

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA  
BOARD MEMORANDUM**

**Departmental**

**TO:** Jason E. Brown, County Administrator

**THROUGH:** Richard B. Szpyrka, P.E., Public Works Director

**THROUGH:** Kendra L. Cope, M.S., Coastal Resources Coordinator

**FROM:** Quintin D. Bergman, M.S., Environmental Specialist

**SUBJECT:** UPDATE – Sea Turtle Nesting Season of 2019

**DATE:** June 7, 2019

**REQUEST**

It is requested that the following information be given formal consideration by the Board of County Commissioners during the regularly scheduled meeting on June 18, 2019.

This is an announcement to inform the residents of Indian River County (IRC) about the success of the sea turtle nesting season to date, and when to expect Public Turtle Digs. Additional information relative to the County’s sea turtle Habitat Conservation Plan and annual nesting information can be found on the County website [www.ircgov.com/coastal](http://www.ircgov.com/coastal) and on the County Coastal Division Facebook page: @IRCcoastal.

**DESCRIPTION AND CONDITIONS**

**Background Information** - Indian River County is home to three species of nesting sea turtles (Leatherback, Loggerhead, and Green). Sea turtles are long-lived species and take up to 20-25 years to become mature adults and can live up to 100 years or more. Long-term monitoring is vital to the understanding of their populations and human impacts. In 2004, the County implemented a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in order to establish a framework for sea turtle conservation. Goals are achieved through daily nesting surveys and beach monitoring, implementing programs to reduce human and predator impacts, and local community education and involvement.

**Nest Monitoring** - 2019 started the 15<sup>th</sup> year of county-wide monitoring since the HCP was implemented. Data collected over these years not only informs County staff of annual nesting numbers but can be used to identify long-term and emerging trends. Annually, sea turtle nesting season in IRC occurs between March 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>. This year, the County received its first loggerhead nests on April 20<sup>th</sup> followed by a leatherback nest on April 21<sup>st</sup> and the first green on May 17<sup>th</sup>, respectively.

**The 2019 sea turtle nesting activity** as of 06/07/19:

2,005	Loggerhead nests
94	Green nests
22	Leatherback nests

**Local Conservation Efforts** - The County and Municipality lighting ordinances also begin March 1<sup>st</sup> and end October 31<sup>st</sup> in order to prevent adult and hatchling disorientation. In summary these ordinances direct home and business owners to either turn off their lights or make sure they are not visible from anywhere on the beach after 9pm. Multiple lighting surveys are conducted throughout the nesting season along all beaches in the County. As guided under the HCP, County staff not only act as a resource for surveys in unincorporated areas, but work cooperatively with municipal partners to identify and resolve lighting problems. Staff also responds to sick, injured and dead sea turtles, as requested by FWC, and encourages members of the community to help report stranded turtles by calling 1-888-404-3922. Data collected from these turtle strandings help inform local and state managers about human and predator impacts.

**Community Involvement** - Community members can be involved in local conservation efforts by attending permitted educational programs in the area.

- Turtle Walks - night-time educational guided tours to view a nesting loggerhead, are led by many organizations in the area. FWC's website <http://myfwc.com/education/wildlife/sea-turtle/where-to-view/#watch> identifies all of the guided walk locations. Sign-ups begin in May and Turtle Walks are led during June and July.
- Turtle Digs - offer the public an opportunity to witness how sea turtle reproductive success is evaluated for County turtle nests. These events occur sporadically in July and August, in partnership with Coastal Connections, Inc., at the Sexton Plaza beach access. Event dates can be found on the coastal Facebook page (@IRCcoastal), and the Coastal Connections website, following a hatching event. These events are special to IRC, as they are free and Vero Beach is one of the only locations in Florida to host these permitted activities.
- On occasion some live strandings that are sent to rehab centers recover their health and are returned to the wild. These opportunities to view a live sea turtle release are also very sporadic and will be announced just as Turtle Digs through the coastal division Facebook page and Coastal Connections website. All of these programs are possible because of many dedicated volunteers who collectively contribute more than 1,200 hours a summer.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The recommendation of staff is to include the 2019 Sea Turtle Nesting Season Update presentation on the Government TV channel.

### **APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR: June 18, 2019**