

Loggerhead nesting boom is on

This could be a record-breaking year for loggerhead turtle nests on north county beaches, officials from the Loggerhead Marinelife Center say.



Bill DiPaolo

The lowest loggerhead nest count with only 4,492 nests was recorded by LMC in 2007. There has been an overall increase in the number of loggerhead nests documented each year ever since.

In 2012, LMC documented a record-setting 11,525 loggerhead nests. If this year's loggerhead nesting stays strong, LMC officials expect 2016 to be a record-breaking loggerhead nesting year.

"In the early 2000s, we were seeing a decline in loggerhead nest counts, but since 2007 we've seen an increasing trend. With this being such a long-lived species, we cannot be cer-

tain why these numbers are changing. That is why long-term monitoring is so important for further study," said Dr. Charles Manire, LMC's director of research and rehabilitation.

The news is not always as good during the sea turtle nesting season, which starts March 1 and runs to Oct. 31.

Tropical Storm Erika in 2015 swept away sea turtle nests, eroded beaches and dumped seaweed on north county beaches. Loggerhead officials counted 1,044 loggerhead nests and 128 green turtle nests lost due to Erika.

LMC volunteers and officials monitor about 10 miles of coastline from Donald Ross Road north to Jonathan Dickinson State Park.

Sea turtle nests and crawls are marked using GPS units by LMC officials and volunteers. Some nests are marked with wooden stakes and monitored during incubation.

More than 1,000 sea turtle nests have been marked this

season. Nests are checked daily for signs of hatchling emergence, erosion, tampering or disturbance by predators. The data provides information on the number of hatchlings produced.

Five Florida counties – Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin and Palm Beach – are the most important loggerhead nursery areas in the Western Hemisphere, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Harming or harassing sea turtles, their nests or hatchlings is illegal. Sea turtles are protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1972 and Florida Statute Chapter 370.

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