

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of County Commissioners

THROUGH: John A. Titkanich, Jr., County Administrator
Kylie Yanchula, Natural Resources Director
Quintin Bergman, Coastal Resource Manager

FROM: Jessica Stuczynski, Sea Turtle Environmental Specialist

SUBJECT: Authorization of 5-Year Agreement with USDA-APHIS-WS (2025-2029 Nesting Seasons)

DATE: August 26, 2024

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION

On December 1, 2004, Indian River County (IRC) received an Incidental Take Permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which required IRC to implement a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP): A Plan for the Protection of Sea Turtles on the Eroding Beaches of Indian River County, Florida. The intent of the HCP is to facilitate State and Federal recovery efforts for sea turtles by improving the productivity of the County's beaches as nesting habitat. This has been accomplished through the establishment of a Sea Turtle Conservation Program that aims to mitigate take of sea turtles through countywide nest monitoring, maintaining a light management program and a predator control program, in addition to conducting education and outreach efforts.

Occasionally, sea turtle nests are eaten or destroyed by other animals. In the early 2000's, when the HCP was first established, raccoons were the most prevalent predator on sea turtle nests taking 5%-10% of the nests in a given area. The Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (ACNWR), the only Refuge established for the protection of sea turtles, managed raccoon predators through their Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Since that management action, nest predation has remained low, >1% to 3% of nests per season.

In recent years, coyotes have become the predominant predator of sea turtle nests within IRC with an average of 139 sea turtle nests impacted by coyotes each season since 2021. Though a significant number, this average is likely an underestimation of total coyote predation within the County, as detection by surveyors is complicated in IRC's dynamic coastal environment. As of August 22, 2024, 73 sea turtle nests have been predated by coyotes in IRC this nesting season.

The HCP states that the County will implement a professionally managed predator control program to increase hatchling productivity on non-federal lands within the ACNWR and on other publicly and privately held lands where predation is identified as a substantial problem. Thus, IRC contracted with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) during the 2022 and 2023 nesting seasons to reduce predation pressure on sea turtle nests located around the ACNWR and Treasure Shores Beach Park. Previous efforts were deemed successful, increasing overall hatchling production following predator removal.

It is anticipated that predation pressure will continue in the coming years, and County staff would like to take a proactive approach to predator management by implementing a 5-year agreement with USDA-APHIS-WS. This would ensure IRC is compliant with the HCP and allow the County to implement predator

removal efforts before a large loss in sea turtle nests is observed. A USDA Wildlife Specialist has outlined the recommended removal techniques in the Work Plan.

The annual not-to-exceed cost estimate for 160-hours of work performed each fiscal year by a Wildlife Specialist is outlined in the table below; however, the County will only be billed for actual work performed (i.e., billing will be based on level of predation pressure from year-to-year). The total not to exceed cost for the 5-year agreement is \$79,446.

Fiscal Year	Total Cost NTE
10/01/2024 – 09/30/2025	\$14,678
10/01/2025 – 09/30/2026	\$15,262
10/01/2026 – 09/30/2027	\$15,867
10/01/2027 – 09/30/2028	\$16,489
10/01/2028 – 09/30/2029	\$17,150
5-Year Agreement Total	\$79,446

FUNDING

Funding for Wildlife Services is budgeted and available in the Coastal Engineering Fund/Other Professional Services (HCP) Account 12814472-033190-99007.

Account Name	Account No.	Amount
Coastal Engineering Fund/Other Professional Services HCP	12814472-033190-99007	\$79,446

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) authorize this Cooperative Services Agreement between Indian River County and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) in the not to exceed amount of \$79,446. Staff also recommends that the BCC authorize the Chairman to execute the attached agreement.

ATTACHMENT

- Indian River Cnty-CSA-FY25-FY29

APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR: September 10, 2024