

Nest Leader / Team Management



Last Updated 2024

The Pleasure Island Sea Turtle Project is a 501(c)3 organization comprised of volunteers of all backgrounds, working within federal and state guidelines, dedicated to the conservation of all sea turtle species, through all stages of life (from nest incubation to hatchling to adult) through education and hands on conservation.

During nesting season (May 1st through August 31st) we patrol from the southern end of Kure Beach to the northern end of Carolina Beach (including Freeman Park).

Our Mission is to ensure the preservation and protection of threatened and endangered sea turtles.

**PISTP volunteers work under NCWRC permit 26ST09 held by Jennifer Hufham.*

"Our differences—the richness of all our unique views, experiences, and backgrounds—can help create stronger conservation outcomes". Renee Johnson, WWF Senior Director, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



First, The Basics... a quick summary of a PISTP nest...

1. Nest leaders are called when the patrol team identifies their nest, to help find the eggs and move it if needed.
 - Sometimes nest leaders are lucky enough to get a call in the middle of the night to come see their turtle nesting on the beach! This is a rare incredible magical moment!
2. Volunteers are notified of nest team signups for each nest as they are identified.
3. Nest prep is scheduled for day 50 of incubation.
4. Nest teams monitor (sit) their nest, interacting with the public and educating curious beachgoers about what we do (sea turtle conservation).
5. Hatch!!! *(happy dance, and sometimes happy tears)*
6. Excavation approximately 72 hours (3 days) after hatch.

Proper Staking and Marking

- When a nest is identified, eggs are verified, and a DNA sample is taken (this tells us where else this mama is nesting).
- To protect the nest from predators, orange plastic netting is placed over the nest, and is covered with sand, as it is a visual cue to the fox. For nests that have coyote problems, we use a special wire cage also.
- Eight stakes are installed around the perimeter of the nest, and flagging tape is tied on to mark off the nest area.
- Flagging tape will loosen over time in the beach wind. Check on it to make sure it is secure throughout incubation time. Remember that well tended nests are a reflection on the project and helps to ensure protection of the nest.



PISTP Policy On Nest Sitting

- Per NCWRC guidelines – In situations where nests are incubating on beaches that have regular foot or motor vehicle traffic, the nests must be marked with adequate buffer zones to avoid incidental crushing. Each nest should be marked such that a 50-foot buffer zone is allowed on all sides of the nest during incubation.
 - Each nest's buffer zone (perimeter) will be determined at the nest prep, and will vary depending on the landscape and walkways near the nest.
- Each nest team monitors (sit) their nest, and educates curious beachgoers about sea turtle conservation.
 - PISTP volunteers are to follow NCWRC guidelines . Sitting away from the nest (*closer to the middle of the beach, outside of the marked off perimeter) minimizes noise at the nest and allows easier interaction with the public.



Waiting For The Hatch! Nest Sitting – Part 1

- Nests tend to hatch around day 50-55 in hot dry weather, and around day 60-70 in cooler weather or shade.
- Incubation times vary depending on depth of the nest, shade over the nest, type of sand, over-wash, rain, and location on the beach. There are many factors affecting incubation times... please be patient!
- One nest leader must be on site each night of active nest monitoring after day 50. Each nest team should plan on about 2 weeks for their nest (this varies depending on time or year, weather, location of nest, etc.).
- Active nest monitoring after day 50 typically lasts for 1 to 2 weeks, and is from 6/7pm until 10/11pm or later each night. This will vary depending on the amount of beach activity, lights, etc. The busier the beach is, the longer you may need to stay.
 - PISTP will provide each nest/team with its own google sheets calendar for team members to schedule their time taking care of their nest. This is a very useful tool for teams to make sure there is sufficient coverage at their nest.
- This is to ensure your nest is left with a dark quiet beach after most beachgoers have gone for the evening.
- Let your eyes adjust to the darkness and you will be able to notice changes to the surface of the nest... remembering that we do NOT use any lights... **even red lights.**

Waiting For The Hatch! Nest Sitting – Part 2

- Nest leaders will select volunteers from the nest team to perform certain functions, such as crowd control, runway monitor, counter, etc.
 - If you communicate clearly, and engage with beachgoers throughout the process, your crowd control issues will be minimal.
- Everyone on the team should be prepared to explain what is going on, and educate visitors on safe viewing. Have a few team members on point to explain what is going on, and where visitors can watch from a safe distance. Visitors at your nest are usually just curious and excited, so keeping them in the loop will work in your benefit, as they will become great turtle protectors for you!
 - Turtle talks are the best way for volunteers to get some great info to share on sea turtle conservation.
 - New volunteers are encouraged to sign up for the 1st nest in KB & CB for special on-site training & education.
- If you see a depression, don't panic! Even if you see heads start to emerge, you should still have time to CALMLY alert your team and get them in place down both sides of the runway.
 - Don't let this exciting moment stress you out... No yelling... Take a deep breath... it's going to be amazing!
- After the last baby is in the water, stay by your nest for a bit in case more trickle out. Continue to sit the nest for stragglers for 2 more nights, and you will excavate your nest on the 3rd evening at 7pm.

Disorientation

v/s

Misorientation

Disorientation means one direction due to a specific light source. These turtles usually do not make it to the water without intervention.



Misorientation means swirly and a little lost, not one exact direction, sometimes due to multiple light sources or other issues. These turtles usually make their way to the water eventually.



All must be documented so we can provide data to the state to help implement lighting ordinances.

How to Handle a Crowd

- Crowd control during a hatch is easy if you and your team are prepared beforehand... this is when you and your team educate bystanders on what to expect, where the perimeters are, where they can be, and how they can help (*by kneeling not standing*).
 - Keeping visitors in the loop works wonders, as they will feel like part of the process, and **educated visitors become fierce protectors of our sea turtles and oceans!**
 - Please remember most people don't know much about what we do, and we will never scold anyone for something they don't know. This is your opportunity to engage with them!
- It is our job to get turtles to the water safely, while ensuring a great experience for visitors. Take a deep breath, and remember this is a very rare and special event to see. Don't panic and lose the magic of what's happening. Yelling at someone is a failure to communicate on your part, and makes the entire project look bad.
 - However, if someone at your nest is intoxicated or otherwise threatening, do not hesitate to contact PD. Our PD on both beaches are wonderful.



Remember, for many people, a hatch is a once in a lifetime experience. Invite them to hang out for a bit... this is also a great opportunity to promote the PISTP [Adopt-a-Nest](#) program!

Excavation Procedures

- Three days after emergence, the nest cavity must be inventoried for data to provide to the state. Excavations are a major event on our beaches, and our chance to shine as a project.
- To prepare for inventory, make sure your team members are clear about their duties ahead of time. You will need 2 to dig, 2 to count, and 1-2 to help pull sand out of the way as the nest is being emptied.
- The rest of the team will interact with the crowd and answer questions. They can also go around showing a hatched eggshell, allowing people to see it up close... a very exciting alternative when there are no hatchlings left in the nest to release.
- Categories counted are: Hatched, Unhatched, Piped Live, Piped Dead, Live Hatchling, Dead Hatchling
- To begin, gently scoop sand out of the nest, following the soft sand to guide you into the nest cavity. Use your fingers to loosen the sand to carefully free any live hatchlings. Live turtles will begin to make their way to the ocean immediately.
- Once the inventory is completed all items are placed back in the nest cavity and sand is packed back over it. Decomposition of these items provide nutrients to the sand for the health of future nests.

These little hatchlings are sometimes weaker than those from the hatch and deserve to be treated with care. They are not to be passed around or posed with. This does not represent the protection we are there to provide. We only handle hatchlings when absolutely necessary.



Hatchling Release



- As the nest inventory is being conducted, any live hatchlings still in the nest are released, to crawl down the same runway path their siblings used on their way to the ocean.
- Sometimes these hatchlings need to crawl a little to wake up, get their lungs functioning, flippers moving, and of course to set their compass (imprinting). They should be allowed to make their way to the water on their own, even if it takes a little while. Remember they have been stuck in that nest for 3 days.
 - Some of our hatchlings won't make it, but it is our responsibility to give them their best chance... and their best chance is in the water.
- There will need to be plenty of room along the shore for this event. Crowds can close in fast when there are hatchlings to see. In order to make this event safe for hatchlings and enjoyable for humans your team must be in control. You will need to set up a perimeter at the tideline (with team members on either end) for crowd control.

Return Of Nest Materials

- After your nest is done, it's time to get the equipment cleaned up and ready for the next nest. All materials must be returned in good condition, clean and bundled the way it was prior to use.
- Silt Fence: Carefully loosen the sand around each stake of the silt fencing, taking caution not to yank it and break the stake (this makes the entire roll unusable). Once the fencing has been pulled up, sweep off sand from both sides and roll up in one direction only. Tie leftover pieces of flagging tape around it to keep it rolled up for the next team.
 - For those who have a nest with a long runway, this task can seem daunting due to the amount of material needed... however, when the whole team works together, this process can be completed easily in just a few minutes.
 - You may even find excited bystanders jumping in to sweep sand & roll up material with you just to be a part of the process! (Don't let the work make you forget how lucky we are to be a part of such amazing events!)
- Stakes/PVC Poles: Sand needs to be knocked out of the pvc poles, and all orange tape removed from poles and stakes.
- Tools: Rinse out your bucket, and place mallet, orange tape, gloves, and any other PISTP tools, in it.



Photography

We have all learned so much from amazing photographs and videos of sea turtles nesting and hatching. And of course, who wouldn't want to share this amazing moment? We get it! But there are things to consider while this is happening...

- PISTP volunteers have a job to do, and this always comes first. We are here to protect sea turtles and get them safely to the water. If you are busy watching them through a lens or screen, you are not focused on the safety of our turtles, your team, or visitors. This does not represent the protection we are there to provide.
- Flash/Lighting – All lighting can disorient hatchlings, harm their eyes, and confuse nesting mamas. If you are unsure how to turn it off, put the camera away. Being fully present in the moment is so much better, and you will see more by letting your eyes adjust without the screen light in your face.
 - Always turn the brightness down on your phone screen, and be sure to move away from the nest and runway when you use it. Hatchlings brand new eyes are sensitive, and even the smallest bit of light can pull them in the wrong direction.
- Photos of nests should not include landmarks or homes in the background. When taking pictures at your nest, be sure to either get the ocean in the background, or point the camera down so the nest location is not visible.

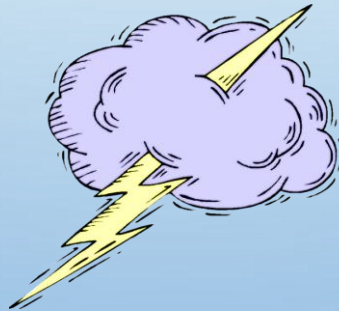


Storms / Hurricanes

Summer storms are inevitable. Be prepared to communicate with your team for last minute weather changes and have a plan in place ahead of time.

- Evaluate the area in advance for possible shelters for pop-up thunderstorms. Introduce yourself and get to know the neighbors so you have a porch to run under if needed. This is a valuable thing to have in place!
- Sometimes excavations have to be done early/quickly due to dangerous conditions. Safety first. This instruction will come from the Permit Holder at that time.
- We do work in the rain, but not in lightning, so there may be times when nest sitting happens in your car in the nearest parking lot. Rotate with your team to check on your nest, but only when it is safe to do so.

Hurricanes mean lots of prep-work... this will be covered if needed at that time.



Is the Mama Turtle in there with them?

FAQ's from tourists...

Does the nest only hatch during the full moon?

- ✓ *Nests can hatch anytime, day or night, any lunar phase.*

What time will the nest hatch?

- ✓ *Usually in the evening, sometimes in the wee hours of the morning, occasionally during the afternoon.*



What happens if it is raining when they hatch?

- ✓ *Hatchlings will get wet on their way to the ocean.*

Can you call me when the nest hatches?

- ✓ *This can take as little as 5-10 minutes, so our volunteers are busy making sure hatchlings make it safely to the ocean.*

Fox / Coyote Management



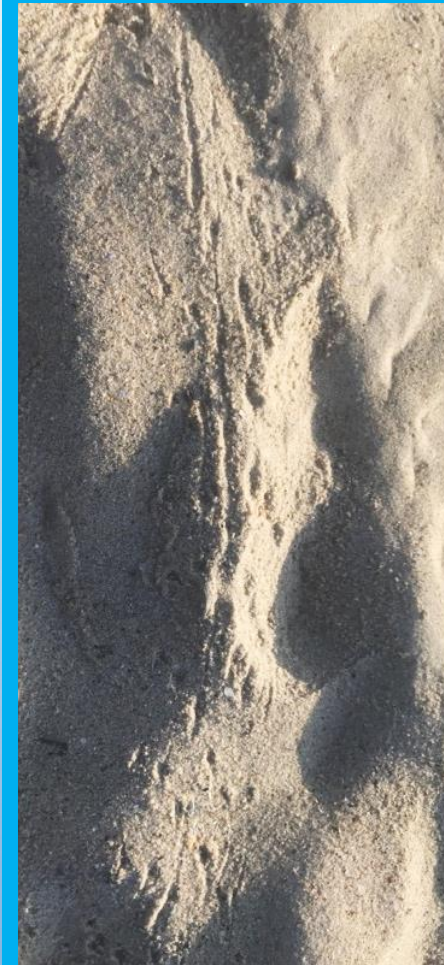
- We are all aware of the unfair reputation our fox and coyote have here (and everywhere). Here is PISTP's stance:
- Relocation only ensures the animal ends up in another territory facing attacks and starvation, and unfortunately, foxes that are trapped must be destroyed.
- The beach is home to many animals, and they are all important. Development that has destroyed natural habitat has had a devastating effect on our wildlife, and our job is to protect them all, as everything is connected.
- We can ensure our nests are as protected as possible. Extra stakes have helped, and we use wire cages to deter coyote.
 - Keep an eye on your nest for footprints or digging/scratching... remembering this is **their** home.
- PISTP volunteers are NOT to chase or throw things at these (or other animals). Metal cages are the best protection if a fox or coyote is interested in your nest.
- Coyotes are being seen on the beach more frequently. For your safety, volunteers are not to sit nests alone at night.

Ghost Crab Management

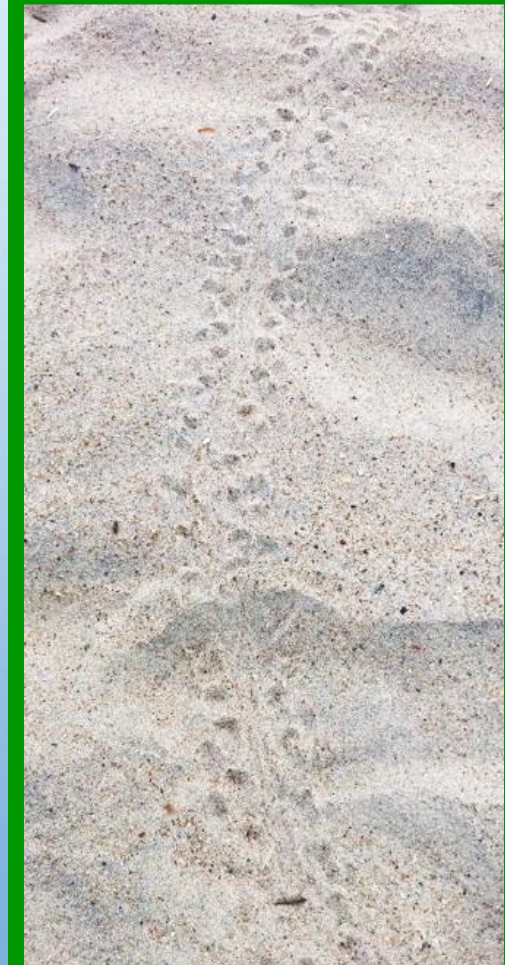


- Yes, it is true... a ghost crab will try to snatch a baby turtle, and have been known to dig right down into the nest.
- Keep an eye on your runway for crab holes or tracks, as this is a prime spot to for them to sneak into.
- If you have a crab take up residence in your nest or runway, gently pack the hole with sand to encourage the crab to move on. Hopefully, crab will give up and move elsewhere.
- We do NOT kill ghost crabs, they are an important part of our beach ecology!!!

Crab Tracks



Hatchling Tracks



How to handle DOGS... We all love them... but...

- If your nest has been dug into, please notify us immediately. We will need pictures so we can determine if we are dealing with a dog or fox/coyote.
- If someone brings a dog near the nest, you may talk to them away from the nest about what we are doing.
- Most people are already aware of the town ordinances for dogs on the beach... so, unless the dog is off leash or the owner is letting it get too close to the nest/runway, there is no need to engage about this rule. Of course we will call 911 for major issues.



YES, dogs on the beach can be a nuisance, and yes there are town ordinances... BUT...



We are not going to run down the beach chasing after them...

WE ARE NOT THE POLICE

Your Team: You Are In Charge Of...

- Building a great team: Communicate respectfully with your team and include them all. A typical Team includes 8-10 members, and several of them will be new volunteers.
- WELCOME other volunteers to your nest... just remember your team will be the only ones allowed to work inside the perimeter of the nest and runway.
- If someone has been a no-show or otherwise uninvolved, please let us know asap so we can determine next steps. We want to make sure you and your active team members have the support you need!
 - Team members looking for nest updates, that have not been active team members, will be reminded that being an active team member on the beach is the way to get nest updates.
- Please speak up if a volunteer is displaying behavior that does not adhere to PISTP principles. The size of our project has grown tremendously, as has our local community, tourist, and social media following. We must remember our actions on the beach represent the project and have long lasting affects.



Side Notes

- There will be bugs. Be prepared by applying your preference of bug repellent before arriving on the beach. Never use bug spray or any other chemical near the nest.
- If you have a daytime depression or other signs of emergence, you may need to be at your nest during the day. Sunscreen, water and a hat/visor are a must to have on hand for these times.
- No tents or umbrellas are to be placed over the nest. This alters natural incubation, which we are not allowed to do.
- Our Policy on the Media: Participating in news/media interviews is to be conducted by the Permit Holder, unless you have been specifically appointed to do so... by the Permit Holder.
- When visitors want information about how to see turtles or become a volunteer, please give our [Facebook](#) page, [website](#), and/or [email address](#)... not cell phone of the permit holder.



Parking

- We are all representatives of PISTP, which means we are in the public eye, and must follow all laws/ordinances. PISTP volunteers are to park only in legally designated parking spots.
- We do not always have the luxury of nearby parking or vacant lots, sometimes parking is a few minutes away from the nest. Carpooling is helpful, as is getting to know the neighbors.
- Parking can be tricky sometimes, and PISTP is not provided with parking passes for everyone.
 - **CB paid parking is free in the morning until 9am, and in the evening after 8pm.** We will continue to work with the town and the parking company to have temporary parking passes for access to the nests. These will be numbered and signed out at the nest prep.
 - **KB paid parking is free in the morning until 8am, and in the evening after 6pm.** We will have PISTP volunteer vehicle identification flyers for those helping to verify nests. These are not passes, but may be helpful in the event of overlapping time verifying a nest during patrol.





Congratulations!

WooHoo!!

- Your nest is done and your job is complete!
- Every nest is a different dynamic, so don't be discouraged if your hatch wasn't textbook. What counts is that you were there for your babies, and did the best you could for them.
- Hopefully you will have enjoyed your adventure, made lifelong friends, and learned a lot from this hands-on experience.
- Leading a nest is a unique and rewarding experience. Our nest leaders are some of the hardest working volunteers in the project, and we are grateful for their commitment to protecting sea turtles on our beaches!