

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alligator River/Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge
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News Release

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Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge: Hub of Activity on Hatteras Island

Summer has always an extremely active time for Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Nesting shorebirds scrape their shallow nests in the sand; sea turtles lumber ashore at night and dig nesting holes. Literally thousands of visitors enjoy the natural-appearing beach and North Pond Wildlife Trail. They come to fish, observe wildlife, paddle, or simply to walk on a beautiful and peaceful beach in the sunshine. This summer has all this activity.... and much more. In an effort to facilitate safe access for our neighbors to the south, the refuge has issued a number of permits to facilitate repair work and protection of NC Highway 12, the only road to these southern villages. Many federal and state agencies are working together to accomplish the needed work while maintaining the protection for wildlife that is required by law.

Currently, there is major construction activity on the north, middle and south sections of the refuge. On the north end, the refuge has granted permission for dredge crews to park their vehicles to work their shifts for the 24-hour dredging operation. A 3-4 mile section in the center of the refuge is busy with NC Department of Transportation and contractor crews replacing the temporary bridge over the inlet caused by Hurricane Irene. And, the southernmost few miles of the refuge are active with the NC DOT and US Corp of Engineers sand dredging project to protect NC Highway at the "S-curves."

Refuge Manager Mike Bryant asks for patience and cooperation, if you are driving on Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. "My staff, especially our Biologist Dennis Stewart, have worked tirelessly and consistently with the NCDOT and their contractors to make this work possible while making sure the wildlife and habitat we have been charged to protect and manage are safe. By working together, we have been able to come up with plans that can accomplish the work while avoiding unacceptable impacts on these wildlife resources. Sea turtle nests will be hatching soon and beach nesting birds are learning to fly. Monitoring the areas for wildlife activity and avoiding certain types of lighting and equipment will provide the protection needed. This work is being done during active bird and sea turtle nesting and hatching. I'm proud the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the NCDOT have been able to plan ahead to get this needed work accomplished. The refuge permit was issued last November which clearly spelled out safe parameters for wildlife. This careful planning allows NCDOT to do their job while we continue to do our work of protecting and

managing wildlife and providing for public use on the refuge."

Pete Benjamin, Field Supervisor for the Ecological Services Office in Raleigh also reminds the public that emergency beach nourishment activities associated with protection of NC 12 may affect public access to the areas being nourished for a number of weeks. The Service has coordinated closely with the NC DOT and US Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that appropriate measures have been incorporated into the project design to minimize potential impacts to wildlife resources. The Service issued a Biological Opinion under the Endangered Species Act on April 1, 2014 that included all the necessary measures to protect federally listed species such as sea turtles and piping plovers. Though this activity will be occurring in the heart of the sea turtle and shorebird nesting seasons, we believe the commitment by NCDOT and the Corps to adhere to the protective measures we collectively developed will ensure that harm to the wildlife will be minimized to the extent possible.

Bryant added, "We appreciate the cooperation of the NC DOT and US Army Corps of Engineers in minimizing impacts to fish and wildlife and are hopeful that the project will progress quickly so that more normal refuge operations and uses can resume. We will post specific changes to refuge use and visitation policies as needed."

Currently, some sections of NC Highway 12 through the refuge have one-lane traffic, so visitors and residents are advised to plan ahead for stop-and-go traffic and delays. Much of the highway through the refuge has heavy equipment coming and going, so motorists should drive with extreme caution.

For information on refuge activities, visit www.fws.gov/peaisland or call 252-473-1131.

photo credit: George A Radecsky/USFWS



Contractors have been stockpiling dredge pipe to prepare for the placement of sand on the beach in the area of the "S-curves" to protect NC Highway 12 for access to Hatteras Island. Here, you see NC 12 to the left, Rodanthe in the background, mats for equipment access and contractor parking in the center, and a pile of dredge pipe to the right.