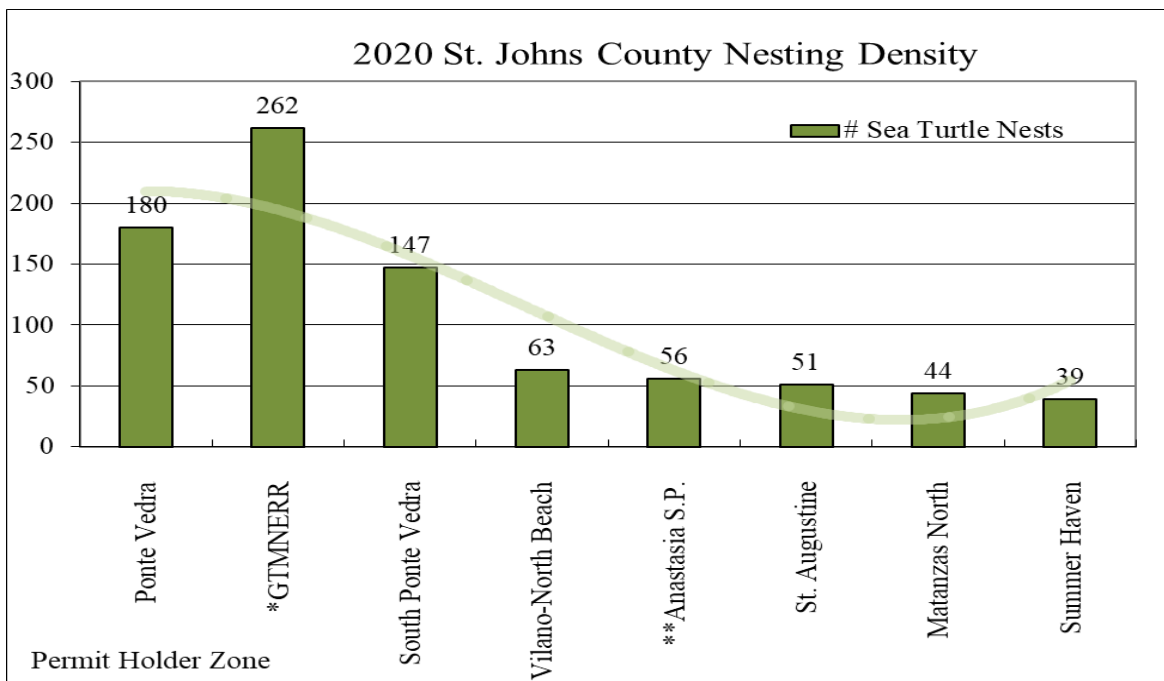
Data Collection

The implementation of the HCP allows for a more formal approach to data collection, while maintaining its citizen-based scientific program collectively known as the volunteers of FWC. MTPs can report weekly nesting data through an online submittal system or in the form of a spreadsheet. This weekly summary includes number of nests, false crawl counts, nesting dates, species, estimated incubation periods, and GPS locations. Continuous communication regarding nesting and false crawls is important to the county, so that protective and adaptive management decisions for coastal permitting, beach lighting, and beach access can be made. These combined efforts demonstrate the various methods it takes to manage the beaches, as well the nesting trends and density differences throughout the county.

Survey Areas

St. Johns County beaches are divided by two inlets that pour into the Intracoastal Waterway separating into three barrier islands from the mainland of Florida. The St. Augustine inlet divides the northern barrier land mass from the middle, thus leaving the middle barrier island, which is named Anastasia Island. While Matanzas Inlet separates Anastasia Island from the most southern barrier isle. Each island is comprised of its own sand types, levels of erosion and accretion, seawalls, slope-angle, and sand placement projects. Although the nesting numbers fluctuate they exhibit similar annual nesting pattern (Graph 1). Fort Matanzas National Monument is not included in the HCP/ITP; therefore, they carry out their own surveys and data collection through coordination with FWC.

Graph 1. St. Johns County Nesting Density for 2020 Season (n = 842)



*GTMNERR – Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve

**ASP – Anastasia State Park

Detailed Survey Description (From North to South) Survey boundaries and driving measurements are approximate.

Ponte Vedra Beach: FWC Permit #074 Ponte Vedra North and Beach Club Drive North. From the Duval County line South to Corona Road and Corona Road to Sawgrass - 4.28 miles (6.85 kilometers). This survey area is a St. Johns County beach located in the Ponte Vedra Municipal Service District that consists primarily of single family homes but also has condominiums, three ocean front resorts, and multiple public walkovers. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Ponte Vedra Beach: FWC Permit #029 Beach Club Drive South. Sawgrass Beach Club South to Old Ponte Vedra Condos - 3.5 miles (5.6 kilometers). This Ponte Vedra beach primarily consists of single family homes and condominiums, and has one major public access point with amenities. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Ponte Vedra Beach: FWC Permit #074 Old Ponte Vedra Condominiums. Old Ponte Vedra Condominiums South to the northern boundary of GTMNERR - 1.13 miles (1.81 kilometers). This Ponte Vedra beach primarily consists of single family homes and condominiums with public accesses. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTMNERR): FWC Permit #140 GTMNERR and South Guana River. Northern boundary of GTMNERR South to southern boundary of GTMNERR at Gate gas station - 7.26 miles (11.6 kilometers). This area consists primarily of single family homes, periodic stretches with no development, and four public access points with parking and minor amenities. Beaches are managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as State Reserve Lands. Monitoring efforts are carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

South Ponte Vedra: FWC Permit #056 Ponte Vedra South. Southern boundary of GTMNERR at Gate gas station South to Usina boat ramp - 5.15 miles (8.29 kilometers). This area consists primarily of single family homes, multiple public access points, and one major condominium resort development. There is 3.31 miles (5.33 kilometers) of non-driving beach and 1.65 miles (2.65 kilometers) of restricted driving. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Vilano Beach: FWC Permit #023 Vilano Beach. Usina beach access South to St. Augustine Inlet - 2.73 miles (4.39 kilometers). This area consists primarily of single family homes, multiple public access points with parking and minor amenities and without parking easily accessed by neighborhoods, and a redevelopment area near the inlet with hotels and beach driving access ramps. The beach consists of 0.28 miles (0.45 kilometers) of driving beach, and 2.55 miles (4.10 kilometers) of restricted driving beach. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Anastasia State Park: FWC Permit #147-01 Anastasia State Park. St. Augustine Inlet South to Pope Road beach access - 4.03 miles (6.48 kilometers). This area has no development with beach driving occurring along entire stretch only by official vehicles working for both the State of Florida and St. Johns County. Major erosion has occurred on the inlet side of the park with periodic re-nourishment projects occurring on the southern end of the park. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by the Department of Environmental Protection Florida State Park Rangers.

St. Augustine Beach: FWC Permit #090 St. Augustine Beach. Pope Road South to Crescent Beach Access Ramp - 6.1 miles (9.81 kilometers). This area is within the boundaries of the City of St. Augustine Beach with multiple beach front hotels, condominiums, and single family homes. This area consists of 0.9 miles (1.44 kilometers) of non-driving beach with 5.2 miles (8.36 kilometers) of driving beach starting at A Street beach access ramp and continuing South to

Crescent Beach Access Ramp, with a total of 6 beach access points. Northern part of this beach near the pier has erosion challenges and receives periodic re-nourishment. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

St. Augustine Beach: FWC Permit #101 Matanzas North. Crescent Beach Access Ramp South to Fort Matanzas Beach Access Ramp - 3.87 miles (6.22 kilometers) of driving beach, multiple condominiums, single family homes, and a 5 year cycle re-nourishment project. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

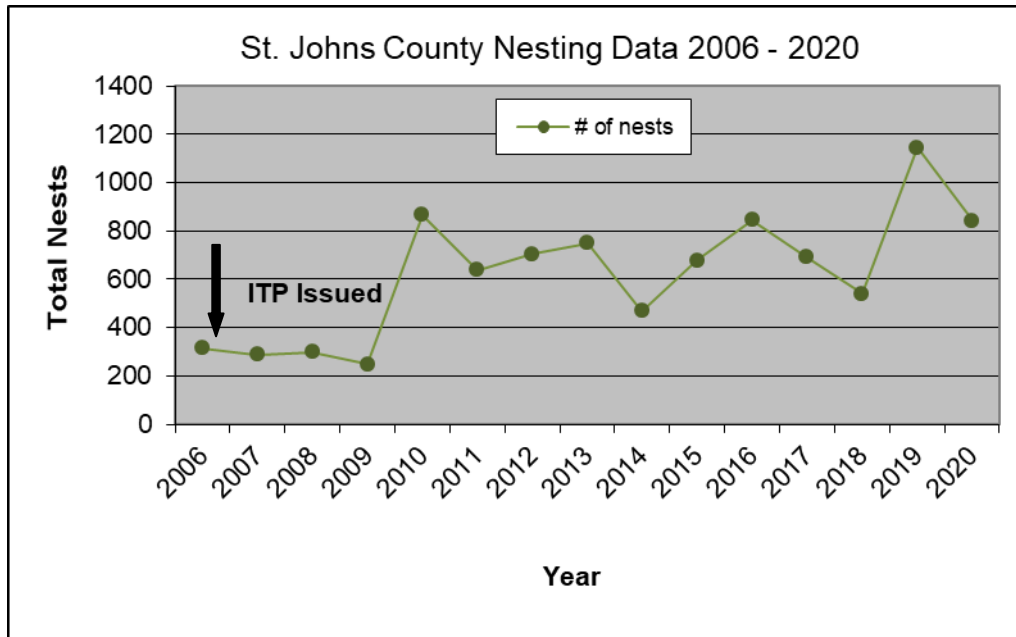
Summer Haven: FWC Permit #046 Matanzas South. This beach as it is commonly referred to as Summer Haven starts at Matanzas inlet south to the St. Johns and Flagler County line. Within this area are 2.56 miles (4.11 kilometers) of single family homes and multiple construction projects such as a sand berm and sand placement projects. Monitoring efforts are coordinated and carried out by sea turtle patrol volunteers.

Assessment: Per the SSTMP the County offered HCP annual training in the form of online training. Throughout the season weekly nesting data was submitted online or in the form of a spreadsheet. MTPs and their volunteers additionally coordinated with County staff regarding nesting activities, disorientations, access, HCP and Beach Code violations. More importantly leading up to and following storm events the County and MTPs communicate regarding beach closures and assistance needed for storm recovery in terms of nesting activity.

Nesting Summary

With multiple fluctuations in sea turtle nesting it should be noted that nesting numbers do not represent the population as a whole. A variety of conservation measures aimed at recovering the species has been implemented since the approval of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1978. Protection measures include protecting nesting habitat, reducing nest depredation, decreasing beachfront lighting, and modifying fishing gear to reduce bycatch. The HCP affords protection of five species of sea turtles implying that all listed species may nest on county beaches, however based on historical data four species of sea turtles have been documented with some outlier nest events by Kemp's Rيدleys. Collectively each documented species produced 842 nests; a 26% decrease from the previous year of 1,145 nests. While the hatchling success rate of 84% is a slight decrease from last year's 87% the total number of hatchlings produced of 65,911 remains to be a positive outcome. The loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) sea turtle continues to account for the largest distribution of nests with 773 nests, followed by the green (*Chelonia mydas*) with 47 nests. The leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) exhibited a high year with 21 nests and lastly a Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) nest. Annual nesting has remained at a steady level in comparison from 2006 to 2020 (Graph 2).

Graph 2. St. Johns County Nesting Data 2006-2020

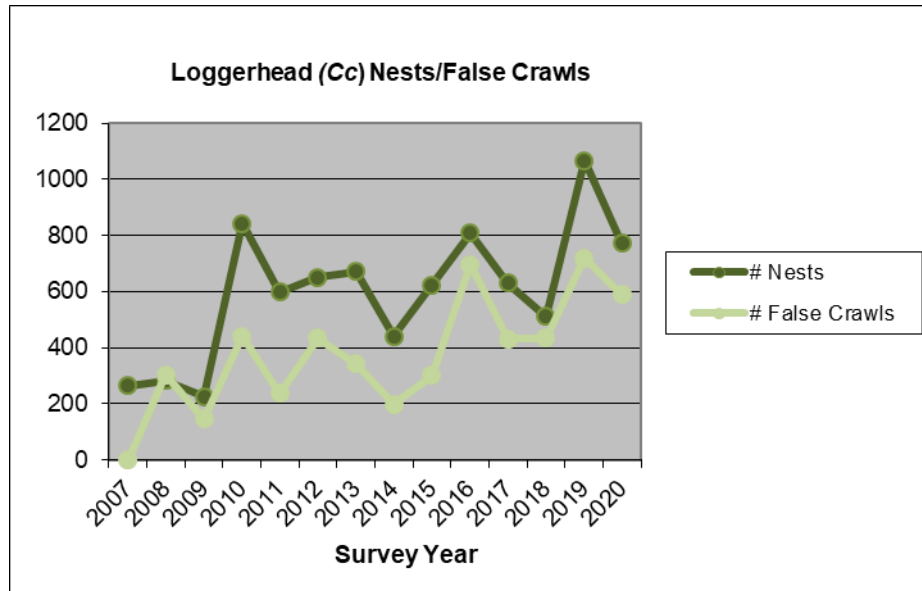


Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute from 1989 to 2020 a complex pattern with three distinct phases has been demonstrated: increase (1989 – 1998), decrease (1998-2007) and increase (2007 – 2020) of the loggerhead species (FWRI, 2020). St. Johns County annual nest counts continue to be in line with the long term analysis of statewide nesting (Graph 3) with 773 nests.

- 773 nests recorded
- 661 nests hatched
- 53 washed out
- 50 clutches not found
- 55,738 hatchlings emerged
- Overall mean clutch of 107 eggs
- Range of 5 to 232 eggs
- 86% nesting success rate
- 85% hatchling success rate
- 55 days average incubation
- 590 false crawls

Graph 3. Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) Nests/False Crawls

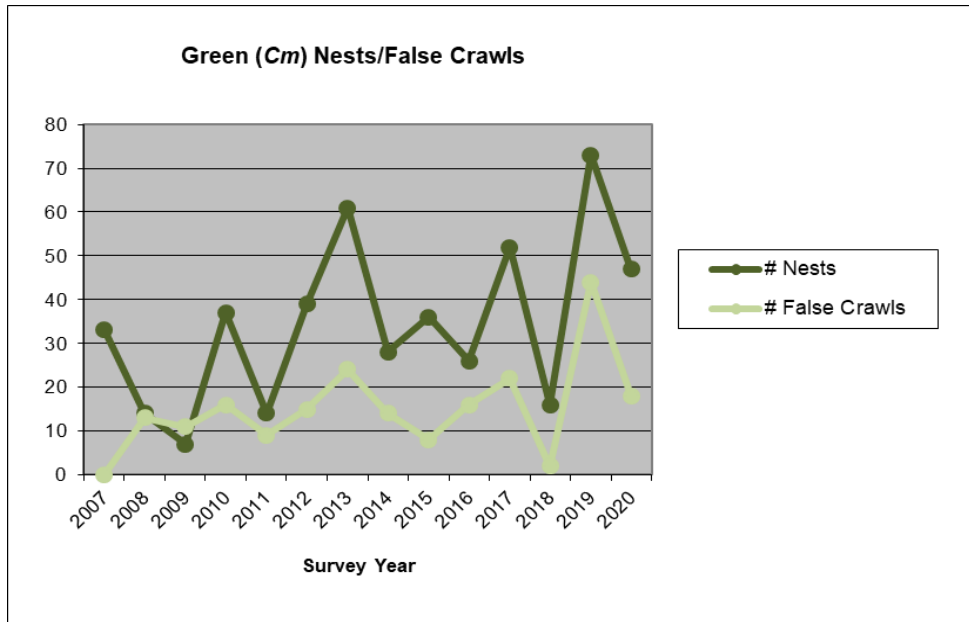


Green (*Chelonia mydas*)

Archie Carr of the Sea Turtle Conservancy first reported that nesting green sea turtles demonstrate a common trend of alternating between high and low nesting numbers (Seaturtle.org). This over-all trend continues with wide fluctuations throughout the state (FWRI, 2020) and is also evident on the beaches of St. Johns County with 47 nests (Graph 5) compared to last year with 16 nests.

- 47 nests recorded
- 35 nests hatched
- 5 washed out
- 5 clutches not found
- 3,322 hatchlings emerged
- Overall mean clutch of 101 eggs
- Range of 56 to 166 eggs
- 74% nesting success rate
- 77% hatchling success rate
- 57 days average incubation
- 18 false crawls

Graph 4. Green (*Chelonia mydas*) Nests/False Crawls

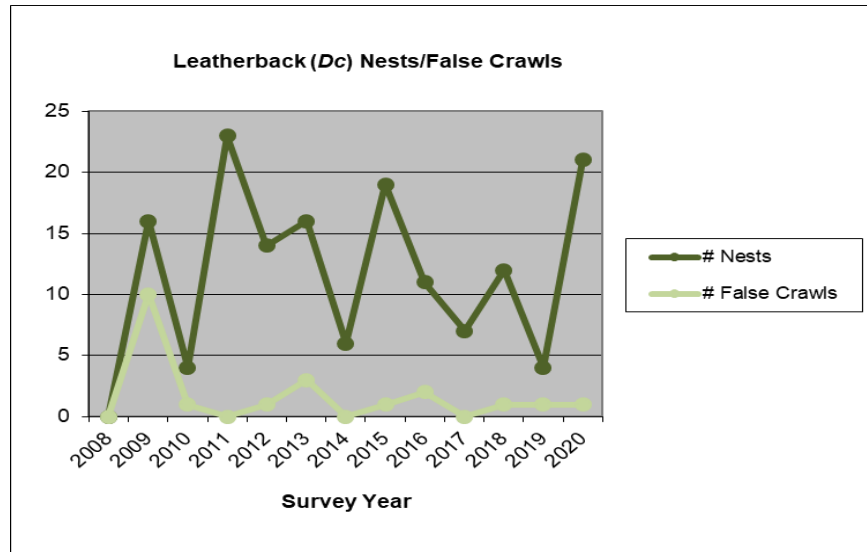


Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

Leatherbacks nest almost exclusively on the east coast of Florida (FWRI, n.d.), however, since 2007 volunteers have recorded anywhere from 0 to 23 nests. Leatherbacks also exhibit a fluctuation in nesting from each year as demonstrated in Graph 5 below.

- 21 nests recorded
- 14 nests hatched
- 1 washed out
- 6 clutch not found
- 811 hatchlings emerged
- Overall mean clutch of 58 eggs
- Range of 57 to 136 eggs
- 67% nesting success rate
- 66% hatchling success rate
- 68 days average incubation
- 1 false crawl

Graph 5. Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) Nests/False Crawls



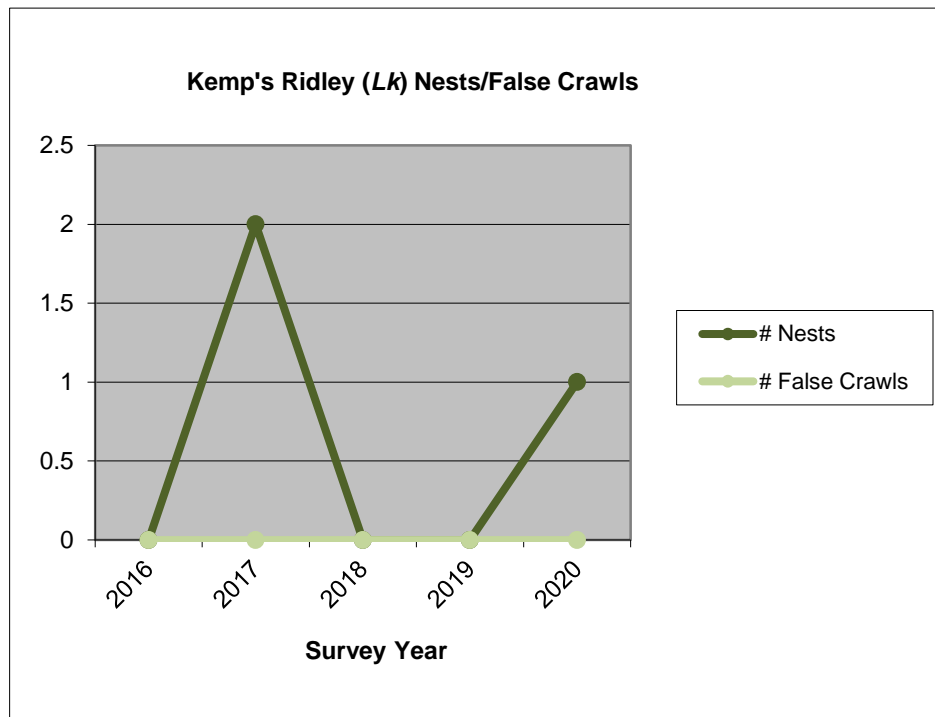
For a more comprehensive representation of nesting that demonstrates levels of density refer to Map Figures 2 and 3.

Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*)

Although Kemp's Ridley sea turtles are primarily found in the Gulf of Mexico they have also been documented nesting on Atlantic Ocean beaches. The first recorded nesting event occurred in 2015 with of 4 nests that have been recorded (Graph 6 below).

- 1 nest recorded
- 1 nest hatched
- 21 hatchlings emerged
- Clutch size 113 eggs
- 100% nesting success rate
- 27% hatchling success rate
- 5 days of incubation
- 0 false crawl

Graph 6. Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) Nests/False Crawls



Incubation Periods and Hatching Success

Several environmental factors like air temperature and rain can increase or decrease an incubation period. The summer of 2020 from May through August had varying ranges of temperature and rain that were similar to the previous season, thus, demonstrating a 1 day average difference from 55 to 56 days of incubation.

Consistent with the previous season the northern barrier island demonstrated an incubation period of 55 days while Anastasia Island demonstrated an average incubation period of 59 days. Lastly, the southern barrier island commonly referred to as Summer Haven was recorded at an average of 57 days of incubation.

Relocated Nests

Although 842 nests were naturally deposited only 5% of the total nests were relocated. Some were relocated because there were below the recent high tide line (9 nests) while others were in danger of being washed out (3 nests). Included in this percentage also are nests that were required to be moved because of a sand placement project which was 44% of the total nests (19 nests).

Other Disturbances

Volunteers also recorded other events that are known to have negative impacts to nests such as predation and over wash events.

- **Predation**

Volunteers did not apply protection methods like self-releasing cages and screens. Fortunately, a small percentage of nests, 32, were impacted by predation:

- 10 Ant
- 22 Crab

- **Tidal Inundation/Washout**

Tidal inundation and washout events are common throughout the season and more especially during storm events. Although we did not have any serious impacts from hurricanes like recent seasons; 58 nests (7%) were recorded as being washed out

Obstacles Encountered

Obstacles encountered during nesting events are documented under two categories; anthropogenic (human) and other natural obstacles (Graphs 7 & 8). Additionally, when an obstacle is encountered FWC requires MTPs to record the impact and outcome. This information is entered to a statewide system and tracked by FWC biologist.

Graph 7. Human obstacles encountered during nesting events

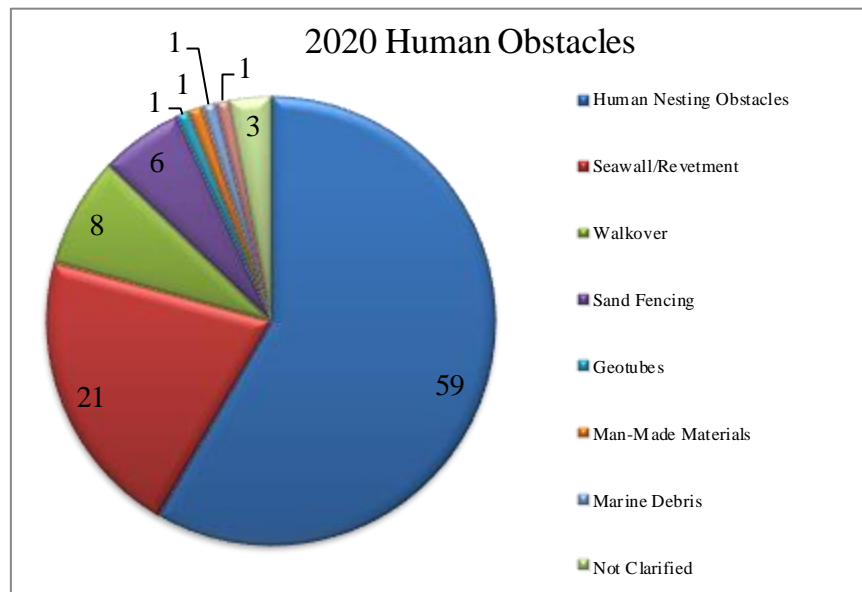


Table 3. Human Nesting Obstacles

Human Nesting Obstacles	Number
Seawall/Revetment	59
Walkover	21
Sand Fencing	8
Geotubes	6
Man-Made Materials	1
Marine Debris	1
Vertical Post	1
Not Clarified	1
Escarpment	3
Total	98

Graph 8. Natural obstacles encountered during nesting events

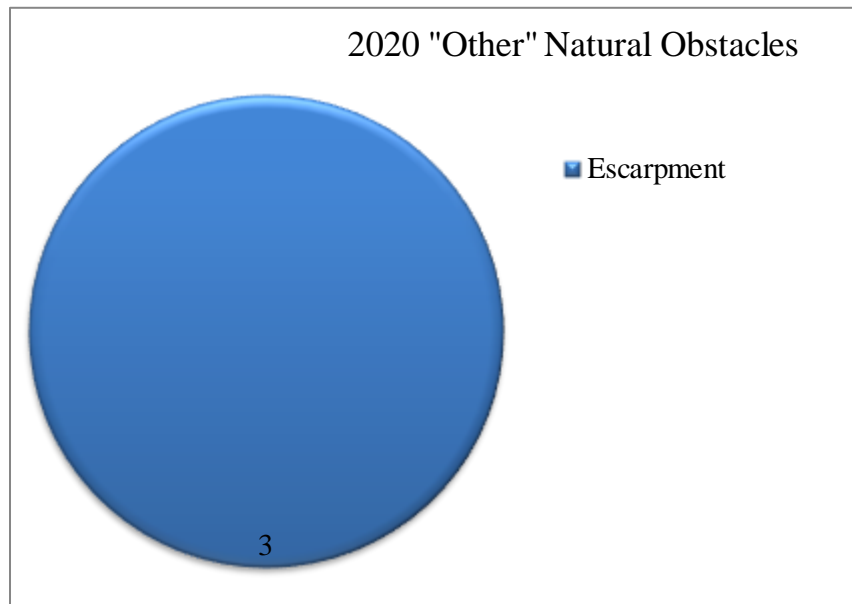


Table 4. "Other" Natural Nesting Obstacles

"Other" Natural Nesting Obstacles	Number
Escarpment	3
Total	3

Spatial Patterns

Spatial patterns discussed in this section include nests deposited in relation to driving and non-driving beach areas, relationship of nesting to the CZ and the link between nesting and type of

beach. Nests deposited on driving beaches accounted for 87 nests (10%), 682 nests (81%) on non-driving beaches and 73 nests (11%) on restricted driving beaches (Table 5).

Table 5. Driving/Non-driving beaches percentage distribution of nests

Beach Type	Mileage	Nest	%Distribution of County Beach	%Distribution of nest
Driving	10.6	87	26%	10%
Non-driving	24.8	682	60%	81%
Restricted	5.7	73	14%	9%
Total	41.1	842	100%	100%

Per Condition G.1.a. and d. G.2.c of the ITP a 15 foot CZ is established seaward of the base of the dune. Part of its purpose is to protect and establish suitable habitat for potential nesting events. Therefore, it's optimistic to understand that more than half of overall documented nests were recorded within the CZ with 579 nests (69%), 123 nests (15%) were located outside of the CZ, and 11 nests (1.3%) within the driving lane and 129 nests (15%) were documented with not having a CZ present. It is important to note that not every mile of the beaches has CZ signage and the signage can sometimes be placed at high use beaches where no driving occurs.

As previously laid out the beaches of St. Johns County consists of multiple shore types that include dune, escarpment, rock revetment and seawalls. As such it was confirmed that 680 nests (81%) were deposited on beaches with a dune, 48 nests (6%) were deposited in front of an escarpment, 113 nests (13%) in front of sea wall, 1 nests (0.1%) deposited in front of a rock revetment and 6 nests (.7%) in front of installed geotubes on Ponte Vedra beach.

Temporal Patterns

Nesting began as early as April 23rd when 2 loggerhead nests were reported on both the GTMNERR and south St. Augustine beach (Matanzas north). Another pre-season nest was recorded on April 26th by sea turtle patrol on South Ponte Vedra beach yet this was a leatherback. Nesting by green sea turtles began earlier than in years past as the first recorded nests was on May 19th on Anastasia State Park. More information can be found in Table 6 below.

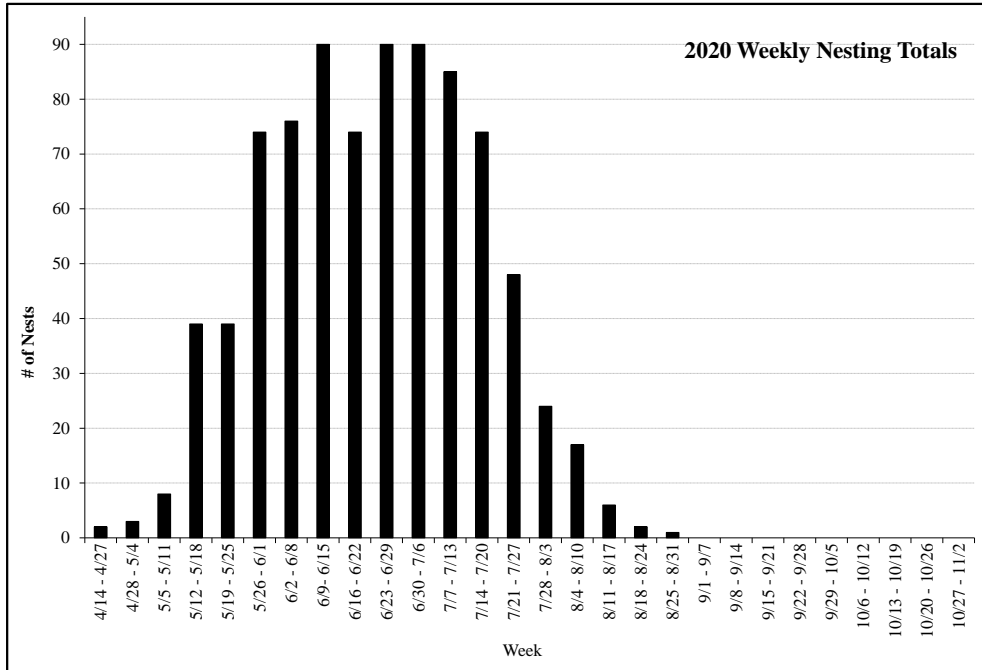
Table 6. Temporal patterns of nesting

Species	Date	Location
Cc (Earliest)	4/23/2020	St. Augustine Beach
Cc (Latest)	9/1/2020	Anastasia State Park
Cm (Earliest)	5/19/2020	Summer Haven
Cm (Latest)	8/19/2020	GTMNERR
Dc (Earliest)	4/26/2020	St. Augustine Beach
Dc (Latest)	7/8/2020	Anastasia State Park

*Cc (*Caretta caretta*) Loggerhead | Cm (*Chelonia mydas*) Green | Dc (*Dermochelys coriacea*) Leatherback

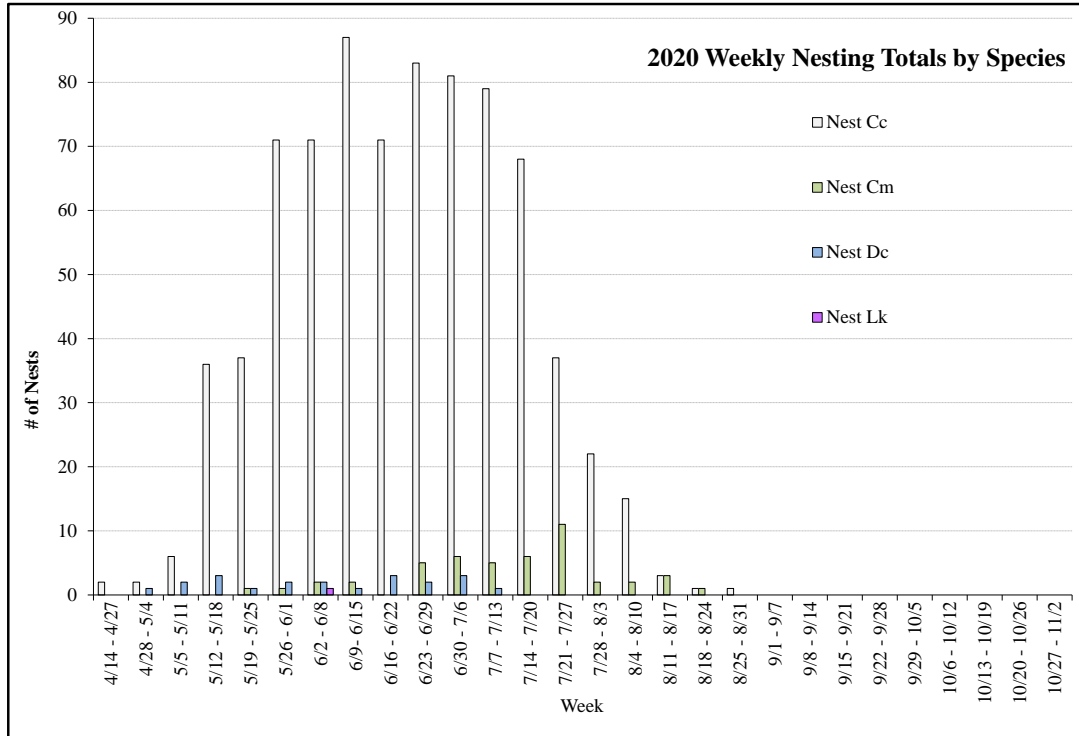
The pattern of nesting remains consistent with slight fluctuations over the months of May, June and July. The highest week of nesting shifted placement from recent seasons of occurring in mid-June while this year the highest week occurred in early July. Graph 9 below has additional information.

Graph 9. Weekly Nesting Totals ($n = 842$)



Naturally loggerhead nesting maintained a steady pace from May to the end of July, while Green nesting events revealed irregular nesting from June to September. Leatherback nesting was rather inconsistent as well starting in early April and ending in early June (Graph 10).

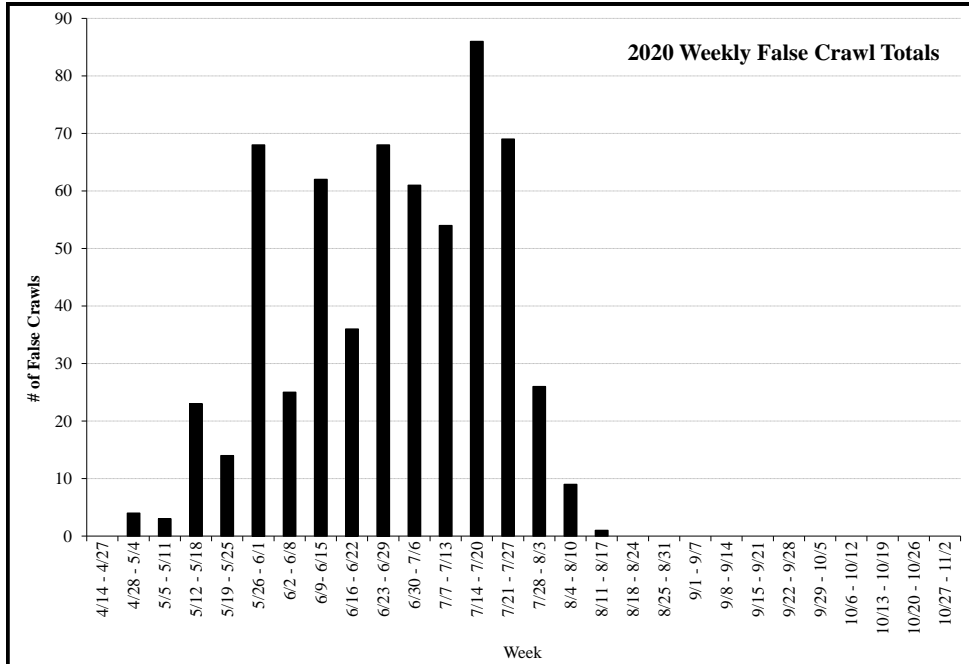
Graph 10. Weekly Nesting Totals by Species ($n = 842$)



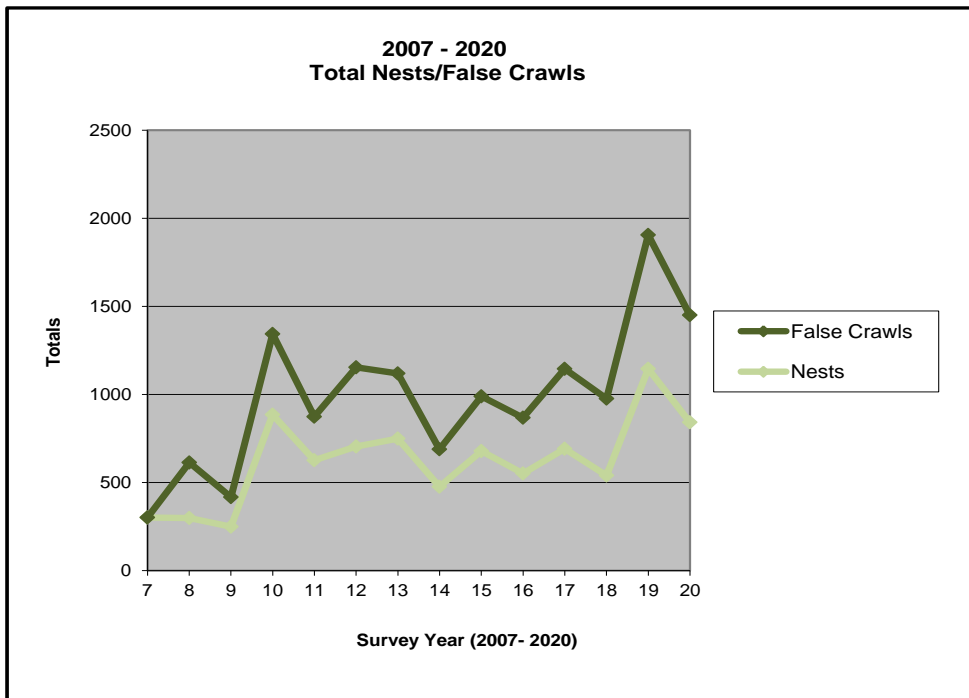
False Crawl Summary

False crawls and nesting events somewhat maintain the same pattern throughout the summer with peaks and valleys (Graph 11). The number of false crawls had historically maintained a 50% rate in comparison to that of nesting. However, the past four nesting seasons have demonstrated a consistent pattern of false crawls crossing over this threshold as volunteers recorded 609 false crawls making up for 72% of the 842 nests documented. Additionally, 86 were on driving beaches, 66 on restricted driving beaches, and 457 recorded on non-driving beaches.

Graph 11. Weekly False Crawl Totals ($n = 609$)



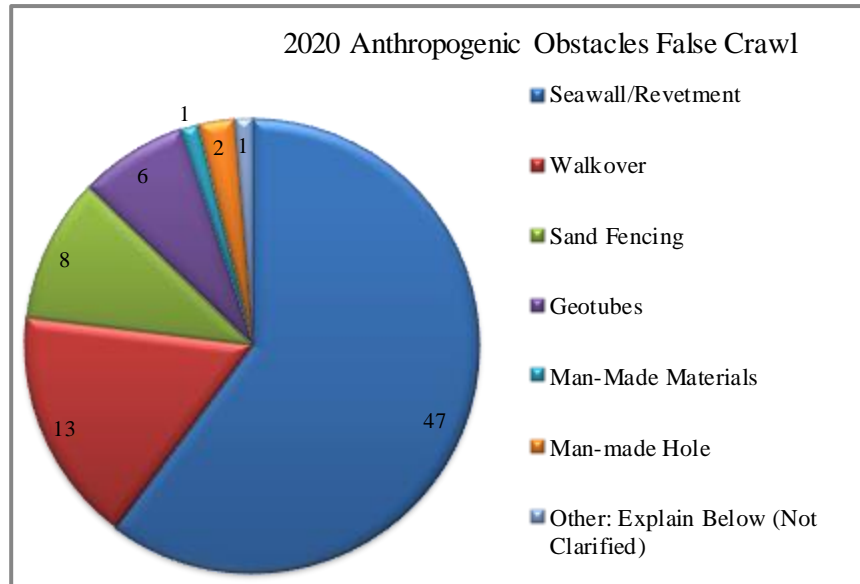
Graph 12. 2007-2020 Total nests and false crawls



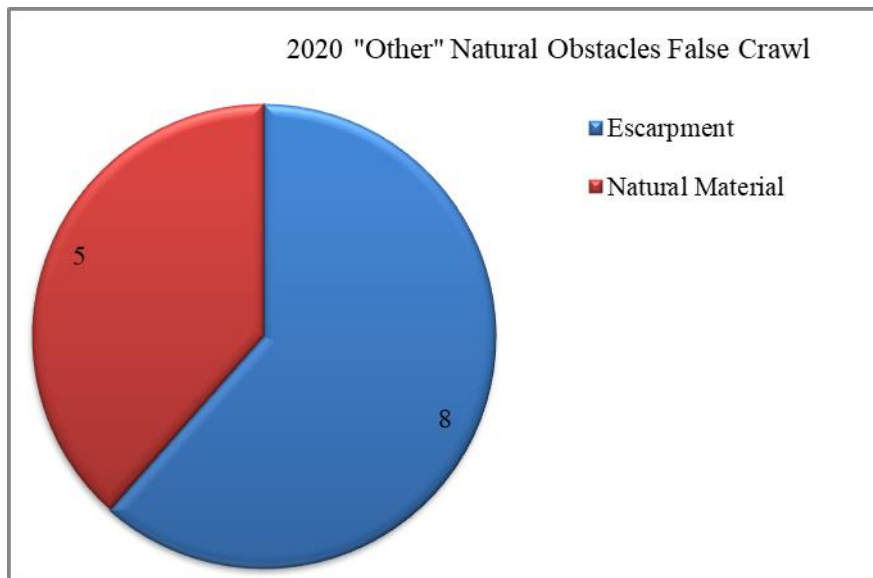
When documenting a false crawl volunteers also record shore type, location or apex of the crawl, and any obstacles encountered.

Just like nesting obstacles encountered during false crawl events are documented under two categories; anthropogenic (human) and other natural obstacles. See Graphs 13 and 14 below.

Graph 13. Human obstacles encountered during false crawl events



Graph 14. Natural obstacles encountered during false crawl events



Disorientations

A total of 16 disorientation reports (Table 7) were either reported to the beach lighting officer or discovered on the FWC Survey123 during the season. Disorientations accounted for 2% of the overall 842 nests within St Johns County beaches. An increase in lighting violations is directly related to the increase in hatchling disorientations as approximately 428 hatchlings are estimated to have been disorientated. The majority of disorientations 6 out of 16 (38%) occurred south of

the Matanzas inlet. This area is commonly referred to as summer haven and has been heavily impacted by the past three years of hurricane events. As a result there is no dune to filter out light pollution coming from the homes or A1A.

The peak season is typically July and August; when most of the nests begin to hatch. Like most years, hatchling disorientations tend to escalate at this time of year. However, the unique circumstances surrounding COVID increased the number of stays at vacation beach rentals thus lighting violations were also more numerous. As a result, the County had the more lighting violations than in previous years.

When a disorientation occurs, the county request that volunteers report the disorientation on the day the event. This way a follow up investigation can be completed that nightfall. This process gave the county the best chance of finding the possible reason for a disorientation to ensue. Of the 16 disorientations, 7 were found to have violating lights in a close proximity on the night that follow report was completed. For more information regarding the Beach Lighting Management Plan and how it is implemented refer to Section 10.

Table 7. Disorientation Summary

Date	Zone	Location	Direction of Travel	# of Turtles	# Dead	Moon phase of Disorientation	Light Source
6/3/2020	10	Between 9183 & 9273 Old A1A	Two circles in dunes	1	0	Waxing Gibbous	Possible car lights from HWY A1A
6/23/2020	4	2607 S Ponte Vedra	South	1	0	Waxing Crescent	Possible extension of walk over
6/25/2020	10	9333 Old A1A	North	1	0	Waxing Crescent	No report given to SJC
7/6/2020	9	7584 A1A South	South	1	0	Waning Gibbous	No lighting violation observed Possible human interference
7/14/2020	5	2883 SPVB	South	11-50	0	Waning Crescent	Landscape lighting
7/18/2020	8	1 1 st lane	Southwest	50+	1	Waning Gibbous	Christmas lights on porch
7/22/2020	9	10 Miliken	north	1	0	Waxing Crescent	White pool lights or flashlights
7/26/2020	10	9273 Old A1A	West into river	50+	unknown	Waxing Crescent	Number of possible lighting
7/23/2020	1	Breakers condo IV	north	~50	0	Waxing Crescent	Unknown
7/29/2020	10	Between 9183 & 9273 Old A1A	West into River	11-50	unknown	Waxing Gibbous	Number of possible lighting
8/3/2020	10	.25 miles S of 9183 Old A1A	West into River	50+	unknown	Full Moon	Number of possible lighting
8/5/2020	8	Bermuda Run Way Beach access	Turtles Circled in dune	5-8	1	Waning Gibbous	No lighting violation observed
9/6/2020	2	1205 Ponte Vedra Blvd	South then west	11-50	0	Waning Gibbous	No lighting violation observed. Neighbor mentioned to patrol that a light is frequently on
9/11/2020	5	2947 S Ponte Vedra	West	11-50	0	Waning Crescent	Possible 1 st floor porch light at 2947 SPVB
9/11/2020	10	9273 Old A1A	South	2-10	0	Waning Crescent	No lighting violation observed
10/15/2020	9	7708 A1A South	Some several feet west in circle A few north and south in tire rut	2-10	0	Waning Crescent	No lighting violation observed

Table 8. Zone Descriptions

Zone #	Zone/Boundaries
1	Duval/St. Johns County Line to Sawgrass Beach Club North
2	Sawgrass Beach Club South to Old Ponte Vedra Condos
3	Old Ponte Vedra Condos to North Boundary GTMNERR
4	GTMNERR North Boundary to Exxon Gas Station (2700 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd.)
5	Exxon Station (2700 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd.) to Reef Restaurant (4100 Coastal Hwy.)
6	Reef Restaurant (4100 Coastal Hwy) to Vilano Beach Jetties
7	Anastasia State Park to Pope Rd.
8	St. Augustine Beach; Pope Rd. to Crescent Beach Ramp
9	Crescent Beach Ramp to Ft. Matanzas Ramp
10	South Matanzas Inlet to St. Johns/Flagler County Line

Refer to Map Figures 4 and 5 for more information regarding densities of false crawls on County beaches. Additionally, Map Figures 6 (a-i) identifies each zone and reflects all nesting, false crawls and AOVs.

Program Improvements: The County will continue to improve on its data recording as well as carry on with researching ways to develop additional statistical evaluations. This will improve the County’s ability to make proper management decisions for the protection of listed species.

SECTION 4: TIRE TRACKS AND RUT REMOVAL PROTOCOL

Applicable ITP Condition- G.2.j.

- j. Tire Tracks/Rut Removal Plan. “Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall submit for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a Tire Track/Rut Removal Plan as further described in Chapter 7 of the HCP. The Permittee shall implement such Plan during the first full nesting season following U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval (beginning on May 1). The approved Tire Track/Rut Removal Plan may be subsequently amended prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*

Implementation: These procedures are carried out according to the approved protocol as outlined in the tire tracks and rut removal plan and the SSMTP. Based on this protocol MTPs submit weekly nesting data to County staff which aids in developing active daily management. On the 45th day of incubation rut removal procedures commence continuing until the nest is either evaluated and/or reported by the MTP that the stakes have been removed. Weekly rut removal spreadsheets are created and distributed to nighttime staff that identifies which nests are in need of rut removal. The data sheet also records if an emergence took place, if the nests received or did not receive rut removal and as to why (i.e. storm, could not locate, etc.). Rut removal is conducted using an ATV or UTV equipped with a heavy duty drag harrow attached to the rear of the vehicles and using large light-weight aluminum ball field rakes. Nightly efforts also include filling in holes, applying HCP stickers to beach gear, and moving obstructions out of the way that could potentially impede adult and/or hatchling sea turtles.

Assessment: Rut removal was conducted on all south beach nests where daily beach driving occurs by both the public and official vehicles. Due to the north beach re-nourishment project that took place some nests remained in-situ while multiple other nests were relocated further north to allow for the project to begin. Even so, Vilano beach north of the St. Augustine inlet has historically been a restricted driving beach where special 4x4 permits are required and permittees are responsible for “self-policing” their activities on the beach. Since routine beach driving does not occur the nests are spot-checked for ruts by accessing at various beach entrances. In addition to this year’s management activities summer haven beach was included due to the lack of defined roadway for both residents and visitors to this beach.

Vilano/North Beach

The area extending North between Vilano and Usina Ramps in North Beach is a productive area for nesting. It is also a restricted beach driving area where participants obtain a four wheel drive permit for special access. This self-policed beach requires permittees to drive below the high tide line. Even so staff is designated to spot check these nests to remove ruts and holes if necessary. A renourishment project was scheduled to begin by late August leaving the 47 nests that were naturally deposited to be checked by staff. However, from July until the end of season 16 nests were relocated to a different beach. Therefore, rut removal concluded in late August.

St. Augustine/Crescent Beach

Three to four HCP technicians are designated for the South Beaches to compensate for the other assigned nightly duties required by the HCP technicians. During times of little rainfall and small trade wind swell, certain areas of the beach will have 4x4 only restrictions. For this reason, deeper ruts can be present requiring more time to adequately remove ruts from the beach. The zone from Pope Road to Crescent Beach ramp required rut removal on 51 nests while the zone south of this extending to Fort Matanzas ramp had 44 nests.

Summer Haven

The beaches of summer haven are lined with approximately 25 homes. Some are full time residents while others are part-time or rented out as vacation rentals. The previously existing roadway washed out during Hurricane Dorian in September of 2017. Attempts have been made to delineate the driving surface from the beach but this has however been failed attempts due to storms. Throughout the summer this beach is patrolled almost daily by law enforcement and weekly by staff. As the nesting season progressed ruts began to become more obvious and closer to sea turtle nests thus causing concern for emerging hatchlings. As part of rut removal scheduling summer haven was added to actively manage the area and to remove ruts. More information regarding summer haven can be found in Section 11: Summer Haven.

Seasonal Break-Down

Rut removal was achieved on approximately 12 miles of drivable beach beginning at the Usina Ramp in North Beach extending south to the St. Augustine Inlet, and from the Pier extending south to the Fort Matanzas National Monument ramp. Rut removal procedures began on June 7th and concluded on October 18th for 133 days on 142 nests. Table 9 below represents additional information as collected and reported by seasonal HCP field technicians:

Table 9. Rut Removal Summary

Beach	Start Date	End Date	Length (days)	Total Nests	*Average Days
Vilano	6/24/20	9/9/20	77	47	12
St. Augustine	7/10/20	10/3/20	85	51	17
Crescent	6/7/20	10/18/20	133	44	23

*Average evenings spent conducting rut removal at nest site per zone (approximation).

Program Improvements: St. Johns County will improve its level of communicating the proper procedures for all beaches so that the elimination of ruts occurs on non driving beaches. Furthermore, County staff will continue to receive rigorous levels of training to ensure that proper details of the procedures are carried out.

SECTION 5: IMPLEMENTATION

Applicable ITP Conditions - G.1.f, G.2.e., G.2. f., H.2

- 1.f. HCP Management Activities.** *“Official vehicle access necessary to monitor and enforce the terms of this Permit and implementation of the conditions of the HCP is not limited, including access within the Conservation Zone.”*
- 2.e. Increased Enforcement Staffing.** *“By May 1 of the first full nesting season following the issuance of this Permit, the Permittee shall provide funding for and fill no less than four (4) full time Beach Ranger positions and/or two (2) full-time Deputy Sheriffs, whose responsibilities will lie only in enforcement of beach-related local ordinances and codes and in lifesaving activities. The Permittee shall also provide funding for and fill one full-time (1) Beach Lighting Officer position whose responsibility shall be enforcement of the Beach Lighting Management Plan described in Condition 11.G.2k.”*
- 2.f. HCP Implementation Staff.** *“By May 1 of the first full nesting season following the issuance date of this permit, the Permittee shall fund and fill one (1) full-time position dedicated entirely to ensuring effective implementation of the HCP and conditions of this Permit.”*
- H.2. Implementation Measures.** *The following measures will be employed by the Permittee to ensure that the terms and conditions of this Permit and provisions of the HCP are implemented.*
- 1. Staffing.** *The Permittee shall maintain staffing as described in Chapter 9 of the HCP to ensure implementation and enforcement of the terms of this Permit and the effective administration of the HCP.*
 - 2. Data and Records Management.** *The Permittee shall ensure that appropriate staff collect, analyze, maintain, and report data and records as defined and described in Chapter 9 of the HCP.*
 - 3. Enforcement and Coordination of Enforcement.** *The Permittee, by accepting this Permit agrees to abide by the terms and conditions of the Permit and agrees to sufficiently and adequately enforce and implement such terms and conditions to ensure that the performance standards listed in this Permit are implemented and the biological goals of the HCP are achieved.*

HCP Management Activities

Implementation: Annually all personnel, including HCP support staff, Beach Maintenance, Marine Rescue, St. Johns County Sheriff’s Deputies, and City of St. Augustine Beach Police Officers who are involved with implementation and coordination of the HCP participate in HCP and Protected Species Training. The workshop provides the framework in which the HCP is to be implemented, management of the beaches as a natural resource for the benefit of all user groups, and the need to demonstrate our efforts in a positive manner. The workshops also cover

the need for County staff to participate in implementation by informing beach management of access after hours, entrance into non-driving zones, reporting of protected species daytime events and incidents as well as the benefit of constant communication between departments.

Assessment: Leading up to the season law enforcement and beach management staff attended training along with staff from marine rescue and FWC law enforcement. During this training staff was presented with information surrounding beach management activities, Beach Code and HCP related enforcement, endangered and listed species updates, agency permitting, and a general overview of the beaches.

Image 1. Law Enforcement Annual HCP Training



February 26th, 2020

Program Improvements: Annual trainings and consistent levels of communication with other County departments will continue to occur and include updates as necessary.

Implementation Measures: Increased Enforcement Staffing

Implementation: The implementation and enforcement of the Beach Code is done so in a professional manner by the SJSO Beach Supervisor, deputy staff and through the cooperation of the City of St. Augustine Beach Police Department with one St. Augustine Beach officer assigned to the beach. Their responsibility is to implement, enforce, and educate individuals on the rules and regulations of the Beach Code, HCP policy, and the enforcement of other applicable local, state, and federal laws as necessary. Benefitting from the geographical split of the beaches with the St. Augustine inlet as the dividing factor the enforcement of the beaches is split into North and South Beaches. Each region is assigned beach enforcement staff that are anywhere from one to two NRDs depending on the time of year as well as additional overtime deputies, and Public Service Assistants (PSAs). March 1st through Labor Day weekend full time

deputies are augmented by a varied number of trained over time Sheriff's deputies. The standard for the combined full time and overtime deputies ranges from 3 to 6 deputies depending on the day of the week and crowd conditions due to holidays or spring break periods.

Documentation of the types of violations occurring on the beaches is done so through the completion of a standard law enforcement daily data sheet at the end of each shift. This allows HCP implementation staff to summarize verbal warnings, written warnings, citations, HCP and wildlife emergencies, and the geographic location of such records.

The environmental division employs two full time year round environmental specialists whose duties include enforcement of the beach lighting management plan year round and data management. Both play important roles in implementation of the HCP during sea turtle nesting season as well as outside of the nesting season. An additional part time beach lighting officer is retained to ensure that surveys are conducted 6 - 7 nights a week. A more detailed report of such activity can be found in Section 10: Beach Lighting Management Plan.

Assessment: Law enforcement views the implementation of the rules and regulations as an opportunity to educate the public through verbal and written warnings. Repeat or blatant offenders were issued a citation or provided a date to appear in court. From January 1st to December 31st beach patrol recorded 6,368 verbal warnings, 1,640 written warnings and 306 County citations with a grand total of 8,314 recorded violations (Table 10).

Table 10. St. Johns County Law Enforcement Statistics

HCP Violations			
Violation	VW	WW	CC
Horseback (HB) Riding w/o Permit Sec 3.02(b)	8	0	0
Removal of Beach Sand/Coquina Sec 3.12	1	1	0
HB Riding South Surfside Sec 3.02(b)	0	0	0
HB Riding South Beach Date Restrictions Sec 3.01(b)	1	0	0
Beach Special Events w/o Permit Sec. 4.02	0	1	0
Parking/Driving after hours Sec.5.03 (c); 5.05	1	0	1
Commercial Fishermen Sec.5.05	0	0	0
Conservation Zone Encroachment Sec. 7.01(b)	954	132	7
Disturbance/Removal of CZ Vegetation Sec. 7.01(c)	2	2	0
Driving in restricted area Sec 5.02(b)	0	0	0
Driving on North Beach with out Permit	0	0	0
Entering North Beach 4x4 permitted area Sec 5.02(b)	1	0	0
Mickler's HB Riding Date Restrictions 2009-60 Sec1	0	0	0
Section Total	968	136	8
Beach Code Violations			
Violation	VW	WW	CC
Conduct Sec. 3.00	2,685	563	158
Animals Sec.3.02(c)	3	0	0
Leash Law 2001-19 Sec.4.00	1,098	163	7
Litter Sec.3.09(a)	2	0	0
Tents, Chairs, Catamarans etc. Sec.3.09(b)	2	0	0
Fireworks/Explosives Sec.3.13	15	7	1
Vehicles Sec. 5.00	1,595	771	132
Section Total	5,400	1,504	298
Totals	6,368	1,640	306
Grand Total	8,314		

In addition to their routine tasks law enforcement also responds to other events on the beach that involve permitting activities and wildlife response (Table 11 below).

Table 11. St. Johns County HCP non-citation responses

HCP Non-Citation Responses	
Stranded Turtle Response	46
Injured Bird Response	25
Bird Nesting Area Patrol	12
Gopher Tortoise Response	11
Beached Marine Mammal	9
NB Permit Check	0
HB Permit Check	18
CCA Permit Check	1
CF &/or Net Fishing Check	0
Event Permit Check	3
*NRD assist FWC	1
Total	126

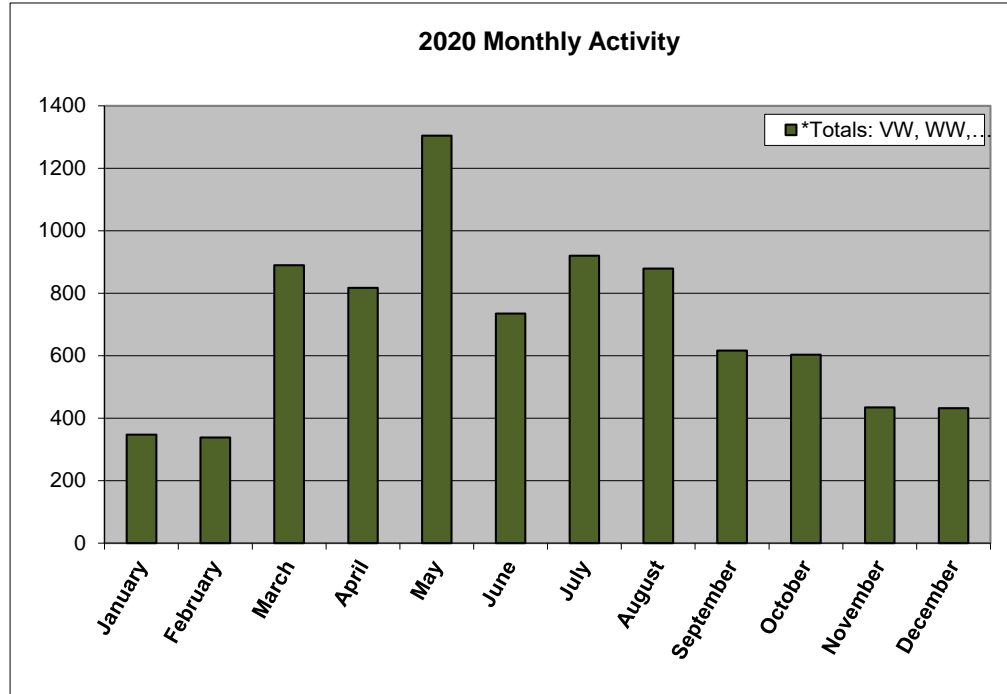
*NRD: Natural Resource Deputy

HCP field technicians work closely with law enforcement to clear the beaches of vehicles and close beach gates. It is essential that both teams maintain open lines of communication as sometimes emergencies can arise, wildlife events (i.e. a hatching sea turtle nest) can stir up the scheduling, and occasionally drivers are resistant to exiting the beach. A harmonious effort over the years has resulted in successful implementation of enforcement and education of the beach gate closures.

Vehicles locked on the beaches during weekend gate closures are not recorded by law enforcement; however, issued citations are reflected in the law enforcement daily reports. According to daily logs recorded by staff 20 vehicles were locked on the beach. It is at the discretion of the responding law enforcement officer to issue a verbal, written warning or citation.

In a normal year of beach activities the months of March and April would mark the periods in which spring break for surrounding counties and colleges take place. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions that included shelter in place orders as well as an increased population of people working from home visitation to the beach remained consistent following the reopening of beach driving on May 12th. Throughout the summer months, and as demonstrated in Graph 15 below, the level of interaction with the public increased as did the number of visitors.

Graph 15. Monthly Law Enforcement Activity



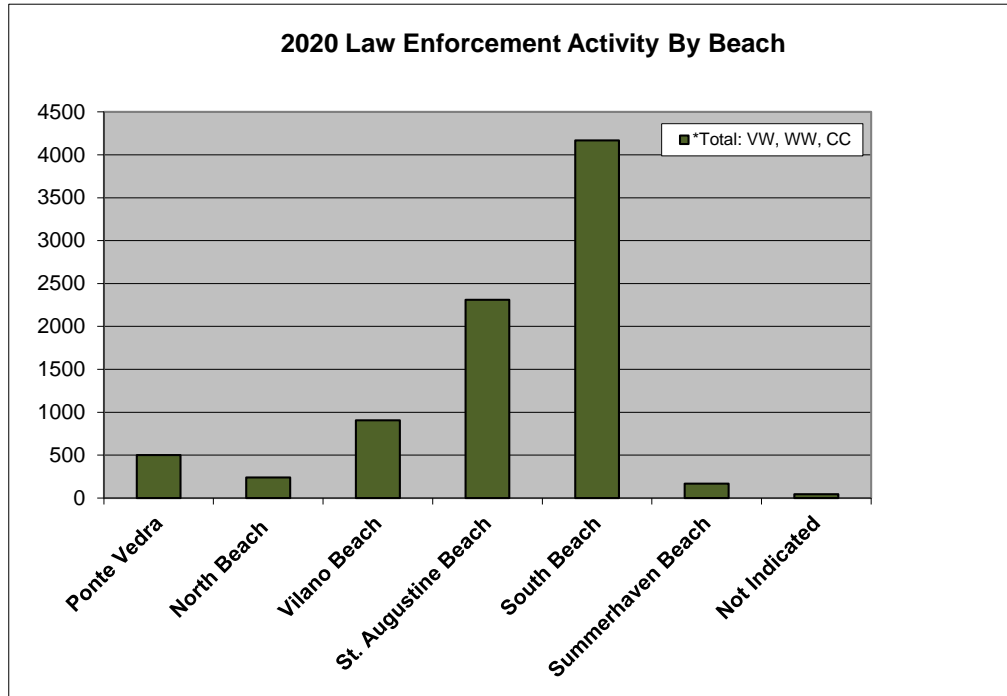
*VW = Verbal Warning WW = Written Warning CC = County Citation

Daily recordings of violations are further broken down into geographic regions excluding the GTMNERR as this stretch of beach receives law enforcement on an as needed basis. The access at each beach varies from walking to horseback riding to driving access. Below is a break down of those accesses and beaches:

- ◆ **Ponte Vedra:** South from the Duval County line area includes South Ponte Vedra extending South to North Beach, has multiple beach access points with walking paths, walkovers, and year-round horseback riding access at Mickler’s Beachfront Park.
- ◆ **North Beach:** Stretch of beach includes multiple beach access points with walking paths, walkovers, year-round horseback riding and North Beach 4x4 vehicle permit access at Surfside Beachfront Park.
- ◆ **Vilano Beach:** Located just south of North Beach, access can be obtained on Vilano Road and Genoa Road also known as Porpoise Point.
- ◆ **St. Augustine Beach:** Beach starts at Pope Road access extending south to Dondanville beach access ramps, multiple public accesses with walkovers and sand paths. Beach driving begins at A Street.
- ◆ **South Beach:** Stretch of beach starts at Dondanville extends south to the Fort Matanzas National Monument and picks back up again south of the inlet, includes Summer Haven ending at Flagler County line in the Town of Marineland. Area includes multiple beach front parks, walkovers, beach driving access and seasonal horseback riding access at Crescent Beach.

Each beach has its share of use by multiple groups and numerous recreational opportunities. Therefore the level of use is increased when more options for beach accessibility are available. This is evident in the amount of citations for the geographic regions of the beach.

Graph 16. Law Enforcement Activity by Beach



*VW = Verbal Warning WW = Written Warning CC = County Citation

Program Improvements: St. Johns County recognizes the need to maintain an enforcement presence for the purpose of applying rules and regulations, documenting, and analyzing law enforcement activity. The county will continue to improve on the level of training and the information collected for beach patrol personnel involved in HCP education and enforcement.

Implementation Measures: Staffing

Implementation: The environmental supervisor manages the habitat conservation section which is sub-component of the environmental division where the manager provides support and direction. Two environmental specialists support the HCP through lighting and data management. Additionally, one part time seasonal employee served as the assistant beach lighting officer as well as six part time HCP field assistants. The environmental supervisor works closely with staff of beach services and parks & recreation. The environmental division and its manager provides administrative and fiscal support while beach services, provides administrative, logistical and over-arching fiscal support. Below is a breakdown of duties:

- Environmental Supervisor (HCP/ITP management) responsibilities include:
 - o Implementation and management of day to day operations of the HCP
 - o Coordination with law enforcement and permitting activities

- Coordination with marine turtle permit holders
- Overseeing data collection
- Management and coordination of full-time and part-time staff
- Coordinating County intra-departmental activities
- Liaison between Federal, State and County officials
- Environmental Specialist (data management) responsibilities include:
 - Data management of all sea turtle nesting activities
 - HCP permitting (Horseback riding, 4x4 permits, commercial fishing)
 - Management of law enforcement data
 - Daily HCP support
- Environmental Specialist (lighting management) responsibilities include:
 - Beach Lighting Officer duties throughout the sea turtle nesting season
 - Nighttime building inspections year round
 - Daily HCP support
 - Nighttime management of seasonal Assistant Beach Lighting Officer and HCP Field Technicians
 - Assistance with beach gate closures and rut removal procedures
- HCP Field Technician responsibilities include:
 - Beach gate closures
 - Routine patrols of beach to educate public
 - Removal of debris and ruts at and near sea turtle nests
 - Application of stickers to beach gear

Assessment: The purpose of the environmental supervisor is to provide professional leadership to all aspects of sea turtle and AIBM management of county beaches. A large part of the daily implementation of the HCP depends on positive and daily working relationships with all levels of staff. Effective communication is critical to daily implementation.

Environmental and beach management staff work closely together to accomplish daily task and to fully implement the HCP. The working relationship between the habitat conservation section and beach services staff is crucial for the success of beach management and the HCP. Daily communication remains a crucial part of the daily activities.

Program Improvements: Over the years the HCP has reached a level of consistency and balance. Program improvements include additional training for the implementation of the HCP as well as more precise record keeping.

Implementation Measures: Data and Records Management

Implementation: The environmental supervisor, environmental specialists, HCP field technicians, and law enforcement personnel collect data on daily log sheets that document HCP activities thus allowing the county to evaluate its HCP performance. MTPs and their volunteers record nesting data on daily nesting sheets as provided by the county and nesting activity is provided weekly through an online reporting program. Additionally, sea turtle patrol reports beach code and HCP violations via phone, text or email messaging.

Assessment: Each nesting season data collection is done so at many different levels and inputted into extensive spreadsheets. As each season passes the continued evaluation and analysis of the data allows for modifications and improvements over each subsequent nesting season.

Program Improvements: As management of data continues to improve so will the response to management of beach and HCP related activities. St. Johns County continues to find ways to stream line data collection.

Implementation Measures: Enforcement and Coordination of Enforcement

Implementation: The environmental supervisor works closely with the beach services natural resource supervisor and the dedicated staff of the Sheriff's department to achieve compliance with the HCP and ITP. Additionally supplemental staff provides an increase in the education and enforcement capabilities of the HCP and ITP. Part time HCP field technicians conduct routine visits to problem areas where law enforcement are not available for regular patrols. If during these visits compliance could not be achieved then law enforcement is requested to assist.

Assessment: Although challenging due to the length of beach and volume of visitors the enforcement of the HCP and ITP has maintained a consistent level of enforcement and implementation due to reliable team efforts. Thus, allowing the habitat conservation section to identify problem areas to target for additional education and enforcement. This is accomplished by conducting routine patrols of area beaches on mules or ATVs for the purpose of educating and removing debris from the beaches.

Program Improvements: The environmental supervisor will continue to work with beach services and the Sheriff's office to maintain compliance with the HCP and ITP. The consistent law enforcement presence will continue to improve the amount of information received in relation to the HCP and ITP. St. Johns County will also continue to find new ways to stream line data collection for the different levels of staff.

SECTION 6: PUBLIC AWARENESS PROGRAM

Applicable ITP Condition - G.2.g.

g. Public Awareness Program. “By May 1 of the first full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop public awareness materials regarding beach driving requirements contained within Chapter 7 of the HCP, this Permit, and local ordinances and codes, provide such materials to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval, and after receiving U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval, make such materials available to the public. Public awareness materials may be subsequently amended prior to and after their distribution upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Implementation: In April of each year a press release is created to provide members of the public information regarding the upcoming sea turtle nesting season. This information is sent by the county public relations office that distributed to multiple media outlets including the St. Johns County website (<http://www.sjcf1.us>), social media and on the “Reach the Beach” application offered by the County. The website has a whole stream of information that provides citizens and visitors with an understanding of the role of the HCP, detailed information regarding beach access, permitting, special events, beach lighting management, as well as protected species and their habitat.

Brochures/Pamphlets

Beach lighting officers distribute multiple types of education material to local restaurants, hotels, resorts, property management groups and other interested organizations before the start of the sea turtle nesting season and throughout to refresh materials.

Education Programs

To further compliment the HCP and its public outreach program staff and NRDs attend and conduct workshops throughout the year. These events give the county the opportunity to provide important information on coastal conservation and sea turtle nesting activities.

Beach Access Signs

Each beach access has varying types of educational signage installed throughout. Signs are made of either custom text or photos developed by staff or taken from posters offered by state and federal agencies. Their location is specific to capture beach goers as they enter the beach while their purpose is to provide necessary education material that relates to natural resource protection.

Special Events

Beach services are responsible for implementing a special event permitting process with the purpose of providing written authorization for holding an organized event. The process includes specific rules and regulations and special conditions as they related to each individual event.

Assessment: Information regarding the HCP, endangered species, volunteering, beach lighting, and the departments involved in implementation are available on the County Web Page at <http://www.co.stjohns.fl.us/Environmental/HCP.aspx>. From this link users can visit other pages that pertain to the beach. It is updated periodically to provide users with new information regarding HCP training, beach access, off-beach parking, protected species, their habitat and the many other beach related activities.

Brochures/Pamphlets

Staff successfully distributed 100 brochures, 24 magnets, 66 table tents, 18 flyers, 29 stickers, and 55 pieces of education material from the Sea Turtle Conservancy. These materials are specific to the HCP and coastal wildlife conservation efforts.

Education Programs

Staff did not participate in education programs this year due to the requirements of social distancing and decreased group activities surrounding COVID-19.

Beach Access Signs

Signage is placed at each beach access location with important information on how to share the beach with coastal wildlife and their habitat. Signage was changed out seasonally to reflect the habitat and species use for that time of year.

Special Events

Upon approval of a special event each applicant received a beach etiquette flyer and permit conditions that reflect HCP and Beach Code regulations. A breakdown of the events is located below:

- Total events:
 - 183 Minor/ 0 Major

- Special requests before 8 am on driving beaches:
 - 1 Minor/ 0 Major

- Special requests before 9 am on non-driving beaches:
 - 16 Minor/ 0 Major

- Total CSAB:
 - 37 Minor/ 1 Major

*Major impact events (200 persons or more) **Minor impact events (199 or less)

Program Improvements: New materials and information are constantly being scheduled and reviewed for updates and improved locations.

SECTION 7: ELEVATING TRASH RECEPTACLES

Applicable ITP Condition - G.2.b.

b. Elevating Trash Receptacles. “By May 1 of the first full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall locate all County-placed trash receptacles within the Plan Area on elevated posts at the seaward boundary of the Conservation Zone throughout the Plan Area, except from the north jetty of St. Augustine Inlet south and west to the Tolomato River (commonly known as Porpoise Point area) where the trash receptacle posts and associated Conservation Zone signage shall be no closer than 30 feet from vegetated dunes or coastal structures.”

Implementation: County trash receptacles located on Anastasia Island and north of the St. Augustine Inlet extending north to Ponte Vedra beach are elevated on posts in the locations as mentioned above. High use areas have been installed with a combination system of both a trash and recycling can elevated on one post. Conservation Zone (CZ) signs are installed on the wooden post between the cans and are maintained throughout the season.

Assessment: All trash cans located on the beaches of Anastasia Island have been elevated to discourage AIBM from entering the bins. This system has been extended for use near all public walkovers, some private and more highly used walkovers, and most of the beach front parks where AIBM have historically been documented or are suspected to have populations. Those parks include Spyglass parking area, Crescent Beach Park, Frank Butler Park East, Gloria Avenue parking, and Pope Road beach access parking lot. This access is located directly adjacent to the entrance of Anastasia State Park where substantial AIBM habitat has been documented. The intent of elevating trash cans can deter beach mice but they can also act as a barrier to sea turtle nesting. Fortunately the nesting event by a loggerhead over the summer was successful even after being deposited at the base of the trash can post, see image below.

Image 2. Sea turtle nest under elevated trash can



Program Improvements: No improvements are scheduled at this time.

SECTION 8: CONSERVATION ZONE

Applicable ITP Conditions - G.1.a. and d., G.2.c

- 1.a Conservation Zone.** *“The Permittee shall implement, maintain, and enforce driving and parking prohibitions within a 30-foot wide Conservation Zone from the northern jetty of St. Augustine Inlet south and west to the Tolomato River (commonly known as the Porpoise Point area) and within a 15-foot wide Conservation Zone throughout the remainder of the HCP Plan Area as described and defined in the HCP, except as authorized below [in the ITP].”*
- 1.d Emergency and Public Safety Vehicles.** *“Emergency and public safety vehicle access is not limited, including access within the Conservation Zone.”*
- 2.c Conservation Zone Marking.** *“By May 1 of the first full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall, at a minimum, place signage on each trash receptacle post referred to in Condition 11.G.2.b designating the area landward of the post as Conservation Zone.”*

Implementation: Where regular beach driving occurs outside of the restricted driving areas the Conservation Zone (CZ) line is adjusted based on the accreting and eroding dunes. The CZ boundary is established by measuring the distance from the seaward edge of permanent line of dune vegetation, toe of dune or armoring structure (i.e. seawall, revetment, etc.) to the required length. As specified in the condition above the width of the CZ varies depending on the beach location.

North and South Beaches

On the northern beaches CZ posts start approximately 100 feet north of the Vilano Road beach access ramp and approximately 15 feet seaward extending south to the Vilano jetties.

South beaches are significantly broader in terms of management due to the length and vastness of the shore line as well as the extremity of tidal fluctuations. CZ posts are increased with an increased number of posts immediately North and South of each vehicular access ramp and in areas where congestion frequently occurs. The CZ line begins in the City of St. Augustine Beach at A Street vehicular access and extends south to Fort Matanzas National Monument vehicular access ramp.

Porpoise Point

Porpoise Point is the only beach in St. Johns County that has a 30 foot CZ requirement as all other beaches have a 15 foot CZ. This CZ is assumed to run from the Vilano jetties and extends south and west to the Tolomato River. Due to the extremely dynamic nature of the area it changes with each tide and storm event causing the sands to shift, loss of signage, and inland areas to periodically become inundated with water.

Assessment: Conservation zone alignment is assessed throughout the winter and spring months. As conditions change the CZ line is adjusted accordingly with periodic re-alignment, new posts, and signage.

North Beaches

Since the impacts of Hurricane Matthew (2016) then Hurricane Irma (2017) and most recently Hurricane Dorian (2019) Vilano and Porpoise Point have fluctuated frequently with available width of beach. More especially Porpoise Point has experienced severe erosion, accretion, tidal inundations, and severe flooding. Thus, eliminating beach driving access on a temporary basis until the area restores to a suitable and legal width for driving.

Porpoise Point

As mentioned in previous compliance reports the County continues to have difficulty in maintaining a required 30 foot CZ due to continuous fluctuations in accretion, erosion, uncertain tidal variabilities, and engineered events. During these variations in beach driving conditions whether unintentional or intentional illegal activity occurs in the theoretical 30 foot CZ area. The management of the CZ under these circumstances has the potential to risk public safety as soft sand conditions and flooded areas cause the loss of CZ signage and portions of vegetation washing to the ocean. Careful consideration has been given to the loss of habitat at porpoise point and the sensitive nature of encroachment onto people's property. Therefore the CZ has been established as 15 feet from property lines extending south towards the inlet when the opportunity is available. At times when the area is flooded or wet the signs are removed.

South Beaches

Following the impacts of each storm event including both hurricanes and Nor'easters the CZ is reviewed and re-aligned according to the vegetation line as necessary. In the spring and prior to the sea turtle nesting season the CZ was supplemented with additional signage where gaps existed any to prevent unintended illegal access.

Program Improvements: Adjustments to the CZ line are critical to accommodate protection of the vegetation, a legal driving lane and space for parking. County staff will continue with moving, realigning and documenting as necessary to ensure full implementation.

SECTION 9: FOUR WHEEL DRIVE TRAINING PROGRAM

Relevant ITP Conditions - G.2.h. and G.2.o

- 2.h. Four-Wheel Drive Training Program.** *The Permittee shall ensure members of the public seeking a County North Beach Vehicle Access Permit to drive north of the Vilano Road beach ramp complete training specified in Condition 11.G.2.o prior to the issuance of such permit.*
- 2.o. HCP and Protected Species Training.** *Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and provide for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a training program. Such program shall provide information regarding applicable HCP conditions and Permit terms and local ordinances necessary to assist individual members of the public in understanding beach driving restrictions provided pursuant to this Permit. The Permittee shall implement use of the HCP and Protected Species Training Program within two (2) months of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval. The Permittee may amend such program both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.*

Implementation: North beach four-wheel drive permittees are required to complete an online HCP and Protected Species training, an application, as well as display a current annual pass adhered to their vehicle windshield. Upon completion of the training, staff conducts a vehicle inspection to verify the applicant's vehicle make/model/color, tag number, windshield-affixed annual pass number, and confirm four-wheel drive capability.

Permittees receive an orange permit that must be hung from the permitted vehicle's rearview mirror and two yellow magnetic placards to be adhered to the permitted vehicle's sides when driving the beach, the inspector's business card (gate lock combination on back), and a map of the driving area boundaries. The inspector verbally reiterates the potential challenges that may be encountered in the driving area and stresses the sensitivity of the driving conditions related to tides.

The completed hangtag permit displays a signature from the environmental supervisor, permit number, tag number, and expiration date; the backside of the hangtag displays HCP rules/regulations and the Sheriff's non-emergency number to dispatch NRDs in the event of observed violations or animals in distress.

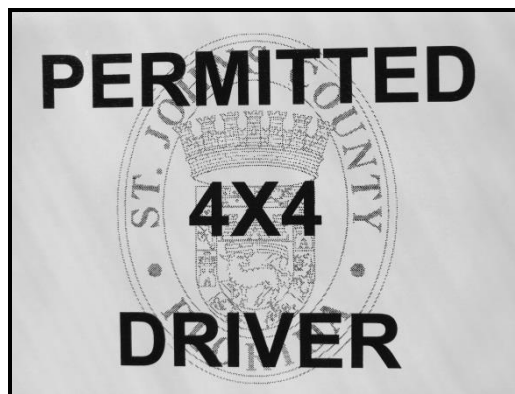
September 8th 2020 began lock-out procedures for access at Surfside Park due to a beach renourishment project lead by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Assessment: There is currently no fee for the permit; the permit is valid for a single calendar year from the date of the training.

Table 12. North Beach Permit Summary

Year	Total Permits Issued	Vehicle Inspections	Renewed Permits
2007	40	39	1
2008	63	48	15
2009	101	48	53
2010	147	78	69
2011	161	76	85
2012	117	58	59
2013	100	64	36
2014	81	46	27
2015	107	64	43
2016	93	56	37
2017	0	0	0
2018	0	0	0
2019	9	9	0
2020	27	27	0

Image 3. Yellow Magnetic Placard



Program Improvements: The permit application was updated to require initial acknowledgement of all permit conditions; notably access at high-tide or mid-high tides are prohibited, all vehicles must remain below the high tide line at all times, and access terminates at the Southern Boundary of the Serenata Beach Club. The Protected Species online training PowerPoint presentation was updated to reflect the aforementioned changes and was made printable for individuals without computer proficiency. There are no other improvements scheduled at this time.

SECTION 10: BEACH LIGHTING

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.k.

k. Beach Lighting Management Plan. “Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this permit, the Permittee shall develop and submit for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a comprehensive Beach Lighting Management Plan that unifies local and county codes regarding management of beach-front lighting in accordance with actions described in Chapter 7 of the HCP. Beginning May 1 during the first full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall implement such Plan. The Permittee may amend the approved Beach Lighting Management Plan both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Implementation: The Beach Lighting Management Plan is located in the St. Johns County Land Development Code, Article IV. The environmental division employs one year-round beach lighting officer and one part-time assistant, who provide routine enforcement and education of the Beach Lighting Management Plan (For this report, both are referenced as beach lighting officers). On an annual basis, the beach lighting officers follow a routine approach by informing coastal residents, property management companies, resorts, hotels, beachfront businesses, and visitors that sea turtle season is approaching and that the lighting rules and regulations are in effect. Beach officers implement the program through routine education efforts, routine nightly surveys, and home inspections.

Community Education Effort

April	Staff mail an informational postcard to all beachfront property owners, managers, and representatives providing information on the sea turtle nesting season.
May	Staff posted educational videos on social media outlets. The beach lighting officers hand-delivered a limited amount of brochures, table tents, magnets, door hangtags, flyers, window decals, and light switch stickers to hotels, resorts, and property management companies.
May – Oct	Beach lighting officers conducted nightly surveys of coastal properties and issued Alert of Violations (AOV) for any non-compliant lights. The beach lighting officers included recommendations in each AOV to bring offending light into compliance. Throughout the season, beach lighting officers maintained contact with the Florida Power & Light Company (FPL) to discuss issues arising from customer complaints and to discuss any FPL lighting that became non-compliant during the course of the season due to new construction, beach profile change, or landscape changes.

Formal Education Programs

Due to COVID-19, staff was required to limit some of the necessary comprehensive education to help protect staff, residents and visitors. To help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, staff was required to restrict or cancel most of the annual in-class schooling, festivals, and summer camps. At one point, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) advised that a person could contract COVID-19 by touching an infected surface or object and then touching his or her own

mouth, nose, or eyes. Based on these recommendations, staff decreased the amount of educational outreach material provided to the public by 96.4%. In an effort to mitigate any negative impact to the county's outreach efforts, staff created educational videos for St. Johns County Parks & Recreation Virtual Summer Camp, the Alligator Farm's Virtual Summer Camp, and posted on the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office (SJSO) Facebook page. The videos reached approximately 7,000 viewers during the pandemic.

New Construction

All properties are required to pass a nighttime lighting inspection prior to receiving a Certificate of Occupancy (CO). The building department is responsible for reviewing permit applications and building plans for new construction. During the review process, if staff found a property was subject to the sea turtle lighting requirements a "hold" would be placed on the property, thereby alerting the permittee that a lighting inspection would be required prior to permit approval. The permittee is then responsible for contacting the beach lighting officer to obtain approval of any proposed lighting prior to its installation. The beach lighting officer works with the contractor or property owner throughout the construction phase by conducting periodic site visits and offering guidance for compliant lighting. At the conclusion of lighting installation, a final nighttime inspection is required after sunset and from the vantage point of the beach. If the property is in compliance, the beach lighting officer will approve the property through an online tracking database, allowing the property owner to receive a CO from the building department. If the property is not in compliance, it will result in a "failed" inspection. The building department will withhold the CO until staff re-inspects the property and determine it to be in full compliance. Staff uploads all inspections forms into the building department database for future reference. In total, the beach lighting officer or environmental supervisor conducted 25 nighttime inspections during the calendar year of 2020.

Existing Construction

During the months of March and April, the beach lighting officer gathered information related to non-compliant FPL streetlights. To reduce the risk of the spread of the novel coronavirus, SJSO closed the beach to the public during that time. SJSO granted staff limited access to complete their inspections as there were minimal staff available to perform the inspections. The County was unable to hire a new beach lighting officer and seasonal staff until May 11. Staff conducted official lighting surveys nightly during the sea turtle nesting season and until staff could evaluate each nest. For all properties that did not comply with Land Development Code 4.01.09, beach lighting officers issued an AOV door hang and logged the violation into the beach lighting database. The AOV was posted at the property the following day of the documented violation. Additionally, staff provided various information with the AOV, including, the section of the code in violation, instructions to modify or disable all non-compliant lights (including a date to bring the property into compliance), and directed the property owner to contact the Habitat Conservation Section within 24 hours of receiving the violation notice. If staff did not receive a call from the property owner within 24 hours and compliance was not met, staff would attempt to find contact information through other sources to make contact with the property owner. If contact with the owner was not made a certified letter containing a final warning was sent. If the property owner had not corrected the violation by the time specified on the AOV and final warning, a Uniform Code Citation pursuant to Sec. 162.21, *Florida Statutes* (FS) was issued.

Additional site inspections, following each correspondence, until the property owner brought the property into compliance were also completed.

Staff delivered a total of 519 AOVs and issued 2 final warnings to property owners. The highest number of violations per kilometer was Zone 5 (2700 S. Ponte Vedra to 4100 Coastal Hwy). In this area, homes sit within 100 feet or closer to the mean high water line and the area lacks vegetation. This zone was surveyed more frequently to prevent disorientations.

Complaint and Investigation Log

Staff recorded all complaints concerning potential lighting violations received from the public in a complaint and investigation log of the beach lighting database. Staff investigated all complaints within 24 hours of receipt. Staff documented all findings regarding compliance or non-compliance in the log and provided the information to the complainant at their request. Staff addressed violations in the same manner as previously described.

Staff received 1 complaint through the Public Request Inquiry Data Exchange System (PRIDE) and permit holders reported 3 complaints to the Beach Lighting Officer; all complaints were resolved. The amount of AOV distributed to property owners decreased as the season progressed.

Graph 17. Alert of Violation Summary

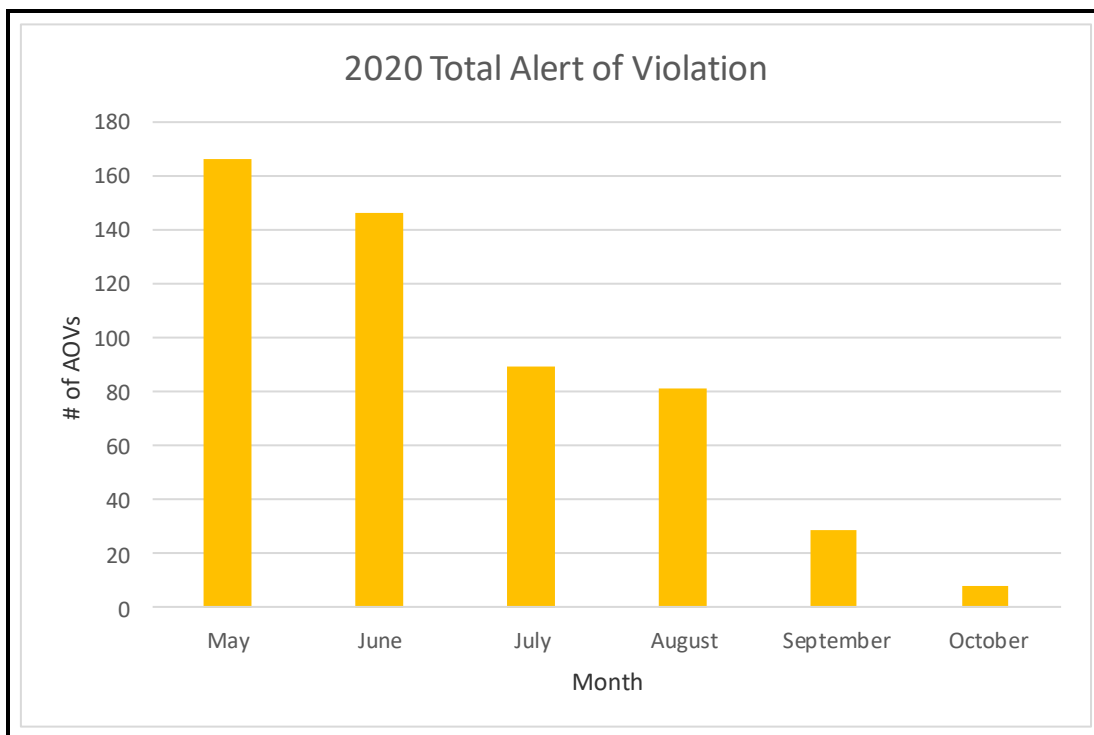
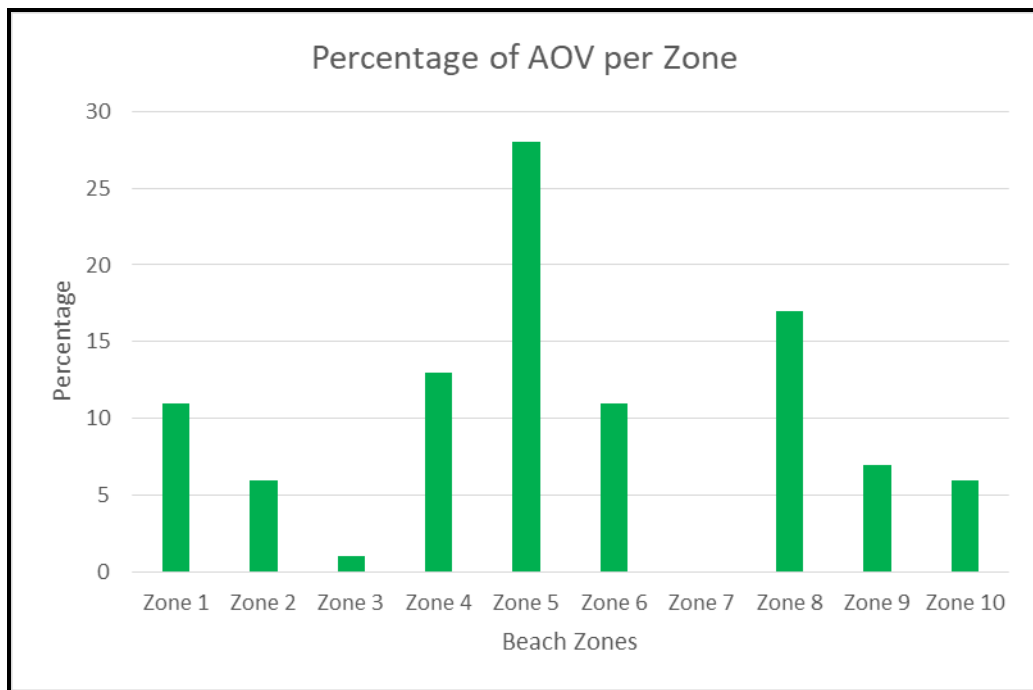


Table 13. Beach Lighting Percent Distribution per Zone

Zone	%	Beginning	End	Km	# of Violations
Zone 1	11	49 Ponte Vedra Blvd.	Sawgrass Beach Club	5	59
Zone 2	6	Sawgrass Beach Club	Old Ponte Vedra Condo	5.6	29
Zone 3	1	Old Ponte Vedra Condo	GTMNERR	1.81	5
Zone 4	13	2343 S. Ponte Vedra Condo	2683 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd	6	67
Zone 5	28	2700 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd	4100 Coastal Hwy (Reef Restaurant)	8.29	147
Zone 6	11	4100 Coastal Hwy (Reef Restaurant)	2 Viejo Rd. (Porpoise Point)	4.39	57
Zone 7	0	Anastasia State Park	Anastasia State Park		0
Zone 8	17	300 A1A Beach Blvd	Crescent Beach Ramp	9.81	88
Zone 9	7	Crescent Beach Ramp	Matanzas Ramp North	6.22	36
Zone 10	6	Summer Haven	9443 Old A1A	4.11	31
Total	100			51.23	519

Graph 18. Beach Lighting Percent Distribution per Zone



Program Improvements: Based on the 2020 season, staff believes that the educational program will need to shift from in-person education outreach to virtual and social media platforms. The beach lighting officer is in the process of revamping educational brochures and material, updating the county website to make it more user-friendly, and providing a “New Construction” packet for contractors and homeowners. The beach lighting officer also created new postcard designs and fun stickers to bring awareness to the lighting ordinance.

SECTION 11: BEACH DRIVING AT SUMMER HAVEN

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.n.

n. Management of Beach Driving at Summer Haven. “The Permittee shall continue to maintain and manage a locked gate barricade along old U.S. A1A immediately south of the terminus of the existing rock revetment along the Atlantic Ocean coastline in the town of Summer Haven. Ingress and egress through such barricade shall only be authorized for owners and/or residents of homes along old U.S. A1A.”

Implementation: The locked gate and barricade in the aforementioned condition no longer exists as a breach in the dune system on the northern end of Summer Haven occurred on October 10, 2008 wiping out the northern section. A new barricade has not been established as the area is no longer accessible from the northern end. Shortly thereafter a dredging project that removed sand from the summer haven river was completed placing sand on the east side to create a dune which was completed with the planting of sea oats.

Assessment: Although beach driving at one time was accessible from the northern end a partially paved roadway existed on the southern end providing access to all of the homes on summer haven beach. The roadway has since been washed out completely by three years of hurricane activity; Matthew (2016) Irma (2017) and Dorian (2018). Commonly referred to as Old A1A these storms swept away any remnants of the roadway and most of the previously existing sand fencing that delineated the driving surface from the beach. Sand fencing was reinstalled in April of 2018 and remained intact throughout the nesting season until the impacts of Hurricane Dorian (2018) which washed out the sand fencing almost entirely. Since then the area has sustained repeated breaches and wash overs forcing new inlets between homes as the breaches continue to move south. The breaches of water repeatedly wash over any driving path about mid-way to the north end. Residents that live on the most northern end cannot access their homes during certain high tide events (Image 4).

Image 4. New breach (December 2020)



Residents of Summer Haven continue to gain access to their homes from the south entrance of Old A1A where the driving surface is delineated by the imaginary line of the public right of way. The thin stretch of sand along Summer Haven hosts all three species of sea turtle nesting which is also bumped up against the assumed driving surface. The amount of available nesting habitat in which nesting female sea turtles has can make the depositing of eggs challenging at best.

Program Improvements: St. Johns County will continue to work with other departments and agencies to create the best alternative to delineate the beach from the driving surface. This will ensure safe driving and suitable habitat for the protected species.

SECTION 12: HORSEBACK RIDING MONITORING PLAN

Relevant ITP Conditions - G.2.d., l. and o.

- d. **Local Ordinance Amendments.** *“Within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall amend applicable local ordinances as described in Chapter 7 of the HCP to ensure effective implementation of the HCP and terms of this Permit.”*
- l. **Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan.** *“Within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and submit for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan as described in Chapter 7 of the HCP. Beginning no later than May 1 during the second full nesting season following the issuance date of this Permit, the Permittee shall implement such Plan. The Permittee shall ensure that each person, or in the case of a company providing horseback riding services, a representative of the company, complete training specified in Condition 11.G..2.o. The Permittee may amend the approved Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan both prior to and after is implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*
- o. **HCP and Protected Species Training.** *“Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and provide for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a training program. Such program shall provide information regarding applicable HCP conditions and Permit terms and local ordinances necessary to assist individual members of the public in understanding beach driving restrictions provided pursuant to this Permit. The Permittee shall implement use of the HCP and Protected Species Training Program within two (2) months of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval. The Permittee may amend such program both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*

Implementation: In September 2006, a Horseback Riding Monitoring Plan, the proposed Ordinance amendments (Section 19: Local Ordinance Amendments) was approved. Each document introduced new horseback riding rules, and provided a tool in which the County was able to monitor the number of riders. The Horseback Riding Plan provides three different categories for permits; a Master Beach Equestrian Guide, a General Beach Equestrian Guide Class I and a General Beach Equestrian Guide Class II.

Training is available on an as-needed basis, either through a classroom training session or online. All Master Equestrian Beach Guide permit requests require approval by the Assistant County Administrator. Applicants shall provide documentation of their extensive riding experience on St. Johns County Beaches. Once approved, permittees are sent a small laminated permit that must be affixed to the external portion of their saddle bags and Master Guides are also provided two laminated day passes that can be issued to their guests.

The Board of County Commissioners adopted Ordinance 2009-60 allowing horseback riding from the northern border of the GTMNERR to the Duval County line between April 15th and September 15th of each year, between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, Sunday, and Federal holidays. The Ordinance is effective in separating the horseback riders from the

sunbathers. Among other regulations, the most effective is the requirement of horseback riders to remain below the high tide line.

Education and Outreach: The annual in-classroom training was conducted out-of-doors at the St. Johns County Fairgrounds for Horse Council members, held in July of 2020. There were 35 attendees, and 28 who received permits from the event; members were able to dialogue about how to navigate the beach responsibly with their horses while respecting other beach-goers and sensitive habitat.

Access: Three access points are available for permitted equestrians to access the beach: Mickler's Landing, Surfside Park, and Frank Butler Park East.

North of St. Augustine Inlet Beaches

Mickler's Landing Access 1109 ½ Ponte Vedra Blvd.

- November 1 – April 14
Ride 7 days a week. No time restriction.
- April 15 – April 30
Monday-Friday: No time restriction.
Saturday, Sundays & Federal Holidays: Ride before 9am & after 5pm
(tides permitting)
- May 1 – September 15
Monday-Friday: 8am-7:30pm
Saturday, Sundays & Federal Holidays: Ride between 8am-9am or 5pm-7:30pm
(tides permitting)
- September 16 – October 31
Ride 7 days a week, 8am-7:30pm

*Surfside Park Access 3070 Coastal Hwy.

- May 1 – October 31
Ride 8am-7:30pm
- November 1 – April 30
Ride 7 days a week. No time restriction

* September 8th 2020 equestrian access was temporarily suspended at Surfside Park due to Beach Renourishment Project lead by the Army Corps of Engineers.

South of St. Augustine Inlet Beaches

Frank Butler Park East 5860 A1A S. / Overflow Parking at 5780 Gloria Ave.

- Open for Rides: November 1 to Designated Spring Break (Usually mid-March; changes annually).
- Closed for Rides: Designated Spring Break to October 31

Sea Turtle Nesting: Sea turtle patrol volunteers are responsible to document when horse tracks are present on the beach in front of a nest on the morning of a nesting event as well as when the nest hatches. Out of the 849 nests documented, 0 emergence events were reported to have had interaction with horse tracks present (note: not all indications of the presence of horse tracks were marked on nesting data sheets). When horse track information is not provided, the County is not able to evaluate the impacts of horseback riding.

Assessment: For calendar year 2020, a total of 121 General Equestrian and no new Master Equestrian permits were issued (Table 14). Additionally, and upon request by the equestrian permit holders, the County will replace a permit for various reasons such as lost or damaged permits. 3 replacement permits were re-issued in 2020.

Table 14. Horseback Riding Permit Summary

Year	General	Master	Total
2007	111	30	141
2008	6	80	86
2009	102	5	107
2010	100	0	100
2011	81	0	81
2012	82	0	82
2013	92	0	92
2014	85	0	85
2015	142	0	142
2016	104	0	104
2017	114	0	114
2018	115	0	115
2019	104	0	104
2020	121	0	121

Program Improvements: The St. Johns County Beach Code 2007-19 continues to be under review for formal updates.

SECTION 13: DAYTIME NESTING & HATCHING EVENTS

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.m.

m. Daytime Nesting and Hatching Events. “Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and submit for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a standard operating procedures protocol for regulating vehicle traffic during daytime sea turtle nesting and hatching events. The Permittee may amend the standard operating procedures protocol both prior to and after its implementation upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Implementation: In September 2006 a Daytime Nesting and Hatching Events Protocol was approved by the USFWS.

Assessment: Although 2020 was an eventful year for nesting with 842 nests and 609 false crawls there were no daytime nesting or hatching events recorded.

Daytime Nesting Events: None to report

Daytime Hatching Event: None to report

Program Improvements: Communication between the MTPs, beach management, and the Sheriff’s department will continue to be an important part of the daily routine.

SECTION 14: COASTAL CONSTRUCTION

Relevant ITP Conditions - G.1.j. and G.1.k

- j. Coastal Construction.** *“Between November 1 or the date on which the last sea turtle nest has hatched and April 30 or the date on which the first sea turtle nest is laid, the Permittee may authorize vehicle access, including within the Conservation Zone, for the purpose of non-emergency coastal construction provided any related construction activity, the resulting structure, and any environmental impacts, including potential incidental take of listed species, have been properly authorized by local, State, and/or Federal regulatory agencies. The Permittee shall ensure operators of vehicles accessing the beach for coastal construction complete training specified in Condition 11.G.2.o.”*
- k. Emergency Coastal Construction.** *“The Permittee may authorize vehicle access, including within the Conservation Zone, for emergency coastal construction projects throughout the year. The Permittee shall ensure operators of vehicles accessing the beach for emergency coastal construction complete training specified in Condition 11.G.2.o.”*

Implementation: The Environmental Division and Beach Services works with the County Engineering, Planning and Building Departments, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Bureau Beaches and Coastal Systems, to ensure that projects occurring on the coast comply with the HCP and ITP. When property owners and contractors are in the process of applying for coastal construction for their homes all agencies involved have the opportunity to comment or contribute by applying conditions that are meant to reduce impacts to the natural resource. A building permit must be applied for and approved by the County in order to proceed with construction activities. If coastal construction access is preferred by the contractor to complete the work an HCP coastal construction access permit must be obtained from the Habitat Conservation Section. This is approved after the completion of HCP and Protected Species Training which can be done online or in a class room setting.

Contractors are required to provide the following information:

- Contractors name/company and contact information
- Construction address
- Requested location for access
- Type of equipment
- Type of construction
- Construction dates
- Copy of approved DEP permit

Permit conditions include the following:

- Driving below high tide line
- Removal of ruts left from equipment
- Leaving beach in clean condition
- Non-disturbance of coastal wildlife and the habitat

- Coordination with FWC MTP if conducted during sea turtle nesting season as permitted if considered an emergency
- Requested location for access
- If public access location is requested a user agreement is required

Assessment: Coastal construction access permits were issued for the installation of seawalls, repairs to stairs, surveys for future re-nourishment projects, installation of sand fencing and geotubes (Image 5). Throughout this time a total of 22 coastal construction access permits were issued by St. Johns County. Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of coastal construction access permits.

Image 5. Geotubes installed at 1085 Ponte Vedra Boulevard



Program Improvements: The County will continue to communicate with the County Engineering, Planning, and Building Departments as well as the DEP, FWC, USFWS to collaborate on coastal projects.

SECTION 15: SANITATION COLLECTION

Relevant ITP Condition - G.1.h.

***h. Sanitation Collection.** “From May 1 to October 31, each year, trash collection shall be authorized only after completion of daily sea turtle nest surveys on beaches containing trash receptacles and until 8:00 p.m. Between November 1 and April 30, each year, access is not limited. The Permittee shall require that any sanitation collection vehicle driver complete training specified in Condition 11.G.2.o.”*

Implementation: The County conducts all trash removal from the beach in-house. Each employee retained for this service completes annual training alongside other members of the beach management team including law enforcement. Current staff has several years of experience on both driving and non-driving beaches demonstrating a seamless effort to operate under the rules of the HCP while carrying out the required duties. Operators of the sanitation vehicles are prohibited from entering the beaches May 1st - October 31st prior to 8:00 a.m. or before sea turtle patrol has finished their morning surveys which ever occurs last. Furthermore, they are prohibited from entering the Conservation Zone while conducting their daily duties on the beach. Employees use one truck to collect trash from cans on driving beaches and are allowed access to Mickler’s beach through the sandy entrance that is also used by Marine Rescue and horseback riders. In addition, an ATV or side-by-side are used to collect debris on both driving and non-driving beaches.

Assessment: St. Johns County retains the services of two part-time employees with assistance from full time maintenance staff to complete trash removal duties. Trash collection continued as it has in years past with minor challenges.

Program Improvements: No formal changes to trash collection management are proposed.

SECTION 16: RAMP GRADING

Relevant ITP Condition - G.I.i.

- i. **Ramp Grading.** “From May 1 to October 31, each year, the Permittee may authorize access for ramp grading equipment only after completion of daily nesting surveys on beaches where ramps exist and until 8:00 p .m. From November 1 through April 30, each year, the Permittee may authorize access for ramp grading equipment at any time.”*

Implementation: Beach Services employs two heavy equipment operators who conducts ramp grading on eight vehicular access ramps. During the sea turtle season ramp grading is conducted every weekend on six South Beach Ramps and several times throughout the week in the afternoon hours. The northern beach access ramps located at Vilano Road and Genoa Road are done so very rarely throughout the year as they do not experience quite the erosion issue as the other ramps do. Ramp grading during sea turtle season occurs only after 8:00 a.m. and is typically completed by early afternoon thus not posing a threat to unmarked sea turtle nests or interfering with rut removal.

Assessment: No reports regarding negative impacts by the ramp grader were reported during the 2020 nesting season.

Program Improvements: No formal changes to ramp grading are proposed.

SECTION 17: PORPOISE POINT VEHICULAR DRIVING

Relevant ITP Condition – 7.3.3

7.3.3 *Redirecting Porpoise Point vehicular driving to allow re-establishment of natural dune features.* “St. Johns County will barricade the interdunal driving lanes radiating from Porpoise Point Ramp and maintain a single traffic corridor from the ramp to the St. Augustine Inlet. Additionally, the County will place and maintain vehicular barricades and appropriate signage at the previous entrances to each interdunal driving lane. The barricades will be monitored and maintained by County staff until dune vegetation/windblown sand covers former driving lanes, and the barricades are deemed unnecessary. St. Johns County will mark the landward side of the driving area around Porpoise Point from the Vilano Ramp to the southwestern tip of Porpoise Point (with appropriate space for parking seaward of the 30-ft wide CZ). This traffic area will connect to the Porpoise Point Ramp. If a 30-ft wide CZ cannot be maintained around Porpoise Point due to high tides, storm surge, or other unusual event, public driving will be temporarily prohibited in this region. The Sheriff’s Department (in cooperation with Beach Rangers, if appropriate) will be responsible for enforcing these beach driving regulations.”

Implementation: The HCP set a 30 foot CZ for the Porpoise Point area to address, “a potential AIBM [Anastasia Island beach mouse] and bird nesting habitat” (see HCP, Chapter 7, Section 7.2.8), therefore, Porpoise Point is the only area in St. Johns County that has a 30 foot CZ as all the other County beaches maintain a 15 foot CZ. The previously existing and radiating interdunal driving lanes were closed off completely by the summer of 2007 allowing for the vegetation and dune system to restore. Access to this stretch of beach parallels the St. Augustine inlet and sometimes can be obtained from both Vilano and Porpoise Point vehicular access ramps depending on the level of exposure on the jetties.

Assessment: During high tide or extreme weather events the area often becomes inundated with water due to fluctuating elevations in sand allowing water to enter the inland area flooding the Porpoise Point vehicular access ramp. Over the course of the last several years these dramatic differences in levels of tidal inundation have caused parts of porpoise point to be shut down completely to beach driving. When these events occur access becomes challenging to beach drivers and are sometimes forced to enter the indistinguishable 30 foot CZ. Additionally any established vegetation on the perimeter of the inland area is sometimes washed out almost completely. These combined conditions have proven to be difficult for the County to maintain a 30 foot CZ without risking public safety, losing CZ signs to the ocean or having unintentional activity to occur in the 30 foot CZ area (see Section 8: Conservation Zone and Section 20: Unforeseen Circumstances for more information).

Program Improvements: The County will continue to work closely with representatives from FWC and USFWS to improve management of protected species in this area. Potential change and a management plan for access to the beach and prohibition into the CZ are necessary to the area (see Section 20: Unforeseen Circumstances).

SECTION 18: HCP AND PROTECTED SPECIES TRAINING

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.o.

- o. HCP and Protected Species Training. “Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall develop and provide for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service review and approval a training program. Such program shall provide information regarding applicable HCP conditions and Permit terms and local ordinances necessary to assist individual members of the public in understanding beach driving restrictions provided pursuant to the Permit. The Permittee shall implement use of the HCP and Protected Species Training Program within two (2) months of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval. The Permittee may amend upon review and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”*

Implementation: In September 2007 St. Johns County submitted to USFWS the required HCP and Protected Species Training procedure. The approved workshops include training for the MTPs, horseback riders, north beach 4x4 drivers and commercial fisherman. Training is completed through group workshops or online programming. Horseback riders, North beach 4x4 drivers, coastal construction and sea turtle patrol volunteers primarily use the online program while commercial fishermen typically attend class training. Washback volunteers are required to complete an online orientation program while also attending beach training. Any training attended by staff are done so in a classroom setting. Each program provides details of the HCP/ITP, how to identify protected species including other listed species not covered on the permit, policy and procedure, as well as completing a quiz at the conclusion of the training.

Assessment: Table 15 below outlines each of the attendees for 2020 HCP and Protected Species Training.

Table 15. Attendance for 2020 HCP and Protected Species Training

Date	Source	Group	# of Participants
Multiple Dates	Online	Equestrian	121
Multiple Dates	Online	North Beach	27
Multiple Dates	Online	Coastal Construction	22
Not Available	Online	Marine Turtle Volunteers	68
2/20/2020	Classroom	Toll Operators	45
2/26/2020	Classroom	LEO/Marine Rescue	25
8/6/2020	Classroom	Commercial Fishing	3
Multiple Dates	Online/Classroom	Washback	200
Total			511

Program Improvements: The County will continue to update training as needed and as it pertains to the adaptive management style of the beaches. Furthermore, training will continue to be provided in all forms available for what best fits the stakeholder.

SECTION 19: LOCAL ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS

Relevant ITP Condition - G.2.d.

d. Local Ordinance Amendments. “Within twelve (12) months of the effective date of this Permit, the Permittee shall amend applicable local ordinances as described in Chapter 7 of the HCP to ensure effective implementation of the HCP and terms of the Permit.”

Implementation: In September 2006, the County submitted to USFWS proposed Ordinance amendments for approval. The St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners adopted a unified Beach Code Ordinance 2007-19, on March 27, 2007.

Additionally, St. Johns County updated its Beach Lighting Management Plan and incorporated the changes into the existing lighting requirements in the Land Development Code Article IV Section 4.019.

Assessment: Ordinance amendments to the Beach Code have allowed County staff, City Police and the Sheriff’s Department the authority to enforce HCP/ITP rules and regulations.

Program Improvements: The County will continue with public outreach programs to properly inform the public of policies and procedures of the Beach Code and HCP/ITP rules and regulations.

SECTION 20: UNFORSEEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Relevant ITP Condition – J.

J. Unforeseen Circumstances. *“Unforeseen and/or changed circumstances may become apparent either to the Permittee, the Permittee’s authorized agents, or to personnel of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For purposes of implementation of this condition unforeseen circumstances are defined as changes in circumstances affecting a species or geographic area covered by the HCP which could not reasonably have been anticipated by the HCP developers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the time of the HCP’s negotiation and development and that result in a substantial and adverse change in the status of the covered species. Changed circumstances are defined as changes in circumstances affecting a species or geographic area covered by the HCP that can reasonably be anticipated by HCP developers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and that can be planned for.*

“The Permittee and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acknowledge that even with the above detailed provisions for mitigating and/or minimizing impacts, circumstances could arise which were not fully anticipated by this Permit and which are considered unforeseen. Such circumstances may become apparent either to the Permittee or to personnel of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. For purposes of implementation of this condition, unforeseen circumstances are defined as any significant unanticipated adverse change in the status of species, any significant, unanticipated adverse change in impacts of the activity or in other factors upon which the HCP and Permit are based, or any other significant new information relevant to the Permit and activity that was unforeseen by the Permittee and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that could give rise to the need to review the Permittee’s conservation program.”

Implementation: In 2012 St. Johns County submitted to USFWS a request for an “Unforeseen Circumstance” to revise the required 30 foot CZ (Section 8: Conservation Zone) to a 15 foot CZ which would be consistent with all other County beaches. At the time the combination of previous dredging activities of the St. Augustine inlet and the various levels of tides and storm activity has proven difficult if not impossible for the County to maintain a 30 foot Conservation Zone (CZ) without risk of public safety, losing CZ signs to the ocean or having unintentional activity occur in the 30 foot CZ area.

Assessment: As mentioned in previous Annual Reports the County still maintains its position to request modification of the CZ at Porpoise Point to a 15 foot CZ as it falls within the definition of minor and is consistent with the protection established for all of the beaches in the County, as it does not cause “new or significantly” different operations or effects and does not cause any additional “take”. The HCP set a 30 foot CZ for the Porpoise Point area to address, “a potential Anastasia Island Beach Mouse (AIBM) and bird nesting habitat.” The original analysis included in the HCP for the 30 foot CZ is no longer applicable. Protection for AIBM at Porpoise Point is unknown as this species is sensitive to storms and erosion. The County continues to implement protections for the nesting birds that far exceed the idea of a 30 foot CZ. Additionally, on December 3rd, 2019 SJC staff with a representative of USFWS to discuss the necessity behind the installation of a CZ. It was collectively determined that the installation of a CZ is not necessary as its original intent was to protect sea turtle nesting habitat and since the area is

devoid of vegetation and dunes there is no nesting habitat to protect. It was agreed that the County would not be placing a CZ at Porpoise Point and that Beach Management signs would be used instead. Please refer to Appendix B to review the letter written to USFWS by SJC to confirm these findings.

Program Improvements: St. Johns County will continue with the active management of Porpoise Point based on the existing dynamic conditions such as tide heights and predicted storm events. In the event that habitat begins to form and vegetation becomes obvious the County will protect the area with appropriate signage.

SECTION 21: FUNDING & FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

Relevant ITP Condition– N.

Funding and Financial Commitment. “The Permittee shall commit funds necessary to implement the terms and conditions of this Permit and provisions of the HCP. By March 31st of each year this Permit is in effect, the Permittee shall submit an HCP Operational Budget to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval. The HCP Operational Budget shall provide an itemized financial commitment sufficient to fund all terms and conditions of this Permit and provisions of the HCP.”

Implementation: Money dedicated to implementation of the HCP/ITP is approved annually through a budget approval process at the requests of each County department. The fiscal year begins on October 1st and extends to September 30th of the following year but information provided in this report is done so on a calendar year basis. The HCP and ITP are currently funded through both the environmental division, which provides salaries for the environmental supervisor, environmental specialist and technician, two seasonal staff and a limited amount of operating funds. The beach services division provides funding for law enforcement personnel, additional salaries, and the bulk of the operational costs.

Assessment: The natural resources superintendent is tasked with the management of beach services budget monies and works closely with the environmental supervisor to ensure compliance with the HCP and ITP. Direct support of the HCP/ITP is evident in the salaries of the environmental supervisor, environmental specialist, and HCP field assistants as well as partial salary support from the superintendent. Accessory support and operational costs are demonstrated in both Tables 16, 17 and 18. All funds expended to implement the conditions of the HCP/ITP have been included in current operational budgets of the Environmental and Beach Services Divisions.

Table 16. HCP/ITP Support Staff

Position	Duties	Department	Revenue Source	*Salary	% Contribution	% Actual Funds
Environmental Division Manager	Provides Administrative Support	Growth Management, Environmental Division	General Fund	\$135,907.51	5%	\$6,795.38
Beach Services Superintendent	Manages Beaches/Special Projects	Recreation & Parks	General Fund/Toll Revenue	\$86,859.89	50%	\$43,429.95
Beach Maintenance	2 full time	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$133,710.82	75%	\$100,283.12
City Police Beach Patrol	City Beach Patrol	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$90,401.64	100%	\$90,401.64
SJC Beach Patrol Natural Resource Deputies (NRDs)	County Beach Patrol	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$840,741.13	100%	\$840,741.13
Total						\$1,081,651.21

***Salary includes entire cost to county including contributions.**

Table 17. HCP/ITP Staff

Position	Duties	Department	Revenue Source	*Salary
Environmental Supervisor Full Time	Implements HCP/ITP	Growth Management, Environmental Division	General Fund	\$95,395
Environmental Specialist Full Time	HCP Support Staff	Growth Management, Environmental Division	General Fund	\$84,372
Environmental Technician Full Time	HCP Support Staff	Growth Management, Environmental Division	General Fund	\$69,205
Environmental Technician /Volunteer Coordinator Part Time	HCP Support Staff	Growth Management, Environmental Division	General Fund	\$9,157
HCP Field Assistants	Gates/Rut Removal	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$10,852
TOTAL				\$268,981

***Salary includes entire cost to county including contributions.**

Table 18. Operational Costs

Type	Department	Revenue Source	Funds
Communications	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$9,383
Insurance	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$4,032
HCP Maintenance	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$1,507
Equipment Purchase	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$0
Equipment Purchase	Tourist Development Council	*Category 3	\$0
HCP Maintenance	Tourist Development Council	*Category 3	\$1,507
Gas, Oil, Lubricants	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$8,157
Vehicle Maintenance	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$12,952
Equipment Maintenance	Beach Services	Toll Revenue	\$8,166
Total			\$ 45,704

Program Improvements: The current method of sharing funds and staffing is expected to continue. Therefore, no substantive changes to the budget or budgeting process are being discussed for 2021.

SECTION 22: ADDITIONAL CONSERVATION MEASURES

Shorebird Nesting Sites

The County responds annually to the possibility of shorebird nesting by monitoring Porpoise Point and Summer Haven for any indications of potential nesting activity. Through consultation with biologist of FWC the area is sometimes pre-posted to allow for safe arrival of nesting least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) or other shorebird species such as the Wilson's plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*). This protection of the area includes prohibiting vehicles and pedestrians, and dogs off leashes from entering the posted area to prevent any disturbance.

Porpoise Point

Posting at Porpoise Point has exemplified consistent management challenges because of the constant relocation of sand from high tide and storm events in relation with heavy vehicle use. These factors including the historic information that Least Terns had not nested at Porpoise Point for the past 4 years gave validity to not pre-post the area as in years past. No Least Terns were recorded at Porpoise Point as resting or nesting.

Summer Haven

Summer haven has experienced extreme changes from dredging of the summer haven river to consistent washouts following storms, accretion and erosion in various locations. Least terns and Wilson's plovers have utilized this area for seasonal nesting activity for the last six years. Pre-posting occurred with little nesting activity. St. Johns County routinely patrolled the area documenting nesting and resting birds but no confirmation of chicks. Volunteers from Audubon and staff from FWC made routine visits to conduct surveys and bird stewarding. Additionally, NRDs made routine visits to ensure that dogs off leashes and persons entering the nesting site were decreased.

Washback Program

The Washback program is designed to respond to post-hatchling sea turtle events in an effort to recover and rehabilitate before further negative impacts can occur. The beaches are broken down into individual zones and organized by volunteer coordinator, a designated zone captain and corresponding volunteers. Zone captains are responsible for contacting the volunteers that are available and providing the equipment needed to perform successful surveys. This program is much different from the sea turtle patrol program in that these volunteers are approved through the St. Johns County personnel department and have no set patrolling schedule as it is based on an as needed basis. FWC still provides the permits in which they are allowed to conduct such surveys. They are also required to attend annual training to effectively implement the approved protocol and to be qualified to handle and transport washbacks. Washback volunteers are invited to a general orientation meeting and required to participate in one mandatory training session on the beach. They are additionally trained on the biological importance of the organic wrack line and natural debris as well as provided information on marine debris and its origin. Their surveys include not only surveying the wrack but to also collect and report marine debris.

Informational meetings and training dates

Mandatory Beach Scenario Trainings - Volunteers completed mock surveys on the beach and trained to process a Washback sea turtle.

- August 14th, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
 - Surfside Beachfront Park, 3070 Coastal Highway.
- August 23rd, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
 - Butler Beachfront Park, 5860 A1A South.
- August 28th, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.
 - South Ponte Vedra Recreation Area, 2993 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd.

Survey Summary

This year's washback season proved to be exciting and well attended with 200 dedicated volunteers both returning and new. Over the course of the season which concludes on November 30th washback volunteers completed 197 surveys recovering 21 live and 10 deceased washbacks from the beaches. The University of Florida Whitney Laboratory Sea Turtle Hospital in Marineland reported a total of 198 washbacks that were recovered from St Johns County beaches and a total of 359 overall were rehabilitated. While conducting surveys volunteers also removed an estimated 1,600 pounds of trash and just over 2,200 cigarette butts. They also recorded picking up other small pieces of small debris like bottle caps (1,840), glass & plastic bottles (260), Styrofoam pieces (301), and food wrappers (191). We are thankful for their time and dedication.

Program Improvements: There are no improvements scheduled for the 2021 season.

References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Coastal Construction Access Permits

SJC Permit Number	DEP Permit #	DEP Exp. Date	Contractor	Construction Address	Type of Construction	Authorized Access Point	Equipment Type	HCP Training Date	Start Date	Exp Date
CA19-001	8040063	4/30/2019	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	6970 A1A South	Replacement of 7 support posts on walkover	Crescent Beach Access	Crane Truck, E35, and dually truck with trailer	11/19/2018	1/10/2019	1/31/19
CA19-002	SJ 1492	7/19/2021	Yelton Construction Co, Inc.	3260 Coastal Hwy	Seawall construction	Surfside Beach Access	Excavator, yellow	1/1/2019	1/21/2019	4/1/19
CA19-003	SJ 1349	3/21/2021	Xtreme Builders, Inc	3121 S PVB	Seawall construction	3125 SPVB	Excavator, skid steer, mini excavator	11/20/2018	1/29/2019	3/29/19
CA19-004	SJ 1445	4/6/2021	Xtreme Builders, Inc	3123 SPVB	Seawall construction	3125 SPVB	Excavator, skid steer, mini excavator	11/20/2018	1/29/2019	3/29/19
CA19-005	SJ 1445	4/6/2012	Xtreme Builders, Inc	3125 SPVB	Seawall construction	3125 SPVB	Excavator, skid steer, mini excavator	11/20/2018	1/29/2019	3/29/19
CA19-006	SJ 1422	NA	Xtreme Builders, Inc	3127 SPVB	Seawall construction	3125 SPVB	Excavator, skid steer, mini excavator	11/20/2018	1/29/2019	3/29/19
CA19-007	SJ 1533 SJ 1308	4/16/2021	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	4412/4418 CHWY	Seawall construction	4412 CHWY	Trackhoe, Backhoe, Skidsteer, Truck Cran	11/19/2018	2/11/2019	4/30/19
CA19-008	SJ 1533 SJ 1308	4/16/2021	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	4412/4418 CHWY	Seawall construction	4412 CHWY	Trackhoe, Backhoe, Skidsteer, Truck Cran	11/19/2018	2/11/2019	4/30/19
CA19-009	SJ 1533 SJ 1308	4/16/2021	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	4412/4418 CHWY	Seawall construction	4412 CHWY	Trackhoe, Backhoe, Skidsteer, Truck Cran	11/19/2018	2/11/2019	4/30/19
CA19-010	SJ 1405	4/10/2021	Yelton Construction Co, Inc.	4100, 4124, 4106, 4092, 4080	Seawall construction	Usina Access Ramp	Excavator, skid steer, mini excavator	1/1/2019	4/3/2019	4/30/19
CA19-011	0295429-002-JC	9/26/2026	Aquatic Plants of Florida	16th Street - Sea Colony	Sea oat planting	A Street, 16th Street	Mules, hand held augers, and carts	3/6/2019	3/19/2019	3/22/19
CA19-012	SJ 1545	NA	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	4388 & 4400 CHWY	Seawall construction	4412 CHWY	Trackhoe, Backhoe, Skidsteer, Truck Cran	11/19/2018	3/12/2019	4/30/19

CA19-013	SJ 1593	2/20/2022	Kollar Bros., Inc.	2923 South Ponte Vedra Blvd	Seawall construction	Exxon and SPVB Rec area	Backhoe, skidsteer	3/14/2019	3/15/2019	4/30/19
CA19-014	SJ 1599	3/8/2022	Kollar Bros., Inc.	3043 South Ponte Vedra Blvd	Seawall construction	Exxon and SPVB Rec area	Backhoe, skidsteer	3/14/2019	3/21/2019	4/30/19
CA19-015	SJ 1445	4/6/2021	Extreme Homebuilders	3125 SPVB	Cleanup of construction materials	3125 SPVB	JCB excavator 131	11/20/2018	4/18/2019	4/30/19
CA19-016	SJ 1607	4/9/2020	Extreme Homebuilders	965 PVB	cleanup of construction materials	965 PVB	Skidsteer	11/20/2018	4/18/2019	4/30/19
CA19-017	SJ 1545 SJ 1533 SJ 1308	N/A	Hayward Construction Group, LLC	4388,4400,4418 ,4412 CHWY	Seawall construction/leveling dirt in front of seawall	Usina Access Ramp	Trackhoe and skidsteer	11/19/2018	4/28/2019	4/30/19
CA19-018	NA	NA	Surv Tech Solutions	Beach Surveys	Beach Surveys	Usina, Surfside, Vilano, St. Augustine Beach accesses	ATV	9/13/2019	9/14/2019	9/22/19
CA19-019	SJ 1551 SJ 1554 SJ 1556	NA	Kevin Worley	925, 929, 939, 941, 1001, 1025, 1029, 1065 - 1085 PV Blvd.	Geotube installation	Micklers	Bulldozer, excavator, trucks, trailers, booster pump, support equipment (ATV)	10/30/2019	11/1/2019	12/31/19
	SJ 1551 SJ 1554 SJ 1556	NA	Fish Tec Inc.		Geotube installation	Micklers	See above	10/30/2019	11/1/2019	12/31/19
CA19-020	SJ 1405	4/10/2019	Yelton Construction Co, Inc.	4100, 10th st., Euclid, NB Avenue	Seawall construction	Usina - per user agreement	Excavator, skid steer	1/1/2019	11/4/2019	2/28/2020
CA19-021	NA	NA	FDEP, Water Resources	DEP R-Monuments R-1 - R-76 and R-157 - R-209	Topographic surveys	Mickler's, ASP, South Beach ramps	ATV/Mules	11/4/2019	11/19/2019	12/6/19
CA19-022	NA	NA	Arc Surveying & Mapping	NA	Beach Surveys	Mickler's, ASP, South Beach ramps	ATV/Mules	12/2/2019	12/3/2019	12/31/19
CA19-023	SJ 1314	3/10/2020	LaConte Marine Construction	2975 SPVB	Seawall construction	2975 SPVB	Excavator	11/19/2019	12/13/2019	1/15/2020

Appendix B: Letter to USFWS regarding Porpoise Point Conservation Zone



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Growth Management Department

December 10, 2019

Mr. Jay Herrington
Field Office Supervisor
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517

Re: Porpoise Point Conservation Zone, St. Johns County

Dear Mr. Herrington:

St. Johns County is experiencing an ongoing loss of habitat at Porpoise Point that makes it increasingly difficult for the County to maintain a Conservation Zone (CZ). Porpoise Point has been and continues to be negatively impacted by numerous events. In 2012, the Army Corps of Engineers removed sand from tidal and sub-tidal habitats along the shore at Porpoise Point in order to re-nourish the beach within the City of St. Augustine Beach. Additionally, Porpoise Point was impacted with a series of major weather events including Hurricane Matthew in 2016, Hurricane Irma in 2017, and Hurricane Dorian in 2019, and is impacted annually with nor'easters all of which has resulted in the total loss of dunes, a reduced amount of beach area and the bulkheading of the private properties. Due to these impacts and altered condition of the beach, the County contends the original rationale for establishing a CZ at Porpoise Point is no longer applicable and is requesting that the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Incidental Take Permit (ITP) be amended to remove the requirement for the CZ at Porpoise Point.

ITP, Section K, HCP and Permit Amendment Criteria, reads, in part:

The Permittee and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agree that modification and amendments to the Permittee's HCP and this Permit may occur through its effective term. Either the Permittee or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may propose modifications and/or amendments to the HCP or this Permit by providing written notice. Absent any objection from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Permittee, and provided such proposed modification or amendment does not fall within the limits of Condition 11.K.2, the proposed modification and/or amendment will be determined as minor and shall become effective upon written approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Permittee.

Condition 11.K.2 provides that only modifications that will not result in adverse effects on the environment that are new or significantly different from those analyzed in connection with the HCP or cause additional take of the covered species will be approved.

As set forth in the HCP, the purpose for the CZ at Porpoise Point was to address potential Anastasia Island Beach Mouse (AIBM) and shorebird nesting habitat (see HCP, Chapter 7, Section 7.2.8). AIBM are present on Anastasia Island but from, “2006 forward no mice have been captured on public lands north of the St. Augustine Inlet, although the mice may persist in very low numbers” (USFWS. 2011. Statewide Programmatic Biological Opinion for Shore Protection Activities along the Coast of Florida). The unfortunate reality is that the AIBM are not present at Porpoise Point as there are no dunes or suitable habitat remaining and tidal events regularly reach the bulkheaded properties making future dune formation remote. As well, as evidenced from the information in the 2011 report cited above, the existence of a population of AIBM north of St. Augustine Inlet that could contribute individuals to naturally repopulate Porpoise Point is not likely.

Further regarding shorebird nesting, the County responds each season to the possibility of shorebird nesting at Porpoise Point by pre-posting any viable location and monitoring for any indications of pre-nesting behavior. If there are indications that shorebirds are selecting Porpoise Point, the posted nesting habitat area is closed throughout the nesting season. This protection includes prohibiting vehicles and pedestrians for a large area of the beach that includes a portion of the beach going from the water’s edge and proceeding toward the CZ. It is the County’s observation that this expansion of a protected area beyond the CZ to accommodate nesting shorebirds is a more protective and effective approach than having the CZ.

Finally, as required by the HCP/ITP, Porpoise Point is surveyed throughout the sea turtle nesting season to protect any sea turtle nests laid in the area. Over the course of the thirteen years that the County has implemented the HCP/ITP, volunteers have documented only six sea turtle nests at Porpoise Point of which none were laid in the CV. Porpoise Point does not have traditional driving lanes such as those of the south beaches, therefore driving occurs on all portions of the beach outside of the CZ. In order to avoid impact to a nest, each nest was treated as an individual nesting event with the installation of several marking stakes and flagging tape around the nest site and then placing traffic safety cones outside and around the originally marked nest site making the site highly visible to passing vehicles and pedestrians. This same effort would continue, as it has in the past, treating each nest as its own event for its protection.

Mr. Jay Herrington
December 10, 2019
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It is the County's position that the request to modify the CZ at Porpoise Point falls within the definition of minor, as it does not cause new or significantly different operations or effects, and does not cause any additional take. St. Johns County is requesting that the HCP/ITP be amended to remove the requirement for the Conservation Zone at Porpoise Point and to continue with the operations described above as they have proved to be an effective protective method to prevent take of a protected species.

With approval of this request, the County will continue to monitor the conditions at Porpoise Point to promptly respond to any condition that may merit future consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thank you for consideration of this request and if you need additional information please contact Jan Brewer at 904/209-0617 or jbrewer@sjcfl.us.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Roberson, Interim Growth Management Director
St. Johns County

Cc: Darrell Locklear, Assistant County Administrator

End of 2020 Annual Compliance Report