

## Sea Turtle Protection Program



The beaches of southwest Florida have long been an important nesting area for the loggerhead sea turtle. Loggerhead sea turtles emerge from the Gulf of Mexico to nest on our beaches each summer (May 1 to August 31). Females crawl from the Gulf late at night to lay their eggs. Loggerheads deposit, on average, 100 ping pong ball sized eggs in each nest. They usually lay two to three nests per season on a 2-3-year cycle. The eggs begin to hatch after about 60 days. As the sand begins to cool (usually late evening) the hatchlings scratch their way out of the nest emerging as a group. As the young turtles exit the nest, they instinctually seek the Gulf by looking for natural light reflecting off the water.

Upon reaching the water, hatchlings begin their journey to the Atlantic Ocean. The first days of their lives are spent swimming offshore. Once there, the tiny loggerheads crawl into mats of drifting algae called sargassum. They spend the first few years of their lives passively drifting on their oceanic rafts feeding on almost anything they can catch in the sargassum. After a few years, the juvenile loggerheads leave their protective nursery and move to inshore feeding grounds where they spend the rest of their pre-adult lives. Ultimately, at the age of 12 - 30, adult, female, loggerhead sea turtles return to the beach of their birth to lay nests of their own. Very few sea turtles survive to this point. Estimates predict that about one in a thousand hatchlings survive to adulthood.

The Collier County Parks & Recreation Division is an active participant in an ongoing statewide nesting sea turtle population study. As a permit requirement for beach nourishment, the CCESD is responsible for the monitoring of [23.7 miles of beach](#). Biologists patrol the beaches each morning looking for the tell-tale signs of sea turtle nesting. Each sea turtle emergence is examined, and determinations are made as to whether the crawl is a nest or a false crawl (a non-nesting emergence). Each nest is marked with stakes and warning tape and, if necessary, covered with a metal screen to protect it from predators. After a nest has been marked, it is carefully monitored for signs of tidal inundation, predation, and finally hatching. After hatching, the Collier County biologists excavate the nest and determine how many hatchlings emerged from the nest. The eggs are counted and a hatching success (the number of hatched egg shells in relation to the total number of eggs) is calculated for each nest.



If you would like further information about sea turtles, please call Collier County Parks & Recreation at (239) 252-4000 or email staff by [clicking here](#).