



February 10, 2017

Commissioner John Stinson
800 Seminole Road
Atlantic Beach, FL 32233
jstinson@coab.us

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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*Managing fish and wildlife
resources for their long-term
well-being and the benefit
of people.*

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MyFWC.com

RE: Sea Turtle Protection, Atlantic Beach

Dear Commissioner Stinson:

Thank you for your recent inquiry about the City of Atlantic Beach's consideration to post the dates when sea turtles lay their nests on City beaches on your website. It is great that the City is considering promoting education about these threatened and endangered sea turtles; however, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is concerned about the potential for negative unintended consequences for nesting and hatchling sea turtles. There is a variety of reasons for our concerns, but in general sea turtles do best when there is less disturbance on the beach so the adult females can lay their nest and hatchlings can emerge with no interference. Posting specific information about nesting dates and locations could result in more people on the sea turtle nesting beach at night in proximity to hatching sea turtle nests. This could significantly increase the risk of harassment of, or harm to, nesting females, their nests and hatchlings on your beaches, and we strongly recommend against it.

FWC staff supports the right of all citizens to enjoy Florida's natural resources and wildlife in ways that do not result in disturbance on the sea turtle nesting beach. Previous studies and observations have documented that human presence on the beach at night can result in female turtles returning to the water without nesting, abandoning nesting mid-way, or spending less time covering their nests making the eggs and hatchlings vulnerable to predators. Hatchlings may also alter natural behaviors, putting them at risk to predators or disrupting critical emergence behaviors. Thus, there is a risk of harassment or harm (take), even if unintended, whenever there are more people on the nesting beach at night. Take is a violation of state and federal law. The Florida Marine Turtle Protection Act, Florida Statute 379.2431(1) further clarifies the consequences for take of marine turtles, their nests, or hatchlings

(http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0300-0399/0379/Sections/0379.2431.html).

We encourage the City to consider posting general information about the species of sea turtles that nest on your beaches and information on how people can protect sea turtles locally, such as adopting and enforcing a sea turtle lighting ordinance, as Jacksonville Beach and Neptune Beach have done. The City could also provide practical information that would result in real benefits to sea turtles on Atlantic

Beach, such as filling in holes or removing beach furniture, boats and other items at the end of the day to limit entrapment of sea turtles. These and other suggestions for sharing the beach with sea turtles are available on our website at <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/sea-turtles/>. In addition, FWC provides information on programs that are authorized by our agency for citizens to observe marine turtles. We also direct people to captive facilities, where they can view different life stages of sea turtles in a controlled environment safe for the animals and the people.

FWC staff are available to assist if the City decides to develop and implement a lighting ordinance, or if we can assist in identifying the best information to provide to the public about how to protect sea turtles while enjoying Florida beaches. Please contact Dr. Robbin Trindell at (850)922-4330 if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carol A. Knox". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Carol A. Knox, Leader
Imperiled Species Management Section

cc: Dr. Anne Meylan, FWC
Ms. Jennifer Burns, Beaches Sea Turtle Patrol
Mr. Heath Rauschenberger, FWS
Mr. David Godfrey, STC
Mr. Scott Eastman, EE