

## SECTION 7 - EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### PUBLIC AWARENESS TURTLE WATCHES

#### SUMMARY

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct public awareness turtle watches**.

#### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The following conditions must be followed:

1. Only one permitted organization may conduct watches in any one area. The watch location must be approved by the FWC prior to the first watch of the season.
2. All participants in turtle watches must be informed of the federal and state laws protecting marine turtles and their nests. Participants must be informed that conducting turtle watches, touching marine turtles, and handling marine turtle eggs without a permit is unlawful.
3. Turtle watches may only be conducted with loggerhead turtles. Should any other species be encountered on the nesting beach, the group is not to be guided near that turtle.
4. Interpretive programs (lectures, slide presentations, etc.) that incorporate accurate, updated information on marine turtle conservation and biology are mandatory. Programs should be presented prior to the actual watch and must include an explanation of procedures to be followed during the experience. If desired, FWC staff members will assist in developing interpretive programs. A list of current topics that should be discussed during the presentation is listed below.
5. Group size must not exceed 25 participants per guide; total group size must not exceed 50 individuals. All guides and scouts must be thoroughly trained and listed on the Marine Turtle Permit issued by the FWC.
6. Public awareness turtle watches may neither be commercialized (conducted for profit) nor exploited for commercial endeavors. Fees may only be charged by non-profit organizations to cover legitimate costs incurred in marine turtle conservation efforts. Do not accept reservations made by commercial enterprises that may charge a fee for services. Please remember that if you charge a fee you may be subject to litigation and should carry liability insurance.
7. Age limitations for participants are left to the discretion of the principal permit holder.
8. Scouts shall be used to search for a nesting loggerhead unless the total group size does not exceed five persons. If an all terrain vehicle (ATV) is used for scouting, a red filter shall be placed over the headlight(s). The headlight(s) may only be used if absolutely necessary, and the ATV is to be operated at the waters' edge. Drive slowly and watch for hatchlings.

9. The use of flashlights by participants is not permitted. The use of low intensity flashlights with a red filter is limited to the walk leader and permitted scouts only. Leaders and scouts may not use flashlights while scouting for a turtle or while guiding participants to the nesting site. A flashlight may only be used to ensure safety while gaining access to the beach. After approaching the turtle, one light may be used by the group leader or a scout to illuminate the egg chamber such that participants can observe egg deposition. The light may not be used to illuminate the turtle until after covering is underway. Remember that other turtles are in the area and hatchlings may be emerging nearby. Improper use of light can deter other nesting females and disorient emergent hatchlings.
10. Turtle-watch leaders and scouts are encouraged to invite persons who are on their own looking for turtles to join the group. This is an opportunity to educate persons who might otherwise disturb nesting turtles.
11. To avoid disturbing the turtle, the leader or scout must exercise great caution when exposing the nest. This is to be conducted prior to the group's arrival near the nesting turtle. At no time should sand be allowed to fall into the nest chamber.
12. Participants must be instructed to stay with the group and remain quiet at all times. During the entire watch, the group must remain together. The group may not approach the turtle until egg deposition is well underway. Participants, scouts, and the leader must approach from the rear and remain behind the nesting turtle during egg deposition. Scouts are responsible for keeping participants behind the turtle. Eggs may NOT be removed from the nest.
13. Contact (light touching) with the nesting female is permitted only after all eggs have been deposited and the turtle is on her way back to the ocean. Contact must not impede the turtle's return to the ocean.
14. The use of flash photography and lights [other than infrared] for filming is not permitted.
15. Only one nesting turtle is to be observed by the group each night.
16. No more than five turtle watches per seven-day week may be conducted in the selected beach area. If more than three watches per week are conducted, then two of the watches must be conducted on Friday and Saturday nights when there are more people on the beach. Extra scouts should be used on weekend nights, when more people on the beach are expected to be encountered and “picked up.” The FWC may further limit turtle-watch activities in certain areas because of the sensitivity of the area or because of permitted research activities that may be disturbed by the watches.
17. Turtle watches shall be conducted during June and July (peak of loggerhead nesting season) unless otherwise authorized by FWC in order to increase the potential for groups to encounter a nesting female. In certain cases, FWC may authorize turtle watches to occur during the later portion of May in order to meet public demand.

**Current Issues To Discuss During Public Turtle Watch Presentations:**

- Coastal development impacts
- Beach nourishment (pros and cons)
- Beachfront lighting impacts
- Marine debris impacts
- Poaching
- Natural and exotic predators
- Propeller/boat injury impacts
- Beach armoring impacts
- TEDs (Turtle Excluder Devices) and the shrimp fishery
- Impacts by other fisheries (gill net, longline,...)
- Impacts caused by human nighttime activity on the beach
- Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge
- Non-nesting turtles (false crawls)
- International trade (CITES)
- Fibropapillomas
- FWC's non-manipulation or "hands off" management strategy
- Significance of Florida's nesting population

**REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

A schedule of planned watches is to be completed on the turtle watch schedule form (Appendix A) and submitted to the FWC (Tequesta office) prior to the first scheduled watch for the season and no later than May 25<sup>th</sup>. In addition, a summary of each watch is to be completed on the turtle watch summary form (Appendix A) and submitted after the last watch of the season is conducted.

## NIGHTTIME PUBLIC HATCHLING RELEASES

### SUMMARY

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **conduct night public hatchling releases**.

Personnel are not authorized to conduct the following activities unless specifically stated on their permit or unless otherwise approved in writing by FWC:

- **conduct nesting surveys**
- **relocate nests**
- **protect nests with self-releasing screen/cage**
- **protect nests with restraining cage**
- **use self-releasing hatchery**
- **use restraining hatchery**
- **excavate a nest prior to 70 days after the date of egg deposition (80 days in the case of a leatherback nest) or 72 hours after the first signs of emergence, whichever occurs first**
- **hold hatchlings recovered from nests in water**
- **use lights to lead the hatchlings to the water**

### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

This activity applies principally to permit holders who utilize restraining beach hatcheries or cages. Under natural conditions, marine turtle hatchlings emerge in darkness. Although rain or overcast skies can induce daylight emergences, the overwhelming majority of hatchlings emerge in the dark. Except for releasing small numbers of hatchlings that are found disoriented or at the bottom of nests during nest success evaluations, daylight releases of hatchlings are not permitted. The following conditions must be adhered to when conducting nighttime public hatchling releases:

1. All participants must be informed of the State and Federal laws protecting marine turtles and their nests. Participants must be informed that conducting hatchling releases without a permit is unlawful.
2. Interpretive programs (lectures, slide presentations, etc.), which incorporate accurate, updated information on marine turtle conservation and biology, are mandatory. Programs should be presented prior to the hatchling release and must include an explanation of procedures to be followed during the experience. If desired, FWC staff will provide assistance in developing interpretive programs.
3. Healthy hatchlings are to be released on the night they emerge and allowed to crawl to the water on their own. Weaker hatchlings may be held on moist sand for 1-2 days until they are ready for release. If, after 1-2 days, the hatchlings are still not ready for release they should be transported to an FWC-permitted rehabilitation facility. Only permitted personnel may handle hatchlings.
4. Nighttime public hatchling releases may not be conducted at dusk or at dawn as these are time periods when predatory birds and fish are particularly active.

5. Flashlights or other artificial lights may not be utilized during releases. This applies to any members of the public observing such releases, as well as all permitted personnel involved in the release. A quick check of the release area with a flashlight fitted with a red filter, a short time after release will insure that all hatchlings have reached the water. Occasionally, individual hatchlings may need assistance in reaching the water. In such cases, they may be moved closer to the water's edge or placed in the shallows and allowed to swim off on their own.
6. The use of flash photography and/or lights for filming [other than infrared] is not permitted.
7. Hatchling releases may neither be commercialized (conducted for profit) nor exploited for commercial endeavors. Fees may only be charged by non-profit organizations to cover legitimate costs incurred in marine turtle conservation efforts. Do not accept reservations made by commercial enterprises that may charge a fee for their services. Please be reminded that if you charge a fee you may be subject to litigation and should carry liability insurance.
8. Age limitations for participants are left to the discretion of the principal permit holder.

#### **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

The principal permit holder shall report the number of public hatchling releases held each year on the Public Hatchling Release Form (Appendix A). If any problems were encountered during releases (e.g. hatchlings becoming disoriented during the release), please explain. The hatchling release form is to be submitted annually with the marine turtle permit renewal application.

## **MAINTAIN AND DISPLAY PRESERVED SPECIMENS**

### **SUMMARY**

This section is specifically intended for those persons whose permit authorizes them to **maintain and display preserved specimens**. These personnel are also authorized to:

- **transport or transfer preserved specimens within Florida**

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

- **transport or transfer preserved specimens into or out of Florida**

### **ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION**

This activity covers museums and educational facilities and allows the permit holder to maintain and/or display whole preserved marine turtles or marine turtle body parts for educational or scientific research purposes. Specimens displayed for educational purposes are to be accompanied by appropriate interpretive verbiage. Specimens may not be maintained for strictly decorative purposes. You are not authorized to import/export turtles or turtle parts outside the state of Florida (foreign or domestic) without prior written approval from FWC.

### **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

Each principal permit holder is expected to keep a written inventory of all preserved specimens. FWC may ask for a copy of this list at any time. Annual reporting is not required.