

Best management practices for operating vehicles *on the beach*



Operating vehicles, including ATVs, on the beach can destroy wildlife habitat and be harmful or fatal to wildlife. This is one reason that, in many areas, beach-driving is strictly prohibited year-round to all but authorized personnel. The eggs and flightless young of beach-nesting birds can be virtually invisible, especially from a vehicle. Sea turtles coming ashore to nest may be scared away by vehicles and hatchlings are vulnerable to being run over. Both adult and hatchling sea turtles can be disoriented by any form of artificial light, including headlights. Ruts made by vehicles can trap and disorient turtle hatchlings and baby birds. May through October is considered sea turtle nesting season. However, some species of sea turtles have been known to nest as early as February, and hatchlings can emerge from their nests as late as the mid-winter months. Beach-nesting birds may be active from mid-February through the end of August. Therefore it is best to avoid beach-driving whenever feasible and critical that everyone authorized to operate a vehicle on the beach during these periods of the year take the following precautions:

- Enter the beach only at designated access points and proceed directly to the hard-packed sand near or below the high tide line. Avoid driving on the upper beach whenever possible, and never drive over any dunes or over beach vegetation. If beach conditions require driving above the high tide line, avoid those areas with known sea turtle nests or shorebird breeding areas.
- Avoid the wrack line or areas of dense seaweed, which may contain sea turtle hatchlings or baby birds.
- Minimize ruts on the dry sandy beach by lowering tire pressure and using 4WD, particularly in front of sea turtle or bird nests.
- Drive slowly. Movement should be slow enough to observe any bird eggs, chicks, or sea turtle hatchlings in the vehicle's line of travel. Please be aware that recently hatched chicks often feed along the water's edge. They may freeze in place rather than run away when ATVs or other vehicles approach.
- Whenever possible, avoid driving on the beach at night.
- Do not park vehicles adjacent to nests or posted areas, and, if you must drive on the beach at night, turn headlights off when parking.
- If you observe a sea turtle crawling out of the surf, stop the vehicle and turn off all lights. No additional movement should occur until the turtle moves across the beach and begins digging her nest or moves into deeper water.

