



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
OUTER BANKS GROUP



Fort Raleigh National Historic Site

Wright Brothers National Memorial

Cape Hatteras National Seashore

1401 National Park Drive

Manteo, North Carolina 27954

IN REPLY REFER TO:

N16 CAHA

NOV 25 2009

Mr. Pete Benjamin
P.O. Box 33726
Raleigh, NC 27636

Dear Mr. Benjamin:

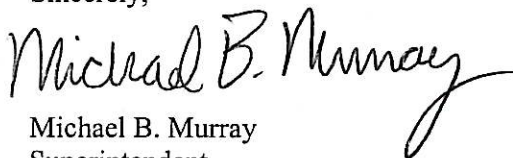
Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) would like to request an exemption to the current Biological Opinion which requires sea turtle nests to be expanded to the waterline on day 50-55 of incubation. While this is standard protocol for all nests located and protected at CAHA, during the 2009 nesting season, staff found a nest that was laid on October 7, 2009, just north of Ramp 49 on Hatteras Island. It is unknown whether the nest was laid by a green or loggerhead sea turtle.

At CAHA, the sea turtle nesting season typically occurs from mid May to the end of August. Patrols for nests are conducted between May 1 and September 15. During 2009, a loggerhead nest was found on September 15, which resulted in continuing patrols past the required time in order to ensure that any additional late nests were found. This practice resulted in locating the October 7 nest. Unfortunately, due to decreasing ambient temperatures, the October 7 nest is unlikely to hatch. If the nest does have hatchlings, they will be collected and taken to the Gulf Stream by boat due to cold ocean temperatures.

Given the amount of maintenance that expanded closures require, the possibility of winter storms or high tide events, and the unlikelihood of the nest having success, CAHA is requesting that the expansion date be delayed to day 80 of incubation (December 26). Day 80 was chosen as the expansion date since all nests laid at the end of October did not hatch until day 80 or later. The nest will be checked daily until day 90, as is normal protocol. If any signs of hatching are noted, an expanded closure will be installed immediately. A preliminary excavation will be held on day 90 (January 5), which is standard for all late season nests. If the nest is determined to be alive on day 90, then the nest will be left in place and the expansion maintained until the nest hatches or is considered dead. The nest will continue to be checked daily.

We have already consulted with Matthew Godfrey, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission sea turtle biologist about this nest. He is in agreement that the expansion data can safely be delayed until day 80 or even day 90.

Sincerely,


Michael B. Murray
Superintendent

