


MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

LTC # 126-2025

LETTER TO COMMISSION

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

FROM: Eric Carpenter, City Manager 

DATE: March 20, 2025

SUBJECT: 2025 Sea Turtle Nesting Season and Grant Award

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. 2024-4652 restricts artificial lighting during nesting season between April 1st and October 31st (Ord. No. 2024-4652). Each year, the City refines its current procedures to prepare for the upcoming nesting season and I am pleased to share an update.

Education and Events



Last year, the Environment and Sustainability Department kicked off a new “**Flip the Switch**” campaign with the assistance of the Marketing and Communications Department to raise awareness about reducing the harmful effects of artificial light on sea turtles. I am pleased to share that the Department was recently awarded \$23,710 in funding through another competitive grant from the Sea Turtle Conservancy to expand upon the campaign. The grant funding will target and support education for hotels and beach concessionaires more directly.

The Department is also pleased to announce that this year’s **Turtle Fest** will be held on **Saturday, April 12th at Altos del Mar Park from 3 to 6 pm**. This fun family-friendly event invites the Miami Beach community to celebrate the beginning of sea turtle nesting season

while raising awareness about local efforts in sea turtle conservation during Earth Month. The family friendly event will again include activities and informative booths.

City Efforts

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

The Environment and Sustainability Department works with various external stake holders and City departments on short-term and long-term strategies for better protecting our native sea turtle population. This includes external coordination with Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) and Miami-Dade County, internal trainings for Code Compliance Officers, evening lighting surveys, and lighting retrofits to include amber lights or shading for City beachfront properties including parking lots and parks. Public property lighting retrofits are generally led by Facilities and Fleet Department and the Public Works Department.

Evening lighting surveys are being conducted by Miami-Dade County, Code Compliance, and Environment and Sustainability to document and address lighting concerns. Code Compliance distributes a letter annually to beachfront properties regarding sea turtle lighting standards and protections.

Background



Sea Turtles are protected by the US Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the 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: The 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 1st and October 31st; however, sea turtle nesting begins on April 1st in Miami Beach to account for the earlier Leatherback nesting season in our county, 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.

Starting at sunrise every morning during sea turtle nesting season, dedicated County staff identify, mark off, and where applicable, relocate 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.

On beaches where artificial lighting is visible, female adult sea turtles may be deterred from nesting and the hatchlings' journey to the sea can be disrupted as they can become disoriented, causing them to crawl away from the ocean and toward the artificial light. Hatchlings are attracted to the brightest source of light, which on an unlit beach would be the reflection of the moon off the surf. Beachfront lighting has been documented to negatively affect nesting females and often results in reduced or abnormal nesting activity. Visible light sources and the reflection of "glow" resulting from the cumulative effects of coastal lights contribute to this problem.

Turtle Nesting Protection Ordinance Amendments

On October 30, 2024, the Miami Beach City Commission updated the 18-year-old Turtle Nesting Protection Ordinance to strengthen the ordinance and further reduce the damaging impacts of artificial light on sea turtles. Highlights from the amended ordinance include provisions such as:

- Modifying the lighting standards for new and existing development to apply to lighting within

line-of-sight of the beach.

- Integration of interior lighting standards for hotels and commercial properties.
- Restriction of fireworks displays to offshore barges during the nesting season.
- Recommending the use of red or amber filters on vehicle headlights for vehicles authorized on the beach at night during the nesting season.

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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