



Beach Safety - Driving on the Beach

NEW BEACH DRIVING RULES

The St. Johns County Commission passed a revised and modified Beach Ordinance on Tuesday March 27, 2007.

This ordinance means fewer beach driving hours, fewer beach miles open to vehicles and earlier beach closing times. The program goes into effect in 30 days.

In a motion by Commissioner Cyndi Stevenson, the measure passed 3-0, with Chairman Ben Rich and Commissioner Ron Sanchez absent.

In this second -- and final -- public hearing, the commission accepted a new horseback riding monitoring plan but heard little public comment.

The ordinance, if not passed, would have threatened all beach driving. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service required that county ordinances regarding a sea turtle and wildlife protection plan must be in place by May 1 or there will no beach driving allowed at all.

Total costs associated with implementing these new rules are about \$400,000, county documents said.

In summary, the new rules would:

- **Limit** beach driving hours from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. from May 1 to Oct. 31, the entire sea turtle nesting season.
- **Reduce** the length of beach available for driving from 14.7 miles to 10.2 miles.
- **Require** development of a rut removal program so adult and baby turtles don't get turned the wrong way in ruts left by vehicles.
- **Increase** enforcement on North Beach and South Beach with four new ATV patrol vehicles and personnel.
- **Require** distribution of public awareness materials.
- **Elevate** 125 trash receptacles on posts.
- **Restrict access** for vehicles to Porpoise Point so the natural dunes have time to re-nourish.
- **Pro-active beach lighting program** to put out the lights and includes St. Augustine Beach. Since Baby sea turtles crawl towards light, any lights visible from the beach would make them crawl away from the ocean.
- **The horseback riding program**, presented to the commission by Ellen O'Brien of Ponte Vedra Beach, designates certain persons as Master Equestrian Beach Guides allowing these guides to lead up to 10 individuals on beach rides. They may also issue a day pass for beach riding after the applicant completes "habitat conservation familiarization. General beach riding permits and day pass permits may also be issued.

First and foremost, driving on the beach is no different than driving on any other County or State Road. As a matter of fact, for the purposes of driving, the beach is considered an extension of State Road A1A and by be designated Beach A1A. All the rules of the road apply to driving on the beach. Only licensed vehicles are permitted and seat belts shall be worn at all times when the vehicle is in motion. The beach speed limit is 10 MPH and this limit is enforced. Beach Patrol is done by St. Johns County Sheriff's Deputies and PSA's, using marked patrol vehicles and ATV's. In addition, unless otherwise posted, ALL beach driving is limited to southbound only.

Safety cones are placed on the beach daily to separate the beach into a driving/parking area and a people only area. Parking is permitted only to the west of the designated driving area. Only sunbathers, families, children and pets on a leash are permitted to the east of the safety cones. Folks enjoying the beach should not have to be concerned about a vehicle meandering through their space. **NO VEHICLES ARE PERMITTED TO DRIVE OR PARK TO THE EAST SIDE OF THESE SAFETY CONES.**

You should also be aware that there are many soft sand areas and when you enter the beach, you do so at your own risk. Many vehicles can get stuck in the soft sand, including at some beach entrances.