Marine Turtle Program Organizational Chart

Current as of February 2015

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

Executive Director's Office

Marine Resources Division

Deputy Director

Coastal Reserves and Outreach

Director

SCDNR Marine Turtle Conservation Program Staff

Mail: PO Box 12559 Charleston, SC 29422
Phone: (843) 953-9015
Fax: (843) 953-9282
Email: seaturtles@dnr.sc.gov
Web Site: www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/

Program Coordinator – coordinates all aspects of the program

Wildlife Biologist II (2) – assist with coastal stranding activity, nest protection project management and research

Seasonal Employee (number of positions varies with funding) – assist with coastal stranding activity, nest protection project management and research

Yawkey Seasonal Employee – manages the sea turtle project at the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center

Botany Bay Seasonal Employee – manages the sea turtle project on Botany Bay Plantation WMA

SECTION 1 – GENERAL INFORMATION FOR PERMIT HOLDERS

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) issues permits for activities involving marine turtles in South Carolina under authority granted to the state through Cooperative Agreements with both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service under Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). All activities must be authorized under Chapter 15 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. To qualify for a marine turtle permit, the applicant must have the appropriate knowledge and experience and demonstrate that the proposed activity adds to the conservation of marine turtles.

Each permit consists of a principal permit holder, qualified personnel with Letters of Authorizations (LOA), and a list of authorized activities. Permit holders are expected to know the conditions and responsibilities associated with their permit and agree to abide by SCDNR guidelines. Principal permit holders are responsible for ensuring that SCDNR staff or an experienced permit holder thoroughly and properly trains all personnel with LOA's listed under their permit. Permit holders are authorized to conduct specific activities depending upon experience, area of investigation and/or demonstrated marine turtle management needs. Only those activities specifically listed on the permit are authorized.

A permit issued by the SCDNR or a letter of authorization (LOA) from the permit holder must be in the possession of each person at all times while conducting authorized activities. You should also carry identification that will verify that you are the named permit holder. Some wildlife or public safety officers or concerned individuals may perceive that your activity is harmful or unlawful. Please ensure that your response to such situations is thoughtful and reflects the special responsibilities associated with your permit.

The permit does not allow you to act as an employee of SCDNR. Please do not represent yourself as a wildlife or conservation officer, especially if you are talking with the media. Distinctive, identifying clothing is encouraged and should display the logo or name of your organization or marine turtle project.

Contact your project coordinator and the SCDNR Hotline number, 1-800-922-5431 if you think unlawful activities are being conducted, such as egg poaching or other disturbances to nests or nesting female turtles. **Do not notify the news media.**

Marine turtle permits are not transferable. Persons wishing to apply for a permit must submit a SCDNR Marine Turtle Permit Application. Applications may be obtained by contacting the SCDNR Marine Turtle Program office at (843) 953-9015. Requests for expansion of authorized activities must be made in advance by phone to the SC Marine Turtle Program Coordinator, and an amendment to the application may be required.

GUIDELINES

These guidelines provide instruction to South Carolina marine turtle permit holders on acceptable research and conservation techniques. Additional copies of the guidelines can be obtained from SCDNR or downloaded from the agency web site at http://www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/. Permit holders are authorized to conduct only those activities specifically listed on their marine turtle permit.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All activities and research projects (see below for coastal construction monitoring projects) authorized under a marine turtle permit, as well as the results, must be reported on an annual basis to the SCDNR. The reporting requirements for all activities described in these guidelines are identified at the end of each section. There is also a Quick Guide for Report Requirements located under the volunteer resources page at http://www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/volres.htm. Issuance of subsequent authorizations is contingent upon following appropriate reporting procedures (or satisfying reporting requirements).

TRAINING

Principal permit holders are expected to be proficient in the activity (ies) that they are authorized to conduct. The principal permit holder is responsible for ensuring that all personnel listed on the permit are thoroughly and properly trained to conduct the activities authorized on their permit. Nest survey training requires that the permit holder spend sufficient time with personnel on the beach identifying crawls. Permit holders must work with inexperienced personnel until they are confident of their ability to distinguish nests from false crawls and to identify the differences in crawl characteristics between species. SCDNR turtle staff provides periodic workshops to permitted personnel to ensure that approved conservation practices are well understood and employed. These workshops are generally designed as refresher courses and are not intended as complete training for persons with no prior survey experience. Due to logistics the workshops do not generally offer much, if any, field training. It is imperative that the principal permit holders spend as much time as necessary providing on-the-beach training for personnel to accurately identify crawls.

MONITORING FOR COASTAL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Under existing state law, certain construction activities may occur along or on your survey beach during the marine turtle nesting season. All such projects are reviewed by SCDNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and operate under specific requirements that consider the nature, timing and sequence of beach construction activities (beach nourishment, sea wall repair and beach scraping) to provide protection to marine turtles and their nests or hatchlings. If you are approached by a local contractor, individual, or other

entity and asked to establish a marine turtle nest relocation or nest protection program in conjunction with a beach construction project (including beach cleaning) contact your Marine Turtle Program Coordinator immediately.

In general, only those activities that have minimal impacts to nesting turtles, their nests, and hatchlings can occur during the nesting season. These types of activities include dune planting, beach cleaning, and special events. Such activities can only occur if a nesting survey has been ongoing since the beginning of the nesting season or 65 days prior to the event. All nests in the project area must be clearly marked. Standardized conditions in the SCDHEC OCRM permit require the person conducting the work/event to coordinate with the marine turtle permit holder for a given beach. No work is allowed to commence until after completion of the nesting survey each day. Fences, overnight storage of equipment, water drainage from pumps, lights, and heavy equipment are prohibited on the nesting beach unless specifically authorized in the permit document. **Marine turtle permits issued by SCDNR do not authorize nest relocation for any coastal construction project unless incidental take and additional authorization for such relocation has been granted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the SCDNR.**

Should you agree to provide marine turtle monitoring services for a project, we recommend that you enter into a written agreement whereby both parties fully understand the services expected of each. Permits for beach restoration activities require a report of marine turtle nesting activity for the project area. Under certain circumstances, another marine turtle permit holder may be authorized to conduct marine turtle nest survey and nest protection activities associated with a construction project even if the project is within your permitted survey area. Generally, the SCDHEC OCRM permitted entity will be instructed to contact the permitted marine turtle survey person for that area first, then to work with other permit holders if the original permit holder cannot conduct the work. Beach nourishment projects, in particular, are reviewed by SCDNR, SCDHEC OCRM, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and USFWS. The USFWS may, under the provisions of Section 7 of the ESA, issue incidental take authorization for the project. Permit holders authorized to relocate nests for conservation purposes may be restricted from doing so by a Section 7 Biological Opinion as follows: **marine turtle permits issued by SCDNR do not authorize nest relocation for any coastal construction project on which a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Section 7 Biological Opinion has been logged unless the permit holder receives official written agency (SCDNR) confirmation that the project is being conducted in a manner consistent with the Section 7 Biological Opinion.**