

SECTION 4 – HOLDING MARINE TURTLES IN CAPTIVITY

SUMMARY

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to:

- **hold loggerheads for educational display**
- **hold non-releasable turtles**
- **hold turtles for rehabilitation**
- **hold turtles for research**

If any of the above activities are listed on the permit, personnel are also authorized to:

- **transfer or transport turtles within Florida after consultation with FWC**
- **conduct necropsies on turtles that die at the holding facility**
- **release turtles after consultation with FWC**

Permit holders are not authorized to conduct the following captive maintenance activities unless these activities are specifically listed on the permit:

- **tag turtles**
- **transfer or transport turtles into or out of Florida**
- **hold turtles for any reason other than that specifically stated on the permit (e.g., permit holders authorized only to hold turtle for rehabilitation may not conduct research on those turtles)**

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The following care and maintenance standards provide minimum requirements for humane care and maintenance of all endangered and threatened species of marine turtles held in captivity under the permitting authority of the FWC. The permit holder shall maintain these standards as a requirement of continued authorization. Any inability to attain or maintain these standards shall be reported to the FWC immediately so an appropriate and a timely resolution of the problem can be made. Failure to notify the FWC or repeated inability to follow these standards, without specific exceptions granted in writing by the FWC, is considered a violation of the Marine Turtle Permit. All wildlife possessed under the authority of the Marine Turtle Permit shall remain the property of the State of Florida and under the primary jurisdiction of FWC.

HOLDING TURTLES FOR EDUCATION

Depending upon the display capabilities of a facility and proper justification, up to three loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) may be held solely for educational purposes by a facility that is primarily educational in nature, that is open to the general public at least five days per week, and that receives no less than an average of 100 visitors per week. The turtles shall be on display and the display is to be accompanied by interpretive signage that includes the following information: species

identification, protection status under the Endangered Species Act, general life history, and current conservation issues (e.g., ingestion of debris, ocean dumping, loss of nesting beaches, loss of developmental habitats and adult foraging grounds, beach lighting, incidental capture, boat strikes, etc.).

Wild turtles (bycaught, stranded, or congenitally deformed) that have been rehabilitated, but which have permanently handicapping injuries or defects that preclude their potential survival in the wild, should be used whenever possible for educational display, *in lieu* of healthy, releasable marine turtles.

If loggerheads are obtained as hatchlings, they shall be held until they reach a straight carapace length of at least 45 centimeters or a curved carapace length of at least 50 centimeters (measured from the nuchal notch to the posterior marginal tip). If a holding facility cannot maintain turtles until they reach this size, prior arrangements must be made with another facility to continue to hold the turtles until they reach the specified size. It is the responsibility of the permit holder who originally held the hatchlings to ensure that an appropriate facility will hold the turtles until they reach the minimum size for release. If loggerheads held for educational display are to be released, the release location must be approved in advance by the FWC.

Note that federal law (CFR 17.21(c)(3)) does not allow for any marine turtle listed as endangered to be held solely for educational display (in Florida this includes green turtles, leatherbacks, hawksbills, and Kemp's ridleys).

Any educational turtle that is injured or dies in captivity must be reported to FWC immediately. Educational turtles that die in captivity must be necropsied fresh (not frozen) to determine the cause of death. For additional information on conducting necropsies please refer to the necropsy requirements on page 4-8.

HOLDING NON-RELEASABLE TURTLES

Some animals sustain injuries that preclude their ability to survive in the wild. One example of this would be permanent blindness. Each individual must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The evaluation must take into account the condition of the individual at the time of stranding, including whether or not certain injuries were already healed and appear unrelated to the current stranding event.

There are also animals in captivity whose genetic identity does not match that of the wild populations found in Florida or whose genetic origin is unknown. These are generally animals that were brought into Florida from other countries many years ago for research purposes or animals that have been transferred from an out-of-state facility that originally obtained the animal from another region of the world. Because these animals come from a different genetic stock(s), they may not be released into Florida waters.

Any non-releasable turtle that is injured or dies in captivity must be reported to FWC immediately. Non-releasable turtles that die in captivity must be necropsied fresh (not frozen) to determine the

cause of death. For additional information on conducting necropsies please refer to the necropsy requirements on page 4-8.

HOLDING TURTLES FOR REHABILITATION

A facility whose permit authorizes them to hold marine turtles for rehabilitation may receive any marine turtle that is sick or injured for treatment or rehabilitation. Upon receiving a sick or injured marine turtle, the attending veterinarian shall examine the turtle within 24 hours. If this is not possible, immediate arrangements shall be made with the FWC to move the turtle to another facility. Facilities must notify the FWC within four days of receiving a turtle for rehabilitation (even if the turtle dies). Also, a short assessment of the progress of each turtle undergoing rehabilitation is to accompany the holding facility quarterly report for every quarter that turtle is kept. Guidelines for releasing rehabilitated turtles are on page 4-6.

Turtles held for rehabilitation should be isolated from other turtles whenever possible. The water from tanks used for rehabilitation may not flow into tanks holding other marine turtles unless it is appropriately treated (e.g., chlorination, ozonation, etc.). Isolation of rehabilitating turtles is vital to prevent the spread of diseases.

Turtles with fibropapillomatosis (FP) must be isolated from turtles that are not known to have the disease. The high incidence of FP in green turtles in Florida waters is of special concern. Research is in progress but the cause of this disease remains undetermined. These growths are highly vascular when large and appear to be extremely sensitive due to the presence of nerve bundles, especially around the eyes. Only the most experienced veterinary personnel should be treating these individuals.

Any rehabilitating turtle that dies in captivity must be necropsied as soon as possible to determine the cause of death. For additional information on conducting necropsies please refer to the necropsy requirements on page 4-8.

HOLDING TURTLES FOR RESEARCH

An investigator may be authorized to hold turtles for scientific research. This authorization is granted only after a research proposal has been submitted by the investigator and approved by FWC. Unless a specific exception is granted because of research conditions, anyone holding turtles for scientific research shall follow all the guidelines for holding turtles (i.e., general tank size and water quality standards must be adhered to). Additional requirements for holding research turtles may be imposed, depending on the nature of the research.

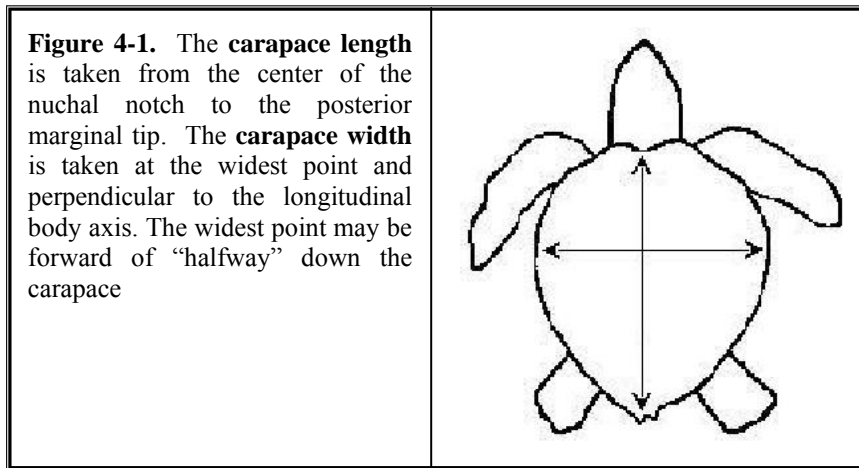
Research that could result in the death of an endangered marine turtle (all species except loggerheads) requires a federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) permit (in addition to the FWC permit). A USFWS permit is also required for research utilizing any endangered marine turtle (all species except loggerheads) that will be held for more than 45 consecutive days.

Any turtle that is injured or dies while being held for research purposes must be reported to FWC immediately. Research turtles that die must be necropsied fresh (not frozen) to determine the cause of death. For additional information on conducting necropsies, please refer to the necropsy requirements on page 4-8.

HOLDING TANK REQUIREMENTS

Tank Size:

Holding tank sizes for turtles shall be based upon the size of the largest specimen in the tank as described below. Use straight carapace measurements to determine the appropriate tank size (Figure 4-1).



1. Hatchlings and Post-hatchlings (up to 10 centimeters straight carapace length) – for one hatchling, a tank with a surface area of at least five times the shell length, by two times the shell width of the turtle plus minimum water depth of one foot. For each additional hatchling or post-hatchling, increase the original surface area by 25%.
2. Turtles up to 50 centimeters straight carapace length – for one turtle, a tank with a surface area of at least seven times the shell length, by two times the shell width of the turtle plus a minimum water depth of two and a half feet. For each additional turtle, increase the original surface area by 50%.
3. Turtles up to 65 centimeters straight carapace length – for one turtle, a tank with a surface area of at least seven times the shell length, by two times the shell width of the turtle plus a minimum water depth of three feet. For each additional turtle, increase the original surface area by 50%.
4. Turtles with a curved straight length greater than 65 centimeters – for one turtle, a tank with a surface area of at least nine times the shell length, by two times the shell width of the turtle plus a minimum water depth of four feet. For each additional turtle, increase the original surface area by 100%.

- TIP #1: 3 foot diameter tank = 7 square feet of surface area
 6 foot diameter tank = 28 square feet of surface area
 9 foot diameter tank = 64 square feet of surface area
 12 foot diameter tank = 113 square feet of surface area
- TIP #2: 10 cm straight carapace length needs a tank with ≥ 1 square foot of surface area
 45 cm straight carapace length needs a tank with ≥ 25 square feet of surface area
 50 cm straight carapace length needs a tank with ≥ 31 square feet of surface area
 65 cm straight carapace length needs a tank with ≥ 51 square feet of surface area
 90 cm straight carapace length needs a tank with ≥ 123 square feet of surface area

NOTE: Turtles housed together must be prevented from injuring each other.

Exceptions:

1. Sick and/or injured turtles may be held in smaller isolation tanks to facilitate medical treatment. Any turtles held for this purpose must be protected from desiccation and moved to an appropriate tank as soon as health allows.
2. Tanks holding mobility-impaired turtles shall meet the standard size requirements, unless it can be demonstrated that the tank is detrimental to the health or welfare of the animal. In such cases, written documentation by a veterinarian confirming the need for such exemption shall be maintained by the permit holder and made available upon request by FWC.
3. If necessary, healthy turtles may be held in tanks with dimensions less than those required for no more than one week every three months or as approved after consultation with FWC. Those tanks must be large enough to allow complete submergence and unimpeded turning.

Tank Condition:

1. The inside surfaces of holding tanks must be free of toxic substances such as lead or copper paints.
2. Holding tanks shall not contain any non-food items that could be ingested by a turtle. Turtles will attempt to eat just about anything. Be sure that nothing except intended food is put into or falls into a turtle tank; this includes material that could be either ingested immediately or broken apart and ingested.
3. Holding tanks shall not contain entangling materials. If there are rocks, ledges, or other structures in the tank, position them such that a turtle cannot become tightly wedged or trapped underwater.
4. The drains and intake pipes of holding tanks shall be constructed or securely shielded such that a turtle cannot become trapped and be held underwater by them.
5. All the tanks in which marine turtles are housed shall have enough lighting (sunlight and/or artificial lighting) to allow for easy viewing of the animals in all areas of the tank. The

photoperiod of captive marine turtles shall be similar to a natural photoperiod. Tanks may not be artificially illuminated for more than sixteen hours per twenty-four hour period.

WATER QUALITY AND FEEDING STANDARDS

Water Quality/Quantity:

1. The salinity shall be maintained between 20 ppt and 35 ppt. If necessary, marine turtles may be maintained in less saline water for up to 24 hours per week. Turtles undergoing medical treatment may be kept at salinity's above or below this range as prescribed by the attending veterinarian.
2. Water pH shall be maintained between 7.5 and 8.5.
3. Water temperatures shall be maintained between 20°C and 30°C (68°F - 86°F). The use of shades on outdoor tanks will help prevent tank water temperatures from becoming too warm. At facilities where tank water temperatures drop below 20°C (68°F), heating units shall be utilized to maintain acceptable temperatures.
4. If chlorine (or bromine) is used to treat the water, free chlorine levels should be maintained no higher than 1.0 PPM and no lower than 0.5 PPM (depending on the species and its sensitivity to chlorine).
5. Coliform bacteria (MPN) must not exceed 1000/100ml of water, according to Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) regulation 9 CFR 3.106(b). FWC may, at any time, request a coliform count from a facility holding marine turtles. If steps are taken to prevent the conditions in which coliform bacteria proliferate, and there are no chronic health problems as determined by FWC, then a facility may be exempted from routine coliform tests. The aforementioned steps include adequate filtration (removing suspended material and larger pieces of feces and leftover food) and the use of an appropriate sanitizing chemical such as chlorine, or a high turnover rate with fresh, uncontaminated seawater. If acceptable coliform levels [as identified above] are exceeded, steps must be taken to reduce levels per the APHIS recommendations for sterilization of marine mammal pool waters¹.
6. Unless a turtle is being treated with a substance that inadvertently reduces clarity (e.g., the use of mineral oil as part of medical treatment) the water shall be clear enough to allow viewing of marine turtles in any part of the tank.
7. No chemical may be used to treat water in a tank housing marine turtles if the chemical is not safely ingestible by the animals at the dilution required for effective treatment.
8. Any facility housing marine turtles shall have the ability to provide adequate water quantity under normal and emergency conditions. In an emergency, marine turtles may be kept out of water for a maximum of four hours per week (longer periods are acceptable when directed by the veterinarian for health reasons). During this time, the animal shall be kept in a temperature

¹ Spotte, Stephen. 1991. *Sterilization of Marine Mammal Pool Waters: Theoretical and Health Concerns*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Technical Bulletin No. 1797.

controlled environment to ensure that its core temperature is not chilled or heated. It should also be protected from drying out and physical damage. Dry-docking turtles should occur only very rarely, if ever. If marine turtle tanks are regularly drained and cleaned, adequate back up holding tanks must be available to house the turtles during this time.

9. Water disposal shall be in accordance with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations.

Feeding:

1. Food shall be provided in an unspoiled and uncontaminated condition. Food should either be fresh, flash frozen and glazed, or frozen in some other manner that ensures the quality of the food. Any frozen food is to be completely thawed in cool water or in air in refrigerated coolers prior to feeding and used entirely or discarded. Frozen food that has been thawed shall be used within 24 hours after thawing. Under no circumstances may food be refrozen. If the quality of the food is questionable, it shall not be used for marine turtle feeding. Reference the APHIS marine mammal food handling guidelines for further information².
2. Food shall be of a type and quantity that meets the nutritional requirements for the particular species. Reasonable efforts shall be made by the holding facility to develop proper diets for marine turtles. It is the responsibility of the holding facility to ensure and justify the adequacy of its feeding regimen.
3. Hand feeding of turtles that will eventually be released is prohibited except when absolutely necessary for rehabilitation. In the latter case, the turtle should be allowed to feed on its own as soon as possible.
4. Whenever possible, release candidates should be fed live food prior to release to observe foraging behavior.

VETERINARY CARE

All facilities housing marine turtles must have the assistance of a licensed veterinarian trained and experienced in herpetological medicine. Facilities shall also have the assistance of a back-up veterinarian trained in the care of marine turtles whenever the primary veterinarian is unavailable. The names of the both the primary and back-up veterinarians shall appear on the facility's permit.

TRANSPORTING LIVE TURTLES

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

² Crissey, Susan D. 1998. *Handling Fish Fed to Fish-Eating Animals: A Manual of Standard Operating Procedures*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, National Agricultural Library.

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 Epibionts 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 epibionts 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.

RELEASE OF REHABILITATED TURTLES

The goals of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Turtle Program of the FWC are to conserve and recover wild populations of threatened and endangered species. Species are listed under the ESA only after it has been determined that they are threatened or endangered with extinction. It is therefore imperative that as many individuals as possible are available to the wild population to mature and become part of the breeding population. Furthermore, a cooperative agreement under section 6 of the ESA between the USFWS and FWC, as in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, only allows FWC to remove endangered marine turtles from the wild if such action is necessary to aid sick or injured animals. It prohibits the holding of healthy endangered turtles in captivity for a period of more than 45 consecutive days. Therefore, endangered turtles must be released when their health status has improved to a point where they can be expected to survive in the wild. Many injuries, when healed, will not hamper a turtle's existence in the wild. For example, the loss of a flipper does not prevent a turtle's ability to survive in the wild. Flipper damage is not an unusual occurrence and is often documented on nesting beaches.

FWC staff shall determine the appropriate timing and location for release of a turtle that has been held for educational purposes or held illegally (e.g., held in a home aquarium). Not all size classes

occur in Florida waters; therefore individual size must be considered to determine an appropriate release location. For example, once leaving the beach hatchling loggerhead turtles spend a period of years drifting in a pelagic environment around convergence zones and gyre systems. Loggerhead turtles are not normally observed in Florida's nearshore/inshore waters until they reach 45 cm straight-line carapace length (SLCL) (Foley, STSSN). It appears that hawksbill and green turtles, on the other hand, move back into nearshore waters at a much smaller size. Hawksbills of all size classes occur in Florida waters including the very small pelagic size. Hawksbill turtles residing in Florida waters have been observed around nearshore reef sites off the southeast coast of Florida in the 20-30 cm SLCL size class (Meylan, personal communication). Green turtles are observed in nearshore and inshore waters off of the central east coast of Florida as small as 21 to 25 centimeters SLCL (personal communication with D. Bagley and M. Bresette). In Florida Bay, the smallest green turtles observed are ~28 cm SLCL (Schroeder, personal communication).

The final determination of an individual's fitness for survival in the wild will be made through FWC marine turtle biologist staff consultations with the facility's veterinarian, animal care personnel, and other persons with marine turtle expertise, as necessary. When a facility's veterinarian has determined that an animal has recovered sufficiently from its illness or injury and is ready for release, the principal permit holder, or a designee, shall contact FWC staff in Tequesta to discuss the appropriate time and site for the release. All marine turtles shall be measured, weighed and tagged (if size appropriate) prior to release (see Section 5 on tagging turtles). Release forms must be completed (this includes tagged and non-tagged animals, except hatchlings) and submitted with the quarterly report for all turtles released.

Note on release of turtles with fibropapillomas (FP): Turtles with FP shall be retained for a minimum of one year after the last observance of a tumor is noted and removed, unless specifically approved for early release by FWC.

NECROPSY REQUIREMENTS FOR TURTLES THAT DIE IN CAPTIVITY

Necropsies shall be performed on any turtles that die at a holding facility, including turtles held for rehabilitation, non-releasable turtles, and turtles held for education or research. Necropsies shall be performed by the attending veterinarian or by FWC staff. Minimally, necropsy procedures are to follow the techniques set forth in the Sea Turtle Necropsy Manual (Wolke and George, 1981). The original necropsy report is to be submitted with the holding facility's quarterly report. If a non-releasable turtle dies or a turtle held for educational display or research, all efforts shall be made to determine the cause of death in order to help prevent future loss. Investigation into the cause of death should include a **complete** histopathological examination.

Note: Before conducting necropsies on any stranded turtles that die within a week after arriving at a facility, the permit holder must notify the State's marine turtle stranding coordinators in either Jacksonville or Tequesta.

DISPOSITION OF DEAD TURTLES

Following necropsy the carcass of any marine turtle that dies, while in the custody of an FWC permitted facility, shall be completely destroyed (in accordance with state and local laws) or, subject to the approval of FWC, be offered to a museum, university, or other educational or research facility. **Under NO circumstances may a dead marine turtle, or any part thereof, be salvaged for any purpose other than FWC approved education and/or research activities.**

FACILITY INSPECTIONS

In order to ensure that facilities holding live marine turtles for rehabilitation, education, and/or research are maintaining the standards for care and maintenance, and that all applicable laws, rules, and guidelines are complied with, all facilities are subject to inspection at any time by commission personnel. Prior to issuance of a permit, new facilities applying for a permit to hold live marine turtles for rehabilitation, education, and/or research, shall be subject to inspection by commission personnel. All facilities being inspected should be fully operational for a minimum of two weeks prior to the date of inspection in order to ensure that water quality and filtration components are working properly. Facilities may be asked to provide a current coliform bacteria count and water quality data upon inspection. Facilities will be provided with a copy of the report generated from the inspection.

QUARTERLY AND ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All permit holders authorized to hold marine turtles for any reason are required to submit a quarterly report on forms provided by FWC. For each turtle held, the permit holder shall report the turtle's state identification number, the species, the date acquired, the stranding ID (if applicable), and the turtle's current size and status. A state identification number (SID) is provided for every turtle held in captivity. The SID number is issued out of the Tequesta Office. Turtles that are transferred from one Florida facility to another should have received a SID number at the first facility receiving the turtle. The SID number is transferred, via a Marine Turtle Transfer Form (Appendix A), with the turtle to the facility taking over the care of the animal. Each time a facility receives a turtle [excepting hatchlings and turtles that are transferred as described above], the permit holder shall contact the FWC Tequesta office to obtain a SID number for the animal. If you receive an animal but are unable to reach turtle staff in Tequesta (e.g., if calling after regular work hours or during a weekend), leave a message and a turtle staff person will get back with you and provide you with a SID number for the turtle.

Under status, the permit holder shall identify the current status of each turtle using the status code list on the reporting form. In the water quality section, the permit holder shall report the weekly temperature, salinity, and pH values for the water in which the turtles are held.

Quarterly and annual reports shall be submitted to FWC's Tequesta office (Imperiled Species Management, Tequesta Field Station, 19100 SE Federal Highway, Tequesta, Florida, 33469). **Reports are due as follows:**

1st quarter report due by no later than April 15th (January – March activities)

2nd quarter report due by no later than July 15th (April – June activities)

3rd quarter report due by no later than October 15th (July – September activities)

4th quarter report due by no later than January 15th (October – December activities)

The annual report is due by no later than January 31st (and should include a January through December summary). Quarterly reports shall include copies of STSSN forms (for live strandings received), transfer forms, tag/release forms, papilloma forms, and necropsy forms as applicable during the reporting period. In addition, an annual (calendar year) report is required that includes: the SID number, tag numbers (if tagged), species, sex (if known), acquisition date, purpose of acquisition, disposition date, and measurements at disposition.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS USING LIVE MARINE TURTLES

SUMMARY

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **use live marine turtles in educational presentations, or hold loggerheads for educational display.** These personnel are also authorized to:

- **transport or transfer turtles within Florida**

Personnel are not authorized to conduct the following activities without explicit permission from FWC:

- **transport or transfer turtles into or out of Florida**

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The following guidelines shall be followed regarding the use of live marine turtles in educational presentations. The phrase "educational presentation" refers only to the use of turtles away from the approved captive facility (e.g., at schools, festivals, fairs, etc). These guidelines have been developed by the FWC in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and have been specifically designed to minimize the stress experienced by turtles used for educational presentations.

1. No turtle shall be used in an educational presentation unless its health will not be compromised by this activity. No underweight or weak turtles are to be used.
2. Whenever possible, a loggerhead is to be used. A rehabilitating green turtle may be substituted if a loggerhead is not available. Rehabilitating Kemp's ridleys and hawksbills may not be used. Release of a rehabilitated turtle may not be delayed because of potential use in an educational presentation. All rehabilitating turtles are to be released as soon as their health status improves to the point where they can be expected to survive in the wild.
3. During periods away from the captive facility (except during transport when the turtle should not be held in water), the turtle is to be kept in a container of clean salt water. This container shall be large enough to allow the turtle to turn completely around (360°) and filled with enough clean salt water to allow complete submergence of the turtle.
4. The longest period of time a turtle may be kept away from the captive facility (for use in an educational presentation) is twelve hours. All turtles are to be returned to the facility within this time period.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Facilities using marine turtles in educational presentations must submit an annual report on the *Educational Presentations* form (Appendix A).

DIVE/SNORKEL PROGRAMS IN TANKS HOLDING MARINE TURTLES

SUMMARY

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct dive/snorkel programs in tanks holding marine turtles**.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The following guidelines shall be followed regarding programs that allow persons from the public to SCUBA dive and/or snorkel in tanks where marine turtles are held. These guidelines are specifically designed to minimize stress that may occur to marine turtles kept in tanks where dive/snorkel programs are authorized. These guidelines also provide instruction to minimize potential harm to persons participating in dive/snorkel programs. Please note that the State of Florida does not accept any liability for unpredictable behavior by marine turtles that may result in injury to participants.

The permitted facility shall ensure the following activities are strictly enforced:

1. Feeding, touching and/or handling turtles by dive/snorkel program participants is strictly prohibited.
2. Turtles undergoing rehabilitation shall not be placed in tanks where dive/snorkel programs are conducted.
3. All dive/snorkel programs shall be closely monitored by facility staff; at least one staff member must be in the tank with participants at all times.
4. Any participant observed harassing a turtle shall be required to exit the tank immediately.

Participants shall be informed of the following information:

1. All species of marine turtles are protected under State and Federal laws. Under the Endangered Species Act, it is illegal to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect... any marine turtle or its nest at any time”.
2. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission permits facilities to hold marine turtles for education, research and/or rehabilitation purposes.
3. Marine turtles (captive or wild) should never be approached. Marine turtles are very mobile under water; they are powerful creatures and can cause serious injury. Nesting turtles can be easily disturbed and provoked to return to the ocean without nesting. It is illegal and potentially dangerous to attempt to interact with them.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Any injury to persons resulting from participation in a dive/snorkel program shall be reported to the FWC, Imperiled Species Management section immediately.