

PROMOTION OF SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION IN BAY COUNTY, FL THROUGH PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND TELEVISION ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Abstract

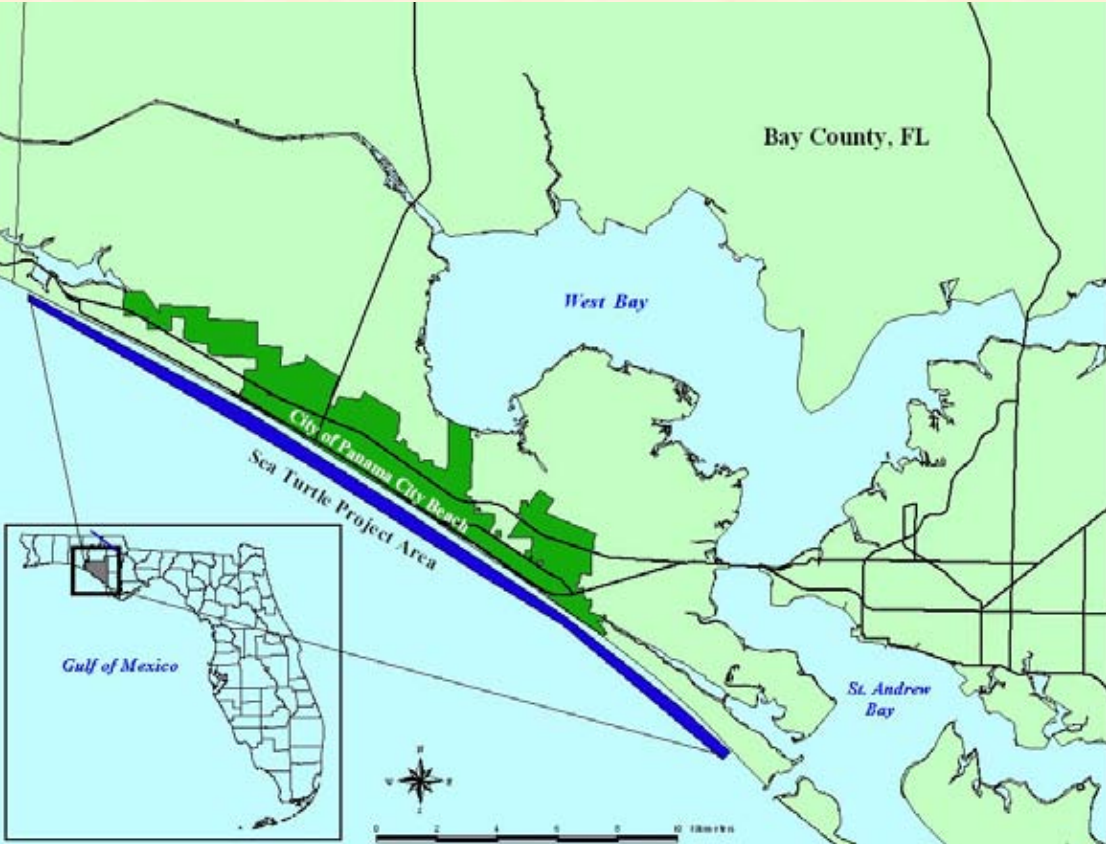
The St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association (RMA), a Florida non-profit organization, has protected sea turtle nests on Panama City Beach since 1991. In 2003 the Florida Sea Turtle Grants Program funded RMA to further its educational efforts to protect sea turtles on local beaches. Panama City Beach is an ideal place to educate people about sea turtles, because this area hosts over three million visitors annually, and the tourist season in this part of Florida coincides with the turtle season. Print materials describing the turtles that nest on our beaches were produced and distributed to beachfront homes, condos, businesses, and schools. Fliers describing Bay County’s new lighting ordinance to protect sea turtles were distributed to property owners in the affected area. Additionally, a Public Service Announcement on sea turtles and lights, entitled “Sea Turtles Dig the Dark,” was aired on local TV stations.



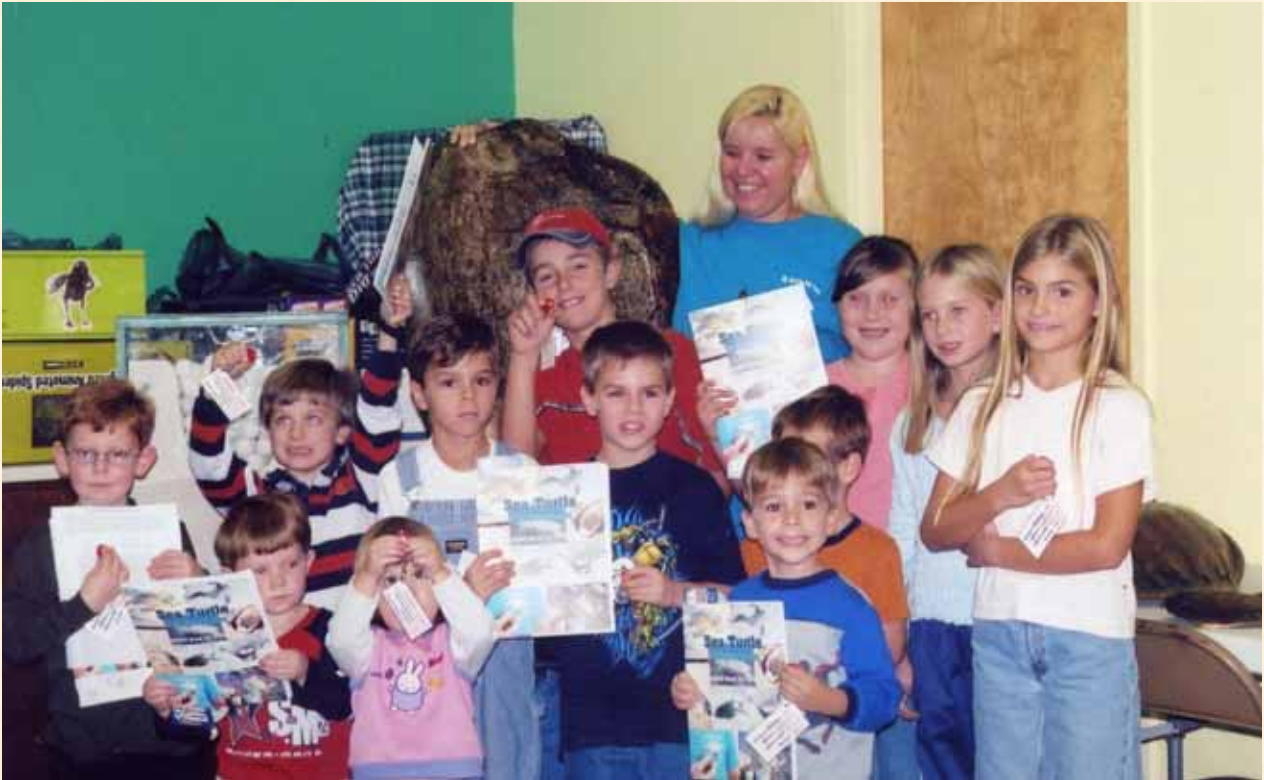
Developed shoreline and white sand beaches of Panama City Beach, FL

Introduction

Bay County, located on the Gulf coast of northwest Florida, supports nesting by threatened loggerhead and endangered green turtles. The loggerheads in this area are part of a genetically distinct sub-population nesting in northwest Florida. The RMA Turtle Watch program surveys 29 km of beach daily during the May-October nesting season. The major threats to nesting and hatchling turtles on local beaches are due to artificial lights from beachfront developments, and trash, lounge chairs, and other items left on the beach at night.



Map of project area: Bay County, FL



Home school students ages 3 -10

Methods

To raise local awareness of sea turtle issue, we developed educational material specific to beachfront property owners, school children, and the general public.

BEACHFRONT PROPERTY OWNERS & BUSINESSES

- ✦ Table tent with general sea turtle information for placement in motel and condo lobbies, guest rooms, and tables in restaurants.
- ✦ Door hanger with general sea turtle information for placement on guest room doors in condos and motels.
- ✦ Flier with information on Bay County Lighting Ordinance for distribution to beachfront property owners in the affected area.

SCHOOL CHILDREN

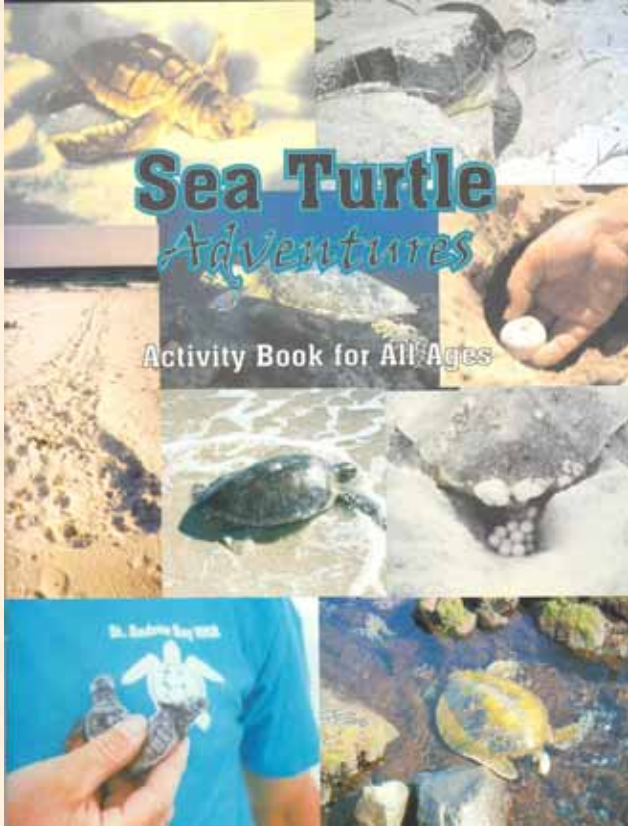
- ✦ Activity book for distribution to local elementary schools, home-schooled children, and other groups focused on educating young children.

GENERAL PUBLIC

- ✦ Informational sign placed at public walkways to the beach with information on the Do’s and Don’ts of the sea turtle nesting season.
- ✦ Public Service Announcement “Sea Turtles Dig the Dark” informing local TV viewers about the threat of beachfront lighting.



Door hanger



Kids activity book

Results

Distributed 1910 table tents and 1910 door hangers to 9 condos and 2 hotels, and 592 table tents to 14 restaurants on Panama City Beach.

Installed informational signs at 43 public walkways along Panama City Beach.

Distributed 1000 activity book to 5 local elementary schools, Anchorage Children’s Home, Bay County Junior Museum, and civic groups.

Aired 173 spots of “Sea Turtles Dig the Dark” on local ABC and NBC affiliates during June -August 2004.

Distributed 250 lighting fliers to property owners in area covered by Bay County lighting ordinance.



Turtle Watch volunteers install informational signs at public access points



Patronis Elementary class

Lessons Learned

We teamed with the Panama City Marine Institute (PCMI) to help us prepare the informational signs for installation at public walkways. PCMI, an alternative school for troubled kids, combines standard classroom work with marine-related activities. The signs were framed and painted by PCMI students.

The activity book enhanced our “Adopt-a-Nest” program with the local school system. Turtle Watch volunteers give presentations to elementary classes prior to a field trip where the kids observe volunteers excavating a hatched sea turtle nest. The activity book is distributed to the kids during the presentation to help them understand the plight of sea turtles.

Distribution of the activity book was assisted by a local TV station, which conducted a campaign to promote recycling and environmental awareness among young people.

The Public Service Announcement (PSA) was tailored for local viewing with contact information for the Bay County Planning Department and the Turtle Watch program. These changes were made by a local media company, which donated its services.



Table tent



Restaurant patrons examine sea turtle table tents

Acknowledgements

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Visit our website:
www.turtlewatch.org

