

DRAFT – Sea Turtles -- DRAFT

Effects Determination Guidance for Endangered & Threatened Species (EDGES)

Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Glynn, Liberty, and McIntosh Counties

Species Covered by This EDGES: Loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and Kemp’s ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*).

Sea turtles may be found in the marine and estuarine waters of Georgia. Nesting season in the state is May 1- August 31, and hatching extends to October 31. Nesting habitat includes both sandy beach and any sandy areas that wrap around the north and south ends of islands. Loggerheads are Georgia’s primary nesting sea turtle, laying 99.6% of the nests found on the State’s beaches. Green, leatherback, and Kemp’s ridley sea turtles occasionally nest in Georgia. Sea turtles have site fidelity to their nesting beaches. A primary threat to these species is loss or degradation of nesting habitat. Most of GA’s beaches (map page 2) are designated Critical Habitat.



This EDGES covers projects on Georgia’s coast that permanently or temporarily alter sea turtle nesting habitat. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service share Federal jurisdiction for sea turtles. FWS has responsibility for sea turtles on the nesting beach and NMFS in the marine environment. This EDGES, therefore, only addresses activities, that may impact nesting sea turtles, their nests, eggs, or hatchlings, as they emerge from the nest and crawl to the sea. Separate consultation with NMFS, may be required for potential impacts to sea turtles in ocean waters.



Endangered Species Act Consultation Checklist:

Applicant:

1. IPAC indicates sea turtles may nest in the project area (see range map on Page 2).
 - a. No.....No effect. Provide IPaC information to the Savannah District with application/PCN.
 - b. Yes.....Go to #2.

2. The proposed project will impact or alter any of Georgia’s coastal beaches, sandy north/south island ends, or associated dune habitat.
 - a. No.....Provide this information to the Savannah District with application/PCN
 - b. Yes.....Go to #3.

3. The Fish and Wildlife Service’s Georgia Field Office (FWS-GA) provided documentation stating project impacts to sea turtles were likely to be minimal.
 - a. No.....Provide completed EDGES Applicant Coordination Slip and supporting documentation to the Savannah District with 404 application/PCN.
 - b. Yes.....Provide FWS-GA project review documentation and/or survey data to the Savannah District with application/PCN.

Savannah District:

4. IPAC indicates the project is within designated Critical Habitat for one or more of the listed sea turtles.
 - a. No.....Go to #5.
 - b. Yes.....Contact FWS-GA to determine if consultation is needed.

5. The project would result in impacts <6 months to sea turtle nesting habitat (e.g., construction of groins, sea walls, jetties, ocean piers, placement of fill, etc.).
 - a. No.....Go to #6.
 - b. Yes.....May affect. Consultation required.

6. Projects that cause temporary impacts to sea turtle nesting habitat (e.g., beach renourishment, beach restoration, or inlet sand transfer) will be constructed only from September through April, when sea turtles are not nesting.
 - a. No.....May affect. Consultation required.
 - b. Yes.....Go to #7.

7. The sea turtle conditions below will be implemented throughout project preparation and construction.
 - a. No.....MALAA. Consultation with FWS-GA required.
 - b. Yes.....NLAA. Consultation complete. FWS-GA concurrence is needed, in writing, for JPNs, but is assumed for other Savannah District actions if FWS does not respond.

Sea Turtles Conditions

1. Permittee will not work between May 1 and August 31 in order to avoid impacts to sea turtle nests.
2. Permittee will have a designated qualified biological monitor, acceptable to FWS-GA and the Savannah District, present each day to monitor construction activity and the presence of sea turtles. Permittee will provide the name of the monitor and their qualifications prior to commencing work.
3. For work between September 1 and October 31, the permittee or their contractor shall coordinate with GADNR WRD non-game, sea turtle specialist (currently Mark Dodd - phone number 912-280-6892) before work commences concerning protection of sea turtle nests that may be present in the project area. Permittee or contractor will be expected to avoid impacts to sea turtle nests and hatchlings through protective measures such as hay bales or similar materials, through the end of nesting season on October 31.
4. Permittee will measure sand compaction in the work area immediately after project completion and consult with FWS-GA' Coastal Georgia ES Office to determine if the sand needs to be tilled to improve sea turtle nesting habitat. Sand compaction monitoring and tilling protocols are posted on pages 2-3 of the following document: <https://www.fws.gov/panamacity/resources/PostConstructionRequirementsChecklist.pdf>.
5. Visual surveys for escarpments along beach renourishment projects must be made immediately after completion and in late March-early April for three years post-construction. Escarpments that interfere with sea turtle nesting or that exceed 18 inches in height for a distance of 100 feet must be leveled and the beach profile reconfigured to minimize scarp formation before May 1 annually.
6. FWS-GA and GADNR will be notified if a sea turtle adult, hatchling, or egg is harmed or destroyed as a direct or indirect result of the project.
7. All personnel associated with the project will be notified, in writing, that there are civil and criminal penalties for harming, harassing or killing sea turtles.
5. All vessels associated with the project will operate at "no wake/idle" speeds at all times while in the construction area. All vessels will follow routes of deep water whenever possible.
6. All temporary construction materials will be removed upon completion of the work. No construction debris or trash will be discarded in the water.

