

Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) for Natural Resource Advisors (NRAs)

Notifications:

- Contact the **Resources at Risk Hotline (850-316-5081)** at any time of day or night if you have questions on how to interpret or implement any of these SOPs.
- Special considerations for Sensitive Lands (NPS or USFWS Refuge lands):
 - If operations will be performed on any Sensitive Lands, a federally approved resource advisor (READ) is required (Your training and status do not qualify you as a federal READ). Make sure that Operations understand this requirement and distinction. They (or you on their behalf) should call the **Sensitive Lands Hotline (251-445-3009)** to request a READ. Be prepared to contact the associated land manager (i.e. Park Supervisor) if requested.
- SOME BEACHES ARE RESTRICTED for military or other purposes. If you are not sure whether you have permission to access the beach, call the **NRA Program Manager (251-382-2436)** to verify authorization to access.
- If the area to be cleaned includes coastal sand dunes, special notification and authorization are required prior to working in these areas. See the Dune Cleanup SOP below.

Avoiding Sea Turtle Nests:

- Although many beaches are surveyed each morning for sea turtle nests, many are not. Assume that unmarked nests may be present in all beach areas you may be at.
- Do not destroy existing turtle crawls you observe. Operations should limit activities around crawls to the minimum necessary to perform cleanup. Example turtle crawl photos are provided in your NRA binder. You may flag crawls to assist Operations in avoiding them.
- If you observe a suspected unmarked nest, mark the nest and contact the appropriate sea turtle permit holder (see attached contacts list) (example marked nest photos are provided in your NRA binder). To mark the nest:
 - Mark undisturbed area around the nest with four stakes or pin flags and an additional ten-foot buffer with four stakes or pin flags; use caution when driving in the stakes. Do not enter or place any stakes or pin flags within the disturbed area.
 - Record the general location and the GPS coordinates of the suspected nest. Be prepared to communicate this information to the permit holder.
- As a general rule, Operations should avoid work within 10 feet of marked nests. If cleanup is needed inside a staked area, contact a sea turtle permit holder to supervise this cleanup (see attached contacts list). Do not supervise clean up inside a staked area without a sea turtle permit holder.

Sea Turtle Permit Holder Contacts

Location	Permit Holder	Contact
Alabama (Dauphin Island)	Mike Reynolds	Cell: 251-747-4985 Office: 251-974-2253
Alabama (Fort Morgan Peninsula, including Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge to West Beach in Gulf Shores)	Jackie Isaacs	Cell: 251-752-0654 Office: 251-540-8523
Alabama (West Beach in Gulf Shores to the Alabama/Florida state line)	Mike Reynolds	Cell: 251-747-4985 Office: 251-974-2253
Florida (all beaches)	Robbin Trindell Meghan Koperski (back-up)	Cell: 561-262-1104 Office: 850-617-6055 Cell: 561-339-1001 Office: 561-575-5407 x17

Avoiding Other Sensitive Areas and Wildlife:

- Equipment, vehicles, foot traffic, staging/break areas, or disturbance of any kind in dune, scrub or other vegetated areas should be avoided. Investigation of dune areas when necessary may be done on foot from the dune edge and only when presence is not agitating wildlife. Otherwise, keep a minimum of 50 ft between operations and the toe of the primary dune system unless conditions require encroachment into this zone (e.g. oil in the supratidal zone, erosion encroaching on the dunes, etc.)
- Walk or ride a beach vehicle (see next section) in front of heavy equipment, out of the oiled zone, and survey for evidence of activity of sea turtles and birds. Special attention should be paid to the water's edge, the wrack line (an important feeding zone for shorebirds), and the area in between to look for wildlife. If wildlife is in the path of the equipment, the equipment should stop until the wildlife moves out of the way on its own. You may identify a path for the equipment to move that will avoid impacts to individual wildlife.
- Daytime activities should be completed by sunset each day if possible.
- Beaches should be re-leveled prior to the end of the day's activities at that location to protect the beach from storm surge and to avoid creating barriers to animal movement.
- Bird colonies should not be entered, even to remove oil, unless authorized. Contact the **Wildlife Hotline (866-557-1401)** to dispatch responders to take care of any oiled eggs, hatchlings, or adult birds within a colony.
- If you see a sudden flush of birds near your operations, you may have disturbed a bird colony; retreat to a reasonable distance and avoid the area where the birds were disturbed.
- Do not enter posted sea turtle or shorebird nest sites and minimize time spent around these sites. Most of these will be marked with posts and signs, but not all. Try to maintain at least 50 ft from nesting areas.

Beach Vehicles:

- Vehicles should avoid beach vegetation and should stay as far as possible from the upper beach and dune areas. Travel along the beach should occur as close to the waterline as possible while avoiding the wrack line (area of organic debris generally marking the highest point of the tidal zone).
- Use lightweight vehicles with lower tire pressure (<10 psi) (e.g. Gators, Mules, ATVs). Lower the existing tire pressure to avoid ruts.
- Use 4WD when available and drive slowly to avoid ruts.
- Don't drive any faster than a quick walk (<5 mph) and watch for wildlife, including eggs, stationary and camouflaged birds and other wildlife.
- Do not park next to bird or sea turtle nests or staked areas.
- Vehicles should proceed directly to the hard-packed sand near or below the high tide/wrack line. All driving and movement of equipment across the shoreline should occur below the high tide/wrack line
- Ingress and egress of the beach should occur perpendicular to the shoreline.

Handling and Reporting Distressed or Dead Wildlife:

- Do not attempt to capture any distressed, oiled, or even healthy wildlife.
- Anything found dead that is not a sea turtle, sea mammal, bird, bird or turtle egg, or fish kill may be cleaned up by the Ops crew.
- Call in all dead or alive sea turtles and sea mammals, dead birds, or distressed live birds¹ found on the land or the water to the **Wildlife Hotline (866-557-1401)**. Record GPS info, written description, and behavior or unusual circumstances on the ICS 214 Unit Summary Form or logbook. If possible, mark (dead) or track (living) wildlife until contacted by a qualified responder (do not stop or impede operations to perform this function).
- If you encounter dead wildlife, do not handle it unless it is in the intertidal zone and is at risk of being washed out to sea before responders can arrive. Use best professional judgment to decide if the animal must be moved. (Note: some wildlife may appear dead but are not. If you are not sure, do not handle the animal). Place the animal above the intertidal zone and call the **Wildlife Hotline (866-557-1401)**. A qualified responder may contact you for more information or with further instructions; otherwise avoid the animal.
- Call in all suspected fish kills to **the Wildlife Hotline (866-557-1401)**. A "fish kill" is a "significant and sudden death of fish characterized by large numbers of fish dying over a short time." Use your best professional judgment to determine whether what you have found is a fish kill. Neither Operations nor NRAs should touch or disturb a fish kill.

Night Operations:

Special protocols apply to nighttime operations due to the potential presence of nesting female sea turtles.

¹ Live birds do not need to be reported unless they are distressed (e.g. oiled or injured).

- Wildlife Observers(s) (WOs) must accompany nighttime cleanup crews to protect nesting sea turtles (NRAs do not qualify as WOs). Operations (or you on their behalf) should call the **WO Coordinator (888-988-3835)** prior to 1500 hrs.
- If a sea turtle is spotted, maintain at least 200 feet between the turtle and any beach equipment or personnel. Operations should be suspended while the turtle is nesting.
- Operations cleanup crews should be limited to a) a total of 50 and b) a maximum of 30 active cleaning personnel at any one time within the operational area. The maximum length of shoreline that can be cleaned by a single crew at any one time is 450 yards of shoreline.
- For both manual and mechanical cleanup, if more than one crew (e.g. two groups of workers operating independent of each other), they should remain separated by at least 1000 yards at all times.
- Nesting turtles are highly sensitive and are easily distressed by bright lights. Detailed recommendations for lighting during night operations have been developed. Work with Operations to meet these recommendations to the extent possible without compromising safety or effectiveness.
 - Illumination in the operations area should be the minimum necessary to comply with U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and/or Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements. Illumination *beyond* the immediate work area should be minimized to the greatest extent possible. If headlamps with a red filter on the light can meet this requirement, this is preferable. Lights should be directed toward the sea, not landward using side shields. Bright white light, such as metal halide, halogen, fluorescent, mercury vapor and incandescent lamps should NOT be used. Limited use of shorter wavelength lights may be used in areas where direct and indirect light or glow could not possibly be visible from the beach. See Figure 1 for a preferred illumination set up. Acceptable lamps include: a) low pressure sodium (LPS) 18w, 35w lamps; b) red, orange or amber LEDs (true red, orange or amber diodes, NOT filters); c) true neon red; and d) other lighting sources that produce light of 560 nanometers or longer. The best technology available to minimize impacts to sea turtles from lighting is a Red or Amber LED. Solutions to minimize lighting impacts to sea turtles can be found at: http://myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/seaturtle_lighting.htm.
- Verbal noise (shouting or yelling) should be minimized.
- Mechanical cleanup:
 - Florida Specific: Notify the **FWC Regional Biologist (850-265-3676)** prior to starting work
 - Work areas should not extend more than 10 feet shoreward of the oiled area or encroach on dunes.
 - All staging areas will be contained in the operational area
 - Mechanical equipment on beaches should be kept to a minimum; equipment speeds should not exceed a fast walking speed.
 - Operational areas should be established before nightfall to avoid impacts to any existing resources.
 - Beach should be returned to the normal topography by 0600 hours.

Dune Cleanup:

Special Notification and Authorization required:

- Before any cleanup work occurs in coastal dune areas, consult with your Mobile IC NRA Program Manager (251-382-2436). On Sensitive Lands, also consult with the on-site federal READ who will make a decision whether work will be permitted in these areas.
 - If *mechanical* dune cleanup work is needed on Sensitive Lands, contact the on-site federal READ or the Sensitive Lands Branch Hotline (251-445-3009). For State, County, Municipal, or private lands, contact your Mobile IC NRA Program Manager (251-382-2436).
- Brief Operations the special considerations listed here regarding dune cleanup.
- During dune cleanup activities, if you encounter any suspected beach mice, beach mice burrows, nesting shorebirds, eggs, turtle nests, or turtle crawls in the work area, ask Operations to suspend work and contact your Mobile IC NRA Program Manager (251-382-2436) for instructions on proceeding.
- Advise Ops crews to clean oiled dune areas with the fewest people possible to minimize dune trampling and maintain long-term dune stability. Record the number of people conducting dune cleanup, methods, and areas worked. Record deviations from the protocols (e.g. ICS 214 form or logbook).
- For access, do not trample vegetation, and use varying travel paths. Access work areas or oiled dunes from the shoreward/beach side of the dune.
- By default, all dune work will be manual and not mechanical; and should be reflected in the Shoreline Treatment Recommendations (STRs) provided to you. If mechanical dune cleanup work is required on Sensitive Lands, see notifications section above.
- Advise Operations to locate staging of tools, equipment, or bags of collected oil outside 50 ft of the toe of the primary dune.
- Instruct Operations to avoid un-oiled areas near the dunes.
- For oiled vegetation:
 - If dune vegetation is lightly oiled, instruct Operations to leave the vegetation as is, and to remove oil from sand around the plant.
 - If dune vegetation is heavily oiled, Operations may wipe vegetation with a cloth or oil sorbent material without uprooting or removing it.
 - If vegetation is heavily oiled and wiping is not effective, cutting it may be an option, but because dune vegetation is critical habitat, this tactic will need to be discussed with your Mobile IC NRA Program Manager (251-382-2436) prior to initiating it.