

MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 020-2024

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Honorable Mayor Steven Meiner and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Alina Hudak, City Manager 

DATE: January 19, 2024

SUBJECT: 2024 Sea Turtle Nesting Season in Miami Beach

The City of Miami Beach is dedicated to the conservation and preservation of its natural resources, including the protection of sea turtles that nest annually on our beaches. City Ordinance No. 2006-3525 restricts artificial lighting during nesting season between April 1 and October 31 (Ord. No. 2006-3525). Each year, the City refines its procedures to prepare for the upcoming nesting season and I am pleased to share an update.

Education and Events

The Environment and Sustainability Department was awarded a competitive grant by the Sea Turtle Conservancy in the amount of \$13,550 to launch a campaign for the 2024 sea turtle nesting season. The Department is working closely with the Office of Marketing and Communications to launch the “**Flip the Switch**” campaign to increase awareness and compliance of turtle-friendly lighting. The objective is to reduce the damaging impacts of artificial light on sea turtles by implementing low, long, and shielded lighting practices. On beaches where artificial lighting is visible, females may be deterred from nesting and the hatchlings’ important journey to the sea can be disrupted. This poses a serious threat to sea turtle hatchlings as they can become disoriented, causing them to crawl away from the ocean and toward the artificial light.



Digital messaging will be disseminated via all social media channels and will include digital ads, paid social ads, and a public service announcement (PSA). Printed advertisements will include bus shelters, physical flyers, stickers, magnets, and a featured article in the Spring edition of the Miami Beach Magazine. Furthermore, the campaign will engage the community and target population through regular newsletters during the nesting season, emphasizing the critical importance of protecting sea turtles.

To learn more about sea turtle nesting season here on Miami Beach and how community members can help, the City is pleased to announce the following events for the community this season:

- Miami-Dade County will be hosting a **Sea Turtle Awareness Public Workshop on Saturday, January 20 at the North Shore Park Youth Center (501 72nd Street) at 12:30 pm and on Saturday, February 10 at the Miami Beach Regional Library (227 22nd Street) at 12:30 pm.**
- The Environment and Sustainability Department will be hosting **Turtle Fest on April 20 at Altos del Mar Park (76th Street & Collins Avenue).** This family fun event was

first held in 2023 and celebrates the start of sea turtle nesting season to raise awareness about sea turtle conservation.

Background



Sea Turtles are protected by the US Endangered Species Act of 1973 and Florida Statute Chapter 370. It is illegal to harm or harass sea turtles, their nests, or hatchlings. The City of Miami Beach is a nesting habitat for three species of protected sea turtles: Loggerhead, Green, and Leatherback sea turtles. Handling of turtles and nests is regulated by the state agency, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Sea turtle nesting season in the State of Florida occurs between May 1 and October 31; however, sea turtle nesting begins on April 1st in Miami Beach to account for the earlier Leatherback nesting season. Locally, the Miami-Dade County Sea Turtle

Conservation Program (MDCSTCP) is responsible for spearheading sea turtle conservation efforts. FWC issued a permit to the County that allows County staff to handle sea turtle nests and hatchlings, and conduct daily inspections on our beaches.

County staff began sea turtle nesting surveys on March 1st for the 2023 turtle season. The surveys begin at sunrise every morning during sea turtle nesting season which include dedicated County staff identifying, marking off, and where applicable, relocating nests. They also inventory hatched nests and document hatchling disorientations. No beach activities (beach maintenance operations, sand sifting, litter collection, concessionaire operations, special events, etc.) can begin before the daily survey is completed and County staff gives the authorization to begin activities on the beach. This prevents the loss of sea turtle tracks used to identify nests, as well as potential collisions with nesting sea turtles or newly laid nests. All nests identified by County staff during the survey are marked and surrounded by caution tape the same morning they are discovered, signaling the public to maintain a safe buffer of at least 10 feet. Furthermore, the City will continue to work closely with the County to help address any lighting or conservation concerns along our beaches as the season continues.

City Efforts

A successful sea turtle season relies on the entire community to help prepare our beaches for sea turtle nesting season. For this reason, the City implements strategies and conducts extensive education and outreach to the community to increase sea turtle awareness.

The Environment and Sustainability Department has been working with various external stakeholders and City departments on short- and long-term strategies to enhance the protection of our native sea turtle population. Efforts include coordination with FWC and the County, internal training for Code Compliance Officers, installation of lighting retrofits to include amber lights or shading for City beachfront properties—including parks, parking lots, and community workshops.

The Code Compliance Department enforces the City's Turtle Nesting Protection Ordinance through proactive inspections and complaints. Code Compliance distributes information

annually to beachfront properties to remind them to reduce unnecessary artificial light sources, keep blinds closed at night, and not harass nesting sea turtles.

If you have any questions, please contact Amy Knowles, Chief Resilience Officer, at AmyKnowles@miamibeachfl.gov or Lindsey Precht, Assistant Director of the Environment & Sustainability Department, at LindseyPrecht@miamibeachfl.gov.

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