

Dead sea turtle found on Okaloosa Island

The number of turtle strandings on Panhandle beaches so far this year has not been unusual, state officials say

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OKALOOSA ISLAND — A dead sea turtle washed up on the beach on Okaloosa Island Tuesday morning after an apparent run-in with a motorboat.

The young adult loggerhead turtle was discovered by walkers on Air Force land about a quarter-mile east of Beasley Park. Biologists with Eglin Air Force Base's Jackson Guard completed a report and sent it to the National Marine Fisheries Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"It happens on a regular basis but I wouldn't say often," said Eglin environmental spokesman Mike Spaits. "It's unfortunate that it occurs at all, but it's one of those things that accidents happen."

The turtle measured 2.5 feet, but its weight was undetermined because a portion of the back was missing. The sex was also unknown.

Biologists found a large gash along the width of the turtle's shell that was consistent with a boat propeller injury, Spaits said.

Loggerhead turtles, the most common sea turtle in Florida waters, are classified as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

According to the FWC, there were 11 sick, dead or injured loggerhead turtles stranded in Okaloosa County in 2005. Researchers reported that the number of strandings in the Panhandle so far in 2006 has not been unusual, said FWC spokeswoman Jess Brown.

FWC encourages anyone who finds a dead or injured turtle to call (888) 404-3922.

Turtle protection has been on the minds of many with the start of nesting season on May 1. Dredging projects in the area have been mindful of turtles after were killed recently.

Beach restoration efforts in Navarre were delayed when the project was shut down after a Kemp's ridley sea turtle was killed in early April. Walton County and Destin's beach restoration project has killed a loggerhead and a Kemp's ridley since it started in February.

Inspectors from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reviewed the Walton County project last week after the Kemp's ridley death and left a list of suggestions to tighten up protection. The Corps found that the Liberty Island dredge was powering up prior to firm contact with the bottom and that dragheads were being lifted off the bottom before being turned off.

The Corps also recommended closer coordination between the dredge and the turtle trawling boat and to avoid an area where the trawler hits an obstruction.

"These operational procedure modifications should minimize the potential for additional sea turtle takes," the Corps said in an e-mail to the Walton County Tourist Development Council.

So far, the trawler has netted and relocated 42 turtles.



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Keri Landry with Eglin Air Force Base's Jackson Guard measures a dead loggerhead sea turtle that was found Tuesday on Okaloosa Island east of Beasley Park. The small adult turtle, which had a gash across its shell, was apparently killed by a motorboat.

MORE INFO

People who discover dead or injured sea turtles should call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (888) 404-3922.