

SECTION 3 - STRANDING AND SALVAGE ACTIVITIES

Summary

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct stranding and salvage activities**. These personnel are also authorized to:

- **transport or transfer live turtles, carcasses, or preserved material within Florida**

This activity does not authorize personnel to conduct the following activities unless specifically stated on their permit:

- **conduct necropsies**
- **hold turtles for rehabilitation**
- **transport or transfer live turtles, carcasses, or preserved material into or out of Florida (this activity requires a specific consent permit from FWC)**

Activity Description

This activity typically involves the collection of information on turtles that are found dead or debilitated. All permit holders participating in this program are required to complete a Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) stranding report for each dead or debilitated turtle encountered. Completed STSSN forms should be faxed within 48 hours to the FWC Tequesta Field Office at (561) 743-6228. You do not need to put a cover sheet on the report, it will be routed correctly without a cover sheet. The fax machine will answer 24 hours a day, if you get a busy signal, please try back in a few minutes. If a fax machine is not available or practical, summary information should be reported within 48 hours by phone to FWC marine turtle stranding staff at Tequesta (561) 575-5407 or St. Petersburg (727) 896-8626. To avoid any long distance phone charges, you may also page stranding staff at 1-800-241-4653, then enter pager number 274-4867 and then enter your phone number **including area code**. The pager is monitored 7 days/week 8 am-8 pm. Someone will return your page and take the stranding information. FWC is required to report all strandings on a weekly basis to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Additionally, timely notification of marine turtle strandings is essential to addressing mortality factors. In order to meet these requirements, which are very important for the conservation of marine turtles, you must notify us each time you document a stranded marine turtle. You must also mail the original of the completed STSSN form within one week to the FWC Tequesta Field Office at 19100 SE Federal Highway, Tequesta, Florida 33469. FWC stranding staff will provide all the blank STSSN reporting forms. Please do not make your own copies of blank forms.

Conducting stranding and salvage activities may also involve the collection of information on turtles that have been impacted by a human-related activity or situation but not necessarily killed or debilitated. A STSSN reporting form should be completed anytime a turtle is captured or trapped even if the turtle is released unharmed (the only exceptions occur when these captures or entrapments are already reported to FWC through other reporting forms or reporting requirements). A STSSN reporting form should be used to document any hazards encountered by nesting turtles on the beach (e.g., trapped under boardwalk, trapped under boat, trapped in rocks, ran into beach furniture, fell off seawall, wandered into a nearby road, wandered into road and got hit by car, became trapped behind the dune, etc.). A STSSN reporting form should be

completed for all post-hatchling wash-ins (turtles that have left the beach and then stranded; they are generally a bit larger than newly-emergent hatchlings, and may have algae, barnacle, or other epizoa present).

The efforts of the Florida STSSN are critical to the FWC conservation and recovery program for marine turtles. To maintain consistency and data quality, STSSN activities should only be conducted by highly experienced personnel with explicit training from FWC. All personnel conducting STSSN activities are to follow instructions and guidelines circulated by FWC in periodic STSSN updates. Please note carefully the following additional permit requirements:

1. A photograph is the single-most important piece of information you can generate from a stranding. Submit at least three photographs of each stranded turtle when you mail the original copy of the stranding report to FWC stranding staff in Tequesta. Take one close-up photograph of the turtle's head, one photograph of the dorsal surface of the turtle, and one photograph of the ventral surface of the turtle. If developing the photographs will take more than one week, then mail the original copy of the stranding report without the photographs and note on the stranding report that photographs will follow. When you have the photographs developed, please label them with your name, date of stranding, turtle number-by-day, and mail them to the FWC stranding staff in Tequesta. Polaroid cameras are available from the FWC stranding staff if you do not have a camera for photographing stranded marine turtles.
2. Do not dispose of any turtle carcasses that have tags or tag scars until someone with the FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg is notified.
3. Do not dispose of any hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, or leatherback carcasses until someone with the FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg is notified.
4. Do not dispose of any turtle carcass that has not been positively identified to species (classified as probable or unsure) until someone with the FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg is notified.
5. If entangling materials are found on a turtle, take photographs of the turtle before the entangling materials are removed and take extra photographs of the entangling material, especially of any hooks or types of identification marks. Do not dispose of any entangling materials without taking proper photographs.
6. Do not dispose of any fresh (no smell) carcasses without notifying the FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg. Attempts will be made to save as many of these as possible for necropsy.
7. Include a copy of a local map with each stranding report, showing the exact location of the stranding whenever the descriptive location of the stranding does not reference a major map feature (e.g., causeway, inlet, cape, point, etc.). Clearly indicate whether or not the stranding was found in or along offshore waters (Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico) or in or along inshore waters (passes, inlets, sounds, bays, lagoons, rivers, harbors, bays).

COMPLETING THE STSSN DATA REPORT SHEET

The following information is provided to assist with the proper completion of the STSSN reporting form (see copy of form in Appendix A-1). Permit holders conducting stranding and salvage activities are to be familiar with the following information and are to complete forms in an appropriate manner.

Observer's Name/Address/Phone: This is the person who handled and documented the turtle in the field. It is not the person who reported the turtle to you. Please include your full name with middle initial if you have one. Records are partially indexed by observer initials. We may need to contact you for clarification of the reported data; please give us an address and phone number where we can reach you.

Stranding Date: This is the date the stranded turtle was first reported or encountered by the initial observer. If you did not investigate until a later date, please make that known in the box at the bottom of the stranding form. The turtle number by day is used to keep track of more than one turtle (regardless of species) investigated on a single day by the same stranding participant. Your first turtle of the day is 01, second of the same day is 02, third of the same day is 03, etc.

Species: If you code a turtle as "unidentified", contact FWC turtle staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg by telephone before you dispose of the carcass. If you are unable to contact FWC before you dispose of an "unidentified" turtle, please take several photographs from different angles. If the skull is present, please save it to be used for identification.

Location: Indicate whether or not the turtle was found along a shoreline of, or floating in, offshore waters (Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico) or was found along a shoreline of, or floating in, inshore waters (passes, inlets, sounds, bays, lagoons, rivers, harbors, bayous). When describing the location, be as specific as possible and use a known reference point. Local names or landmarks not found on nautical charts do not help us pinpoint a location. Good reference points are inlets, county lines, state boundaries, cape points, major roads that intersect the beach, etc. An example of a good, descriptive location is: "2.5 miles south of the Ft. Pierce Inlet on the ocean beach." The stranding location is one of the most important data items on the form. If you know that the location is difficult to describe and will be difficult for us to transfer to a nautical chart it will be very helpful if you include a copy of a map with the stranding location indicated. If the turtle was found floating, please indicate so. If you have access to current nautical charts and you know exactly how to plot and read positions, you may include the latitude and longitude of the stranded turtle. Positions are coded to the nearest tenth of a degree and recorded in the following format (e.g., 28 °16.8'N and 80 °36.3'W). LORAN positions can be converted, but it is better to submit a latitude and longitude. If you use a GPS unit to determine the latitude and longitude of a stranding please indicate this. In most cases, you will leave the latitude and longitude blank.

Condition of Turtle: If the turtle seems intermediate between two stages of decomposition, pick the one that fits best. If it smells bad at all, it is not fresh. If you have a fresh dead turtle (that does not smell bad), please contact FWC stranding staff at Tequesta or St. Petersburg as soon as possible.

Final Disposition of Turtle: These codes refer to what you did with the stranded turtle. To avoid duplicate reporting, you should never leave a turtle unpainted on the beach. At the very least, please paint the turtle and move it out of reach of the tide. The preferred method is to paint and then bury the turtle either on the beach or off the beach. During the nesting season you should dig only by hand or locate a spot off the nesting beach; if you dig by any method other than hand, you may dig into and destroy a nest. Codes 1-4 refer to dead turtles only. Codes 6 and 7 are for live animals. If you use code 6 (alive, released) please say where and when you released it in the box at the bottom of the reporting form. If you use code 7 (alive, taken to holding facility) please give the name and location of the facility the turtle was taken to at the bottom of the reporting form. Remember, only permitted rehabilitation facilities are allowed to receive injured turtles. If a turtle was found floating and was unable to be recovered, use code 8 (left floating). If none of the disposition codes fit the event you are reporting, please explain what you did with the animal in the box at the bottom of the reporting form. Paint all dead turtles unless you are salvaging the carcass for FWC.

Sex: This will most often be undetermined, as immature marine turtles cannot be sexed externally. Adult male turtles have a tail that extends well beyond the carapace. Generally, the sex of loggerheads and green turtles under 98 cm curved carapace length will be considered undetermined if a long tail is not present. If you determine the sex to be male, give a measurement for the length of the tail extending beyond the posterior edge of the carapace in the adjacent blank.

Tags: Check the turtle for tags or indications of lost tags. All flippers should be thoroughly checked and the carapace should be checked as well. If you encounter a stranded turtle with a tag, contact FWC turtle staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg by telephone before you dispose of the animal. Researchers depend heavily on these rare events to learn important things about turtles. There may be something specific that needs to be done with the carcass. We may want to collect skeletal parts or the whole animal. If you are instructed by FWC to dispose of the carcass, always remove the tags before you leave the site and bury the turtle. List the tag number(s) and location (e.g., left front flipper). Enclose the tags in a padded envelope and submit them, along with the stranding report, to the state coordinator. All turtles with flipper tags or with tag scars should be scanned for PIT (internal) tags. If necessary, please contact FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg to arrange for a PIT tag scan. Because all Kemp's ridley carcasses should be scanned for PIT and coded wire (also internal) tags and checked for the presence of living tags, all efforts should be made to transfer those carcasses to FWC stranding staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg.

Carapace Measurements: Enter the measurement in the correct slot (straight or curved, length or width). Straight-line measurements are taken only with calipers. If you do not have calipers, please do not report straight-line measurements. Do not take straight-line measurements with a flexible tape measure. If you take straight measurements, please take curved measurements, as well. Be sure to circle the units you used as centimeters (cm) or inches (in). Methods of obtaining standard carapace measurements are depicted on the stranding form. Please indicate if your measurements are estimates.

Remarks: The box at the bottom of the page is a space for your notes. The more information you give us, the easier it will be for us to code the record. Use the back of the data sheet to continue your remarks. Always note anything unusual about a stranding event (some of these anomalies are listed on the data sheet). We will code these notes onto each turtle's record. Use the diagrams on the

STSSN form to indicate flipper damage, carapace wounds, tag locations, or anything else you want us to know about the turtle. Please do not leave this section blank. If there are no anomalies (peculiarities), please say so. If the turtle was caught in any type of gear, please indicate so, for example: “This turtle was caught hook and line.” or “This turtle was entangled in a crab trap line that was (or was not) attached to a crab trap.”

LIVE TURTLE TRANSPORT

If you need to transport a sick or injured marine turtle, it must be shaded and otherwise protected from extremes of heat and cold (not above 90°F and not below 50°F). If a turtle is transported at temperatures greater than or equal to 75°F, it should be cooled by keeping a wet towel on the carapace and by periodically pouring water over the head. Water and wet towels should not be used when transporting turtles at temperatures less than 75°F or at any time they are exposed to an air-conditioned environment. The only exception is that any open wounds should be kept moist with clean freshwater. At temperatures less than 75°F, turtles may be kept from drying out during transport by applying a thin layer of petroleum jelly (e.g., Vaseline®) to the carapace and all the soft tissues (except the eyes and any open wounds). The use of petroleum jelly is recommended only for small turtles (juveniles).

FWC stranding staff will often suggest the use of towels, water, or petroleum jelly when making transportation arrangements for each live turtle. The table below provides guidance in determining which treatment is most appropriate for any live turtle needing transport.

Ambient Air Temperature around Turtle	Duration of Transport (hours)	Barnacles or Other Epibiota present on carapace	Turtle Class Size	Recommended Treatment
75°F (or warmer)	Any	--	Any size	Wet towel or water mist
74°F (or cooler)	≤2 hours	--	Any size	Dry towel
74°F (or cooler)	≥2 hours	Carapace clear	Juvenile	Petroleum jelly
74°F (or cooler)	≥2 hours	Carapace clear	Sub-adult/Adult	Dry towel
74°F (or cooler)	≥2 hours	Large amounts of epibiota present	Any size	Dry towel

Any containers housing turtles during transport are to be padded and may not contain any material that could be accidentally ingested. Hatchlings and post-hatchlings should be transported in a container with moist sand; they should not be transported in water. The containers should be secured during transport such that they do not slide around or tip over.

CONDUCTING NECROPSIES

Summary

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct necropsies**. These personnel are also authorized to:

- **transport or transfer carcasses or preserved material within Florida**

Personnel are not authorized to conduct the following activities unless specifically stated on their permit:

- **conduct stranding and salvage activities**
- **hold turtles for rehabilitation**
- **transport or transfer carcasses or preserved material into or out of Florida (this activity requires a specific consent permit from FWC)**

Activity Description

Minimally, necropsy procedures are to follow the techniques set forth in the "Sea Turtle Necropsy Manual" by Richard E. Wolke and Anita George, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFC-24 (1981). The listing of necropsy as an activity on a permit does not imply that all listed personnel can conduct this activity. Only personnel with thorough training and demonstrated expertise in this area may conduct necropsies. Personnel who are authorized to conduct necropsies on stranded turtles (that have not been held in a rehabilitation facility) must contact FWC turtle staff in Tequesta or St. Petersburg before conducting a necropsy.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A FWC necropsy report is to be completed for each marine turtle necropsied and the original submitted to FWC in Tequesta (see Appendix A-4 for a copy of the necropsy form).

TED TURTLES

Each year the National Marine Fisheries Service conducts turtle excluder device (TED) certification trials off of Panama City Beach, Florida. The turtles used in these tests are juvenile loggerheads that were collected from Florida's nesting beaches as hatchlings and raised for approximately two years specifically for the TED certification trials. Upon completion of the annual trials, the turtles are released. Some of the turtles released swim into the nearshore waters and are often observed by the public. FWC is interested in knowing about sightings of these turtles. Should you receive calls regarding small turtles that appear to be "friendly" toward people, we ask that you collect as much information as possible including flipper tag number(s), date and location of sighting, and the general behavior of the animal. Please report sightings in writing to the Imperiled Species Management Section office in Tequesta.