

A Coastal Guide to Living with Sea Turtles



Escambia County
Sea Turtle Protection Program
(850) 595-1144

PLEASE LEAVE ONLY YOUR FOOTPRINTS ON THE BEACH

Each evening, remove any:



Keep Beaches Dark & Obstacle Free

Escambia beaches are utilized year round by protected wildlife. Nesting sea turtles typically begin to nest in May with the last of the hatchlings heading into the Gulf of Mexico in October.

When the female sea turtle comes onto the beach to nest, if she encounters foreign obstacles such as beach furniture, tents, guidelines, or watercraft, her instincts tell her to abandon the nesting attempt and seek a more favorable environment. Items left on the beach have resulted in an increase of emergency responses to assist adult turtles to return to the Gulf of Mexico.

As you can see from the tracks, this turtle was lucky enough to successfully avoid the chairs left on the beach overnight. Others are not so lucky.



What can I do to help?

Follow these simple guidelines to do your part protecting sea turtles and be compliant with local rules and regulations:

- Each night, remove all personal belongings such as beach furniture and toys and store them off of the beach in an area free of dune vegetation
- Properly dispose of trash and discarded fishing gear. Sea turtles ingest plastic bags and wrappers, mistaking them for jellyfish and may become entangled in old fishing nets and lines
- Knock down sand sculptures and fill in holes before you leave the beach so sea turtles don't have obstacles to block their nesting activities
- Use only flashlights to safely enter and exit the beach. Fishing lanterns should be used only as necessary to set, bait, and remove hooks from fish, and not be on the entire time you are fishing
- Conduct a lighting inspection of your property

How to Perform a Lighting Inspection

Turn on all indoor and outdoor lights. Examine your property from multiple angles on the beach and take note of all visible light. One or more of the following adjustments may be necessary to reduce light pollution from your property:

- Reposition fixtures so that the point source of the light (bulb) is no longer visible from the beach
- Shield the top and sides of exterior fixtures so that light is directed downward onto your property and away from the beach
- Close blinds and curtains when interior lights are on at night
- Replace incandescent, fluorescent and high intensity lighting with amber or red light emitting diode (LED) or low-pressure sodium (LPS) fixtures
- Plant or improve native vegetation buffers between the light and the open beach

Light pollution also has a negative effect on sea turtles. Once hatchlings emerge from the nest, they orient in the direction of the brightest horizon. Reflected celestial light from the Gulf of Mexico attracts hatchlings to the south. If lighting from homes and commercial development outshine the reflection from the Gulf, then the hatchlings will become disoriented and head north away from the water.

An estimated 1 out of 1,000 hatchlings live to reach reproductive age. Currently, all species of sea turtles are listed as threatened or endangered.

**To report an injured or dead sea turtle, please contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at:
1-888-404-3922**



LIGHTS OUT, SEA TURTLES DIG THE DARK

Did you know?



Escambia County beaches are home to four of the six species of sea turtles found in U.S. waters – loggerhead, green, leatherback, and Kemp’s ridley.

The most frequent nesting turtle is the loggerhead. Named for their large head, loggerhead turtles weigh between 200-350 lbs, become adults after about 25 years, and then return to nest on the beach where they hatched approximately every other year.

The Kemp’s ridley is the smallest, weighing between 80-100 lbs and our largest, the leatherback, can grow to exceed 1,500 lbs.

Sea turtle nests contain an average of 100 eggs. The eggs are completely round and are about the size of a ping-pong ball. Nests that incubate in cooler temperatures generate mostly males, while warmer temperatures produce primarily females.

Only 1 out of 1,000 sea turtle hatchlings survive to reach adulthood!

All species of sea turtles are listed as threatened or endangered and protected by the Endangered Species Act.



**May 1 – October 31 is
Sea Turtle Nesting Season**