



RESOLUTION

February 23, 2011

IN RECOGNITION AND PRAISE OF THE FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION, IT'S STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IN THE RESCUE AND RELEASE OF COLD STUNNED SEATURTLES IN GULF OF MEXICO

Whereas, The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is responsible and issues permits for activities involving sea turtles in Florida under authority granted to the state through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 6 of the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and all activities relating to marine turtles authorized under subsection 370.10 (1), Florida Statutes; and

Whereas, all five species of sea turtles off Florida's coast are listed as endangered and threatened requiring a permit to handle, rescue, transport and recover them; and

Whereas, sea turtles can tolerate water temperatures down to about 50 degrees, but when it drops below that, they become unable to swim and carry on other essential activities; and

Whereas, in January of 2010, following unprecedented below freezing temperatures for an extended period of time in Florida, over 1,700 sea turtles were cold stunned and had to be removed from St. Joseph Bay, resulting in mortality and an unprecedented volunteer rescue and rehabilitation effort; and

Whereas, as a result of lessons learned in the 2010 event, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission staff stocked up on supplies, improved communication, training and transportation protocols and a plan among volunteers and partner organizations, and were

generally on the lookout for sea turtles in trouble before they were reported, so when water temperatures dropped into the 40's in January 2011, FWCC was ready; and

Whereas, as a result of these efforts, three hundred and forty-two cold-stunned sea turtles, the majority being green turtles, were released into the Gulf of Mexico on January 19, 2011, and an additional twenty-five Kemp's Ridleys, also rescued from the cold, will be released at a later date, along with the green turtles that needed additional rehabilitation; and

Whereas, as a result of dedicated and prepared volunteers from St. Joseph Peninsula State Park and Buffer Preserve, Gulf World Marine Park in Panama City Beach, Florida's Gulfarium in Fort Walton Beach, St. Andrew Bay Resource management Association, National Marine Fisheries Service, University of Florida turtle researchers and local citizens, what could have been a sea turtle catastrophe turned into a marine wildlife rescue success story; and

Whereas, the Gainesville-based **Sea Turtle Conservancy**, is the oldest sea turtle organization in the world, and has been instrumental in saving the Caribbean green turtle from immediate extinction, as well as raising awareness and protection for sea turtles across the globe with nearly 50 years of experience in national and international sea turtle conservation, research and educational endeavors; and

Whereas, the Key West-based **Reef Relief**, a citizen education and advocacy membership organization dedicated to improving and protecting living coral reef ecosystems in Florida and throughout the world over the last twenty five years - where sea turtles live and feed, works to instill an attitude of stewardship in boaters, divers, fishermen and the general public to encourage them to take action in avoiding harmful practices of anchoring, waste discharge, fuel leaks, marine debris, and over harvest that can inadvertently harm our coral reefs and associated coastal and marine habitats and wildlife, and encourage and support ecotourism as part of sustainable community development that protects and preserves coral reef ecosystems.

Therefore, Reef Relief and the Sea Turtle Conservancy recognize and praise the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, its staff and the many volunteers, partner organizations and others that worked together in preparing and responding to the 2011 cold stunning sea turtle event and continue to monitor and respond to the health and well being of sea turtle populations and coral reef ecosystems in Florida and throughout the world, and ask all Floridians to do the same.



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