



BREVARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

# TURTLE TALK

## SEA TURTLE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Vol. 14, No 1 - Spring 2010

<http://www.SeaTurtleSpacecoast.org>

### From the Chair's Perspective

by Mike Splitt, Board Chair



January 2010 brought the space coast a severe cold snap causing an historic sea turtle cold stunning event. Thousands of sea turtles were stranded state wide and thanks goes to all the STPS volunteers that helped save the lives of many of these sea turtles. Many of you put in hours of effort helping to find, rescue, and transport sea turtles to rehab facilities – and then to release them when conditions moderated late in January. The February general membership meeting was a special edition with a series of speakers presenting aspects about the 2010 cold stun event with the keynote by Karrie Minch (FWC, east coast sea turtle stranding coordinator) – she gave an extensive overview of statewide efforts and it was a great talk. This was a very informative meeting and the house was packed and kudos goes to the event organizers.

Let's hope we don't need to do this for quite some time! I made a presentation at the February meeting regarding the meteorology of the cold snap. Before the meeting, I had been hearing many in the public commenting on how global warming couldn't be occurring if we were getting record cold. As it turns out January 2010 average temperatures over the

globe were 1.5° F higher than the long term average and part of the continued warming trend! So what gives? January 2010 was cold for Florida, statewide it wasn't the coldest (only the 10<sup>th</sup> coldest since 1895). And, much of the southeastern 2/3rds of the county was colder than normal. But, if you look further north – the arctic has been extremely warm. The Arctic Oscillation has recently been in one of it's negative phases – shunting cold air southward, but warming the arctic. We also have been impacted by the El Nino this winter, which also tends to cool Florida.

What does this mean for the future of cold events in Florida? We will certainly see more sub-freezing cold snaps again, even in a warming climate globally – the more distant future is another story. Whether we get more cold snaps with the duration of the January snap is probable, but not on a very regular basis. This means that the organizations that helped sea turtles, manatees, and other imperiled species in Florida during this cold event will need to keep an eye to the future. We will have more cold stunning events to face during our lifetime of varying magnitudes. With the recovering sea turtle populations we may see larger numbers of cold stunned turtles in future events than we have seen historically as well. And for the global warming – should we root it on for the sea turtles?! I'm saying this in jest, of course – but I know some of you might be thinking this! ☺ For perspective, NOAA Climate Services ([www.climate.gov](http://www.climate.gov)) has a news story entitled “Rising Sea Levels Threaten Hawaii Sea Turtles' Nesting Sites” of note the articles states “Many of the Northwestern Hawaiian islands have low, flat coastal plains....They are already vulnerable to storm surges, and they could be totally inundated as sea level rises.”

**Board Elections:** Annual elections for STPS board members occurred in December 2009. Cindy Dolaway, Cindy Ullmer, Mike Splitt and Beth Stuckey were re-elected for terms on the Board. Also, Roger Pszonowsky is

now the Stranding Permit Holder. Thanks goes to Nancy Yates for years of great service in this position! Hugs to Nancy!

## Floridians Stunned

*By Roger Pszonowsky*

We humans could put on layers of extra clothes, but our local turtle residents weren't so lucky. Florida's temperatures remained cold for a long period, cooling off the lagoons that help moderate our local climate. Around January 4<sup>th</sup>, several turtles were rescued in the Mosquito Lagoon areas. The next day even more, and by Wednesday over 30 turtles went to rehab to get warmed. Word spread that we may have a problem. We did.

STPS got involved that Thursday, gathering supplies and volunteers to go to The Marine Science Center in Volusia County where turtles were warming up on the floor in bins. The cold stayed with us and as the lagoon temperatures dropped in our area, the office began to get busy. For the next week STPS volunteers and friends spent 12 hour days collecting, marking, warming, transporting, and then releasing turtles. This was happening all over the state.

Mike Splitt, STPS's own weather person, speaking at the February 2010 general meeting, explained how the weather teamed up to cool the turtles. Karrie Minch, Stranding coordinator for FWC, followed up with an excellent presentation of stories and numbers from the event. Some refer to the period as "When Florida Froze Over".

**Where and how many?** The entire state from the Panhandle to the Keys. Gulf county had 1730 turtles captured (530 died) and our county area had 1981 rescued (316 died). Statewide there were 4592 cold stunned turtles. Sadly 20% did not survive, but approximately 3700 were saved by volunteers and government employees.

Lots of new information on turtles (size, species, general health, location,

Fibropapilloma) found in the lagoons and bays was collected as each turtle was tagged. This will keep researchers busy for some time.

But the big story is how our non-profit, volunteer organization jumped into action when called upon. By providing transport, supplies, people power, overnight turtle lodging and warmth our organization shined. I thank all those that stepped forward. Stop by the office to see our "connection posters" which include most of the volunteers names. Be sure to check our web site for more data on nesting, strandings, events and the world of sea turtles.

## Statewide Cold Stun Figures

*Information provided by Blaire Witherington FFWCC*

The great cold stun event of 2010 first began in the Mosquito Lagoon on January 4<sup>th</sup> and lasted through January 14<sup>th</sup>. A total of 1981 sea turtles were rescued of which 316 died. This was quickly followed by St. Joseph's Bay in Gulf County, where 1729 sea turtles were rescued of which 530 died. Both the Mosquito Lagoon and St. Joseph's Bay are considered natural traps, as the escape route in both locations lies to the north, with no possible escape to the south. In all of Florida, a total of 4,592 sea turtles were rescued of which 948 died. Sea turtles were rescued as far south as Florida Bay along the shore of the Florida Keys.

<i>Statewide Totals</i>						
County	Total #	CM	CC	LK	EI	Dead
Escambia	29	26	0	3	0	22
Bay	69	67	0	2	0	57
Gulf	1,729	1,646	17	66	0	530
Pasco/Pinellas	105	96	1	0	8	21
Manatee-Lee	29	27	1	1	0	1
Monroe	171	88	35	0	48	0
St. Lucie/Martin	150	150	0	0	0	1
Indian River	321	321	0	0	1	0
Brevard/Volusia	1,981	1,941	39	0	1	316
Flagler/St. Johns	7	7	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,592</b>	<b>4,369</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>948</b>

One observation made was that loggerhead sea turtles may be more cold tolerant than greens. The searches, collection, processing and holding of turtles involved 107 organizations including STPS. The good news is that most of the turtles have been released. Special thanks to the Disney Corp. and also to the Sea Turtle License Plate Fund for emergency grants. There were also 200 manatee deaths in January, with 83 in the Indian River Lagoon, and 70 crocodile deaths reported.



## Florida Sea Turtle Permit Holders Meeting 2010

By Roger Pszonowsky

A small group of STPS members traveled to Tallahassee for the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Marine Turtle Permit Holders Meeting. Although the meeting is held by Florida FWC, there are many corporate and non-profit groups that donate time, money and goods. At most sea turtle workshops and meetings there is a silent auction of donated items to support Widecast.org, (Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network). This year raised \$3,450 toward travel scholarships for Caribbean turtle folks.

Many of the presentations included power point programs that can be viewed at <http://fmtphm.org/FMTPHM - Agenda.html> over the next few months.

Now to the good part.

Florida has 1237 KM of beaches statewide, of which 396 KM are index beaches. The nesting results are not final, but close enough: 55,333 CC nests (48% decline since 1998) trending down for 2009, 4398 CM (about the same as last year), 1744 DM (leatherbacks) up (11 fold increase trend), 3 Hawksbills and 8 kemps. Nesting through-out the Atlantic for loggerheads is trending down.

Dates for nest survey training were announced including March 9 at Harbor Branch. Please contact Dory Hughes for information.

Stranding (injured and dead turtle events) data included 1550 dead in Florida: 692 CC (trend is flattening), 672 CM (highest ever), 97 Kemps, 28 Hawksbills, 9 leatherbacks. Causes included 212 prop wounds, 209 emaciated. Fibropapilloma was reported in 189 CM turtles.

FWC worked hard at tallying numbers for the Great Cold Stunning event of 2010 to present at the meeting: Here are the highlights: state wide there were 4592 turtles affected and Brevard / Volusia accounted for 43% or 1981 turtles (1941 CM , 39 CC , 1 Hawksbill) and 316 Died (at last tally).

At the meeting I was impressed by how many non-profit and FWC personnel speak highly of STPS. We can be proud of its role in supplying volunteers to rescue (water and shore line) and to transport wherever they were asked to go. Supplies were brought in and sent out by lots of folks. Thanks to the nest survey and STERP programs.

*Florida Shorebird Alliance* is a new partnership of FWC, Audubon, USFW & local groups that hope to establish the same type of network of volunteers the sea turtles enjoy. Our stranding training and nest survey training will incorporate shorebird information and handouts because we share the same beach.

Florida Black bears: Increasing the conservation perspective of turtle focused people is an area FWC likes to explore and this

year David Telesco of FWC explained that there are only about 3000 bears, separated into 7 areas. Their diet is only 3% animal (usually dead things, so do not play dead with them) with the rest plants and insects. Best defense when confronted, Yell “Get out of here!”

Florida DEP’s Michael Barnett gave us insight to facts and battles looming. There are 825 miles of sandy beaches in Florida, 397.4 are critically eroded and 208.6 are managed. Battles important to beach habitat include: Singer Island plans for breakwaters, fabric geo tubes for erosion control, oil exploration and competition for offshore sand resources. Citizens need to weigh in with opinions to their representatives and the Army Corp of Engineers.

There were other reports on studies of genetic distribution, nest site fidelity, updates on the need for HCP (Habitat Conservation Plans), satellite tracking of neonate loggerhead turtles and a glimmer of hope provide by a study that shows nesting may increase in 10 years of so.

So if you check <http://fmtphm.org/FMTPHM - Agenda.html> over the next few weeks, you can learn about those studies and reports. It’s always good to increase our knowledge of sea turtles: You never know what questions those school kids will ask.

### **STPS Turtle Walk Program**

Training dates for the walk program will be firmed up as we get closer to the start. The first training program will be **Turtle 101** and will cover basic sea turtle biology and information including threats. This will be followed by **Walk Training** specific to the protocol STPS follows while conducting turtle walks with the public. All new members who wish to be guides and who have not previously attended these courses, must attend both classes. Classes are generally offered on both Saturday and an evening during the week for the convenience of the attendees.

Classes are expected to begin in early April. Those who are interested should check the STPS web site or with the office as the time frame gets nearer.

### **Brevard street Lighting Changes**

The Brevard County Department of Natural Resources, with a grant from the NFWS Marine Turtle Grant Program, was able to arrange for the following sea turtle affecting light changes:

- 192 street lights retrofitted (583 in the last 8 years)
- Plantings on stub streets to block light
- Native plant giveaways to 91 beachfront homeowners
- 29 light fixtures on private properties retrofitted
- Installed stationary louvers on 2 traffic signals in Cocoa Beach
- Distributed over \$6,000 in educational materials to businesses and hotels

### **STPS joins with Disney in the Give a Day, Get a Day Program**

*by Jennifer Bogdan*

The Disney Company is offering free admission for individuals and families that give their time and volunteer for at least one day in 2010. The Sea Turtle Preservation Society has joined with other organizations across the country to be part of this program. We know that many of you volunteer with us already, and we want to be able to reward our present and future volunteers.

*How this works:*

Visit [www.disneyparks.com](http://www.disneyparks.com) to register with and sign up for a posted volunteer opportunity. This confirms you to the specific activity. There will be a few activities posted for those who are not trained but just want to help out, however, many of our activities are listed as “scheduling to be arranged.” This was done to

make sure that trained STPS volunteers are the only ones that can sign up for certain opportunities such as, summertime nesting walks, nesting surveys, education programs, etc. For these activities, notify your STPS point of contact, just as you normally would, and fill out the form on the website that is associated with that volunteer opportunity. Once we have confirmed that you have signed up for that activity, you will go back into the Disney site and register yourself. Once the activity (trained or untrained) is completed, your service will be verified, and you will receive a free one-day park admission voucher to be redeemed with proper ID at the will call window at the front of the park. The ticket can be used for entry to one of the four theme parks in Orlando, FL (Magic Kingdom, EPCOT, Disney's Hollywood Studios, or Animal Kingdom) or one of the two parks in Anaheim, CA (Disneyland or Disney's California Adventure). For those of you that may already be Disney Passholders, Disney has also made concessions for you, and those are listed on the Disney website.

Unfortunately, past volunteer experience is not valid for this promotion. Also, there is a one ticket per person per year maximum. While we appreciate many of your regular volunteer efforts (and we would love you to continue volunteering with us), only the specific opportunity that you signed up for will count for the Disney promotion. You must be over 18 to sign up on the website; however you can sign up as many as 8 family members (over the age of 6). All family members must volunteer to receive tickets. STPS may have age restrictions on certain volunteer opportunities. As of right now, Disney has only made 1 million tickets available for this opportunity, so once the tickets run out, the promotion is over. But as for right now, sign up, volunteer, and get a free ticket. If you have questions about the promotion and requirements, check [www.disneyworld.disney.go.com](http://www.disneyworld.disney.go.com). If you have specific questions about STPS involvement with the program, email us at [volunteer@seaturtlespacecoast.org](mailto:volunteer@seaturtlespacecoast.org).



## **Brevard County Beach Renourishment**

An area of beach from Spessard Holland North Beach Park to just north of Indialantic is currently receiving sand which is being pumped in from an offshore source. The same stretch of beach, called the south reach, was renourished in 2005 and before that in phases between 2001 and 2003. Much of what was pumped in 2005 has washed away, a year ahead of expectations. The company must complete the work by the start of sea turtle nesting season, May 1.

## **STPS Reimbursement Policy**

*By Buddy Braunlich / Treasurer*

Over the past few years STPS has expanded its activities. These growth areas include doubling the nest survey area, developing a STERP program, purchasing a vehicle to support the stranding activities, and increasing the number of educational presentations throughout Brevard County. With this growth, STPS has increased the number of "active members" to support these activities. Accordingly, with the increased activities, as Treasurer, I have seen the number of "requests for reimbursements of travel funds" increase. The STPS Board is in the process of writing a Travel Reimbursement Policy that will provide a structured guideline to volunteers regarding what activities warrant reimbursement and how the reimbursement process should be implemented. When the STPS Board approves the policy a copy will be available either via our web site or in the office.

We do not anticipate any major change to our “current practices”. As in the past, reimbursements will focus primarily on turtle transport. A primary goal of the policy will be to provide a written procedure that will be unambiguous and equitable to our STPS goals and our members.

## **STPS Upcoming Events & Presentations Calendar**

March 4: General Meeting

March 6: KSC All American Picnic

March 6: Beach Clean-up at Coconut Point Park

March 13: Girl Scout Jamboree, Wickham Park

March 13: Critters & Kids, Pt. Malabar Library

March 20: Brevard Zoo Annual Green Event

April 1: General Meeting

April 3: Beach Clean-up at Coconut Point Park

April 19: Suntime Methodist Preschool

April 21: Environmental Alliance, FL Air Academy

May 5: Viera Women’s Club, Conservation Fundraiser

May 6: General Meeting

May 8: Beach Clean-up at Coconut Point Park

June 5: Beach Clean-up at Coconut Point Park

## **General Meeting Speakers**

The STPS always strives to have meaningful and interesting guest speakers at the General Meetings. Previous speakers so far this season were Terry O’Toole representing Sebastian Inlet State Park in September, Jim Egan representing the Marine Resource Council of East Florida in October, Dean Bagley representing UCF in November, Virginia Barker and Mike McGarry representing Brevard County Dept. of Natural Resources in January, and Michelle Bauer representing the Volusia County Marine Science Center in February. The following speakers will appear at our continuing general meetings:

Mar. 4 - Pamela Shoemaker representing Brevard County Solid Waste Management and speaking on Plastics and other Trash.

Apr. 1 -Paula Berntson representing Brevard County Natural Resources, Environmental programs, and speaking on Beach Lighting, Beach renourishment, Code Enforcement.

May 6 - Martha Wolf representing the Florida Institute of Technology and speaking on Water Quality and Runoff, Ocean Pollutants.

## **STPS Donations Received**

The STPS thanks Patrick and Barbara Roth, Duncan and Barbara Bailey, Capital Indemnity Corp., The Sea turtle RV Club, The Brevard Paralegal Organization, Kenneth Hale, , and Mara Hixon for their very generous donations.

## **Turtle Talk Welcomes Your Calls and Letters**

This newsletter relies upon the generous contributions of STPS volunteers and members. If you have an article you would like included in this quarterly newsletter, please submit it for consideration in the next publication.\* Drop your article off at the Turtle Office or submit your article with your name, telephone number and mailing address (or internet address) to the following:

Sea Turtle Preservation Society  
 Attn: Newsletter Editor  
 P.O. Box 510988  
 Melbourne Beach, FL 32951-0988  
 E-mail: [stps@bellsouth.net](mailto:stps@bellsouth.net)

## **Turtle Talk**

The Sea Turtle Preservation Society (STPS) is a not-for-profit organization incorporated in the State of Florida, whose dedicated members are permitted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work with endangered and threatened marine turtles. STPS relies solely on donations from the public, its members and the efforts of volunteers.

**The purpose of STPS is to educate the public about marine turtles and the environmental**

**niche that they occupy. STPS reaches thousands of people each year through lecture presentations and exhibits at area events and through guided walks during the sea turtle nesting season.**

**Turtle Talk is published quarterly for members and supporters of the Sea Turtle Preservation Society. To contact STPS, call (321-676-1701). To write: P.O. Box 510988, Melbourne Beach, Florida, 32951-0988. E-mail: [stps@bellsouth.net](mailto:stps@bellsouth.net)**

The Turtle Office is located at 111 South Miramar, Indialantic, Florida. Office hours are 11am to 5pm Monday through Saturday. Monthly meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at 7:30pm at the Melbourne Beach Town Hall, with the exception of June, July and August. Visitors are always welcome.

## **Board of Directors**

Buddy Braunlich, Jerry Heyes,  
 David Hochberg, Dori Hughes,  
 Brandon Smith, Christin Stewart,  
 Cindy Ullmer, Cindy Dolaway,  
 Nancy Yates, Mark Petrillo  
 Mike Splitt, Beth Stuckey,  
 and Donna Braunlich

Newsletter Editor: Jerry Heyes

**Sea Turtle Preservation Society**  
**P.O. Box 510988**  
**Melbourne Beach, Florida 32951-0988**  
**USA**

**Membership Form**

- Student \$10. Annual       Contributor \$50. Annual       Benefactor \$50. Annual
- Individual \$15. Annual       Lifetime \$200.       Donation \$-----
- Family \$25. Annual       Endowment \$300.

- New Member*       *Renewal*

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your tax deductible check to: **Sea Turtle Preservation Society**

I am interested in volunteering:  **Yes**     **No**

My interests and talents are: -----