

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**.

The following conditions must be followed:

1. Only one permitted organization may conduct watches in any one area.
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 highly recommended. Programs should be presented prior to the actual watch and must include an explanation of procedures to be followed during the experience. If desired, SCDNR 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 10 participants. State parks only will have a limit of 30 participants.
6. A trained person may act as a scout to search for a nesting loggerhead ahead of the larger group unless the total group size does not exceed five persons.
7. All guides, leaders and scouts must be thoroughly trained and listed on the marine turtle permit issued by the SCDNR.
8. 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.
9. Age limitations for participants are left to the discretion of the principal permit holder.
10. Turtle-watch guides 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. The use of flashlights by participants is not permitted. The use of low intensity flashlights with a red or infrared filter is limited to the walk leader only. Information on

flashlight filters can be found on the volunteer resources page (<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/volres.htm>) under supplies. Leaders or scouts may not use flashlights while scouting for a turtle or while guiding participants to the nesting site. A flashlight with a red or infrared filter 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 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.

12. To avoid disturbing the turtle, the leader 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.
13. Participants must be instructed to stay with the group and remain quiet at all times. Participants should crouch and remain low. During the entire watch, the group must remain together. The group may not approach the turtle until egg deposition is well underway. Participants and the leader must approach from the rear and remain behind the nesting turtle during egg deposition. The guide or scout is responsible for keeping participants behind the turtle. Eggs may NOT be removed from the nest.
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 “scouting” personnel should be used on weekend nights, when more people on the beach are expected to be encountered and “picked up.” The SCDNR 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.

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
- Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge
- Non-nesting turtles (false crawls)
- International trade (CITES)
- Fibropapillomas
- Significance of South Carolina's nesting population

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A summary of the guidelines used by the project for turtle watch programs, any problems experienced, the number of excursions and number of participants must be included in the annual project report to SCDNR at the end of the year.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND RELATED MATERIALS

This section applies to all information distributed through the media, slide presentations, newsletters, websites, and public posters and signs by projects in regards to sea turtle conservation and the activities carried out under the permit issued by SCDNR.

Sea turtle conservation requires long-term public support over a large geographic area. The public must be factually informed of the issues particularly when conservation measures conflict with human activities such as commercial fisheries, beach development, and public use of nesting beaches. Public education is the foundation upon which a long-term conservation program will succeed or fail. It is the responsibility of the projects to ensure that information provided to the public in any form is biologically accurate and in keeping with the SCDNR Guidelines.

It is also important to ensure that there is **correct representation** when providing public information. The authorship of any educational materials rests with the respective project. **Do not act as an agent or employee of SCDNR** when providing public information.

In an attempt to ensure that material is factual and up to date, SCDNR is willing to review any educational materials developed and distributed by the projects. SCDNR would also like to maintain a catalog of all the educational materials produced by the projects, including newsletter and media articles. Include copies of any such materials with the annual report sent to SCDNR at the end of each season.

NIGHTTIME PUBLIC HATCHLING EMERGENCE

This activity applies principally to permit holders whose areas are public beaches, such as state parks, or resort areas. 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.

The following conditions must be followed:

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.) that incorporate accurate, updated information on marine turtle conservation and biology are highly recommended. Programs should be presented prior to hatchling release and must include an explanation of procedures to be followed during the experience. If desired, SCDNR staff members will assist in developing interpretive programs. A list of current topics that should be discussed during the presentation is listed below.
3. Nests should not be dug into at any time, neither during daylight or dark, to see if hatchlings are "ready" to emerge.
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 and nearby. **Only permitted personnel may handle hatchlings.**
5. Hatchlings shall emerge naturally and shall be allowed to crawl to the water on their own. Do not dig out turtles whose heads are exposed at the surface of a nest.
6. When an emergence is taking place, the public must stand behind the nest forming a "V" towards the water which is delineated with a roped off area at a minimum of 2 meters (~6.5 feet) from the path of the hatchlings. Hatchlings must be allowed to walk freely to the water without disturbance. The public must be managed in a strict manner so as to avoid hatchlings being trampled.
7. Flashlights or other artificial lights may not be utilized during the emergence. If ambient light pollution is a problem, one staff member can stand in the surf with a single low intensity flashlight pointing up the beach to maintain hatchling orientation to the water. A quick check of the release area with a flashlight fitted with a red or infrared filter, a short time after release will insure that all hatchlings have reached the water.
8. Conducting turtle watches, disturbing sea turtles, and handling eggs or hatchlings without a valid permit is unlawful.
9. 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.
10. The use of flash photography and/or lights for filming [other than infrared] is not permitted.
11. Hatchling emergences 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.

12. Age limitations for participants are left to the discretion of the principal permit holder.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A summary of the guidelines used by the project to manage observed hatchling emergence, any problems experienced, and the number of observations must be included in the annual project report to SCDNR at the end of the year.

MAINTAIN AND DISPLAY PRESERVED SPECIMENS

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 South Carolina**

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

- **collect, store, ship or process biological sea turtle specimens for scientific/medical purposes**
- **transport or transfer preserved specimens into or out of South Carolina**

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 South Carolina (foreign or domestic) without prior written approval from SCDNR.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

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