

# Sea turtle nesting season begins amid oil spill threat

BY JENNER FUENTES  
Waterfront News Writer

The familiar signs of sea turtle nesting season have kicked into full swing throughout Broward County. Blackout draperies top beachfront streetlights and roped-off sandy mounds dot many city beaches.

And despite the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that threatens to whip around Florida's coastline, as of late May the Broward County Sea Turtle Conservation Program will continue as planned.

No decisions have been made to alter the program, said Lou Fisher, natural resource specialist for the Broward County Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department.

"It's really premature until we see what this thing's gonna do."

Robbin Trindell, biological administrator for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, echoed that sentiment. She said major changes right now are geared toward the western portion of the state.

"We're focusing on the Panhandle and getting them ready," she said. "We're working to protect both volunteers and sea turtles."

For Joanne Howes, parks naturalist at the Anne Kolb Nature Center who helps coordinate the county's public hatchling releases, the events in the Gulf bring a heightened sense of urgency to their cause.

"Certainly something of that magnitude that affects so many creatures affects these large creatures as well," Howes said. "There are so many things out there that cause disturbances for sea turtles; we want to minimize any disturbance to them. We rely on the ocean, but these creatures do, too."

Curtis Burney, associate professor at Nova Southeastern University's Oceanographic Center, said it is



Photo/MICHELE BLACKBURN, BCSTCP  
The Anne Kolb Nature Center at West Lake Park in Hollywood will offer twice-weekly public hatchling releases from July 7 through Aug. 27.

not uncommon to see occasional tar balls, which are oil spill remnants, wash ashore.

If they were large and high in number, turtle nesting behavior would definitely be disrupted, added Burney, who is also the county conservation program's principal investigator.

"They're an endangered species and our job is primarily conservation," Burney said of the turtles. We're trying to save the little beasts and get them back in the water. Anything that interferes with that, interferes with our conservation efforts," he said.

For now, officials are closely monitoring the oil spill's movement across the Gulf, but remain optimistic about the county's conservation efforts.

"We're watching day by day. We're hoping the girls show up, and in good numbers, too," Trindell said.

Regardless of the oil spill, she said that many areas in Broward County have made significant strides toward conservation — Fort Lauderdale and Pompano Beach in particular.

"The local community has been great. Now people start to see nests, and a lot of the communities feel pride, and try to protect them," Trindell said.

Lighting ordinances throughout the county have also greatly cut back the need to relocate most of the nests. The one area that has yet to comply is Hollywood.

"It's still too bright. They're just getting a lighting ordinance going," she said.

When it comes to conservation efforts, Howes stressed the importance of awareness.

"Education is our role. The fact that people are interested in learning about sea turtles and their plight, we feel we're doing our part, because it makes them aware," Howes said.

### Up close

Those interested can sign up at Anne Kolb Nature Center at West Lake Park in Hollywood to attend twice-weekly public hatchling releases. The program begins at 8 p.m. with a presentation at the nature center, followed by the hatchling release on a designated stretch of Hollywood Beach. The program is slated to run Wednesdays and Fridays from July 7 through Aug. 27. Those interested must register and pay a \$5 fee in advance.

For questions, call the Anne Kolb Nature Center at 954-926-2480. For sea turtle emergencies, call 954-328-0580.

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