

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA  
BOARD MEMORANDUM**

**PUBLIC NOTICE  
(INFORMATIONAL)**

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

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

**THROUGH:** James D. Gray, Jr., Coastal Engineer

**FROM:** Kendra L. Cope, M.S., Environmental Specialist

**SUBJECT:** **Everything you should know about sea turtle nesting season**

**DATE:** March 22, 2017

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**REQUEST**

It is requested that the following information be given formal consideration by the Board of County Commissioners during the regularly scheduled meeting on April 4, 2017.

This is an announcement to inform the residents of Indian River County (IRC) about the beginning of sea turtle nesting season, how to be involved in local conservation efforts, and a general timeline for sea turtle related activities. 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: @IRC Coastal.

**DESCRIPTION**

**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** - 2017 started the 13<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>. As of March 22<sup>nd</sup> zero nests have been laid in IRC, most likely due to the recent cold weather storm that passed through leatherback migration and reproduction habitats. These are always the first species to nest on the County's beaches. Estimated average nesting start dates for each the three species are as follows:

## Everything you should know about sea turtle nesting season

- Leatherback – March
- Loggerhead – April
- Green – May

**Local Conservation Efforts** - The County and Municipality lighting ordinances also begin March 1<sup>st</sup> and end October 31<sup>st</sup>. 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 acts as a resource for surveys in unincorporated areas but is working cooperatively with its municipal partners to identify and resolve lighting problems. Enforcement of the lighting ordinances may prevent adult and hatchling disorientations on the beach. 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 - offers the public an opportunity to witness how sea turtle reproductive success is evaluated in marked nests. These events occur sporadically in July and August, at Sexton Plaza beach access, 3 days after a nest hatches. Event dates can be found on the coastal Facebook page (@IRCcoastal), the local chamber of commerce, and other community calendars. These events are special to IRC, as they are free and is one of the only location in Florida to host these permitted activities.
- Lastly, on occasion some of the live strandings that were sent to rehab centers are released back into the wild. These opportunities to view a live sea turtle are also very sporadic and will be announced just as Turtle Digs through the coastal division Facebook page, local chamber of commerce, and other community calendars. All of these program are possible because of many dedicated volunteers who collectively contribute more than 1,200 hours a summer.

**APPROVED AGENDA ITEM FOR: APRIL 4, 2017**