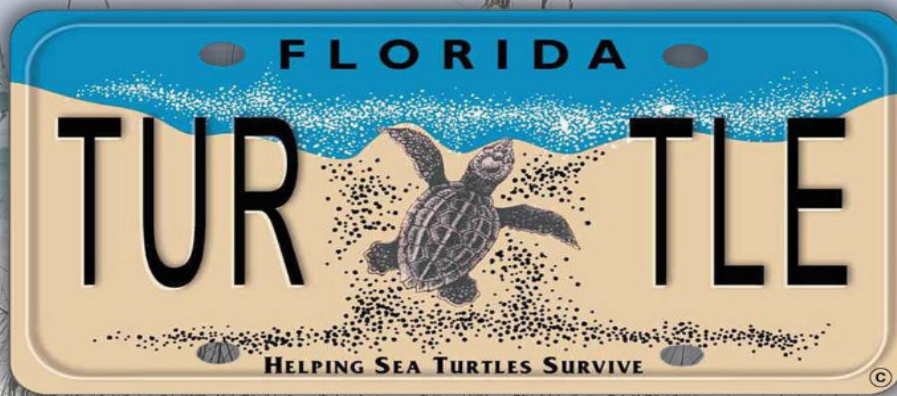


VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 2, 2025

Florida's Sea Turtle License Plate Funds Education, Conservation, Lighting and More



Funded by a portion of revenues from Florida's Sea Turtle Specialty License Plate, the Sea Turtle Grants Program (STGP) distributes funds each year to support sea turtle research, conservation and education programs that benefit Florida's sea turtles. In 2025, STC had three projects funded to support our conservation and education work in Florida. Continue reading to learn more about each project!

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) Big Bend Sea Turtle Education Initiative

STC is conducting an educational outreach program targeting schools and residents within the Big Bend region of Florida. Compared to other, more populated areas of the state, there has been a lack of sea turtle outreach efforts in this part of the state, yet there are critically important

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Tour de Turtles

... from cover

populations of sea turtles that reside along this coast. STC has been conducting an in-water turtle research program in the region for the last five years and has observed a strong desire by members of the public to know more about the turtles along this coast and the threats they face. Meanwhile, there are many human-caused threats to sea turtles here, particularly associated with boat-based and shore-based recreational fishing, which could be reduced through targeted educational activities. This project includes in-person presentations in schools, as well as presentations in local libraries and with civic organizations, expanding STC's reach to local students through distance-learning presentations. This program is providing local students with high-quality, accurate presentations and age-appropriate lesson plans that make sea turtle education fun, informative, and engaging. We are also reaching local adults, particularly boaters and fishermen who frequent these Gulf waters, with information that can help reduce impacts to sea turtles. The STC Big Bend Sea Turtle Education Initiative is bridging the knowledge gap and allowing students, parents, and other locals to learn about what is right in their backyard, and inspiring them to play important stewardship roles.



STC Big Bend Education Outreach Coordinator Evan Cooper conducts an in-person learning session with elementary school students in Florida.

Empowering Coastal Communities to Reduce Light Pollution

There is widespread consensus that poorly-managed artificial light on nesting beaches has a negative impact on adult and hatchling sea turtles. Many of Florida's coastal local governments have lighting ordinances to manage the impacts of artificial light that require the use of fixtures that shield the source of light, keep the light low to the ground, and use long wavelengths (560 nm or longer). However, enforcing these lighting regulations and encouraging coastal stakeholders to make these changes in the real world requires a targeted outreach strategy. STC is working to mitigate the impacts of artificial light on nesting beaches and build a foundation of conservation awareness by conducting statewide lighting workshops and outreach initiatives. The workshops are designed to educate code enforcement personnel and other stakeholders in the effort to reduce light pollution. STC also works with local hardware stores to stock wildlife friendly lighting to provide coastal property owners with easier access to

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, **Velador** translates as "one who stands vigil" —referring to turtle hunters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. STC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the world STC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors. The **Velador** is published for Members and supporters of the nonprofit **Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC)**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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Panama Education & Outreach Coordinator
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products. In addition, STC partners with real estate agents to provide new property owners with educational packets highlighting the ways they can protect the natural resources they are inheriting.



Through this project, STC will continue planning and conducting lighting workshops and further expand its home improvement store and real estate initiatives by engaging new active participants. STC will also conduct lighting workshops via Zoom and distribute educational packets to coastal real estate agents and educational displays to home improvement stores. Through this project, STC will have the ability to target audiences that can make tangible, positive change when it comes to darkening nesting habitat and protecting sea turtles.

Inspiring Stewards and Action Ambassadors to Conserve the Archie Carr Refuge

STC's programs at the Barrier Island Sanctuary Management and Education Center (BIC), located in the heart of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, have a responsibility to train the next generation of stewards of sea turtles and their critical nesting habitat. Sea Turtle School (STS) field study education programs have reached over 3,300 students in both Brevard and Indian River Counties. Most of these programs reach K-4 students. In 2022, STC also launched a new STS STEM Outreach program to provide additional opportunities for the STS attendees to be empowered to innovate solutions to sea turtle threats. To broaden the age range of our audience, STC built the Sea Turtle TECH STEM Mentorship

and Conservation Career Training Program to reach middle school and teen audiences during the summer. In 2024, STC successfully launched a new program during the school year, the STC Action Ambassadors (STCAA) to reach teens, ages 11-18 yrs. All of these programs show strong learning outcomes and pro-sea turtles attitude and conservation behavior shifts.



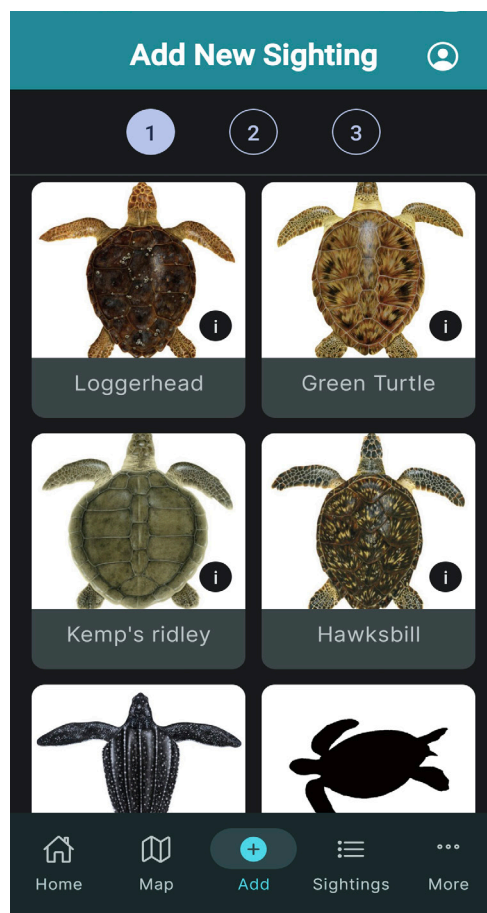
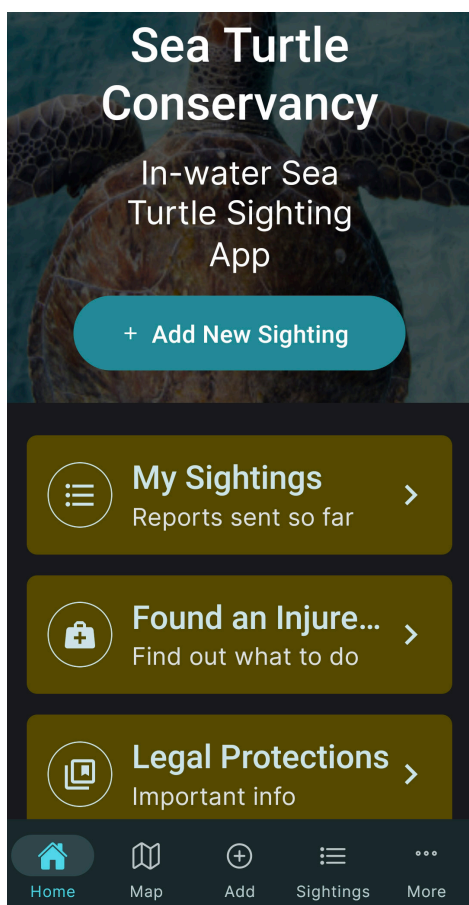
BIC Community Stewardship Coordinator Sarah Rhodes-Oni mentors a student as part of STC's Sea Turtle Tech STEM Program.

This year's funding from the Sea Turtle Grants Program is supporting STS, STS STEM Outreach, and the STCAA program. The STCAA is training teens in the steps to succeed in collaborative projects that create systemic change to conserve sea turtles and their habitats. Issues the STCAA addresses in the Carr Refuge include lighting hazards, trash removal, and dune stabilization. STC also received funding for the Community Stewardship Coordinator and a college intern to support the STS education program and bus scholarships, outreach programs, and to sustain the new STCAA program. All of these programs are building future stewards of the Archie Carr Refuge by training the next generation in the skills needed to conserve sea turtles and their habitats. 🐢

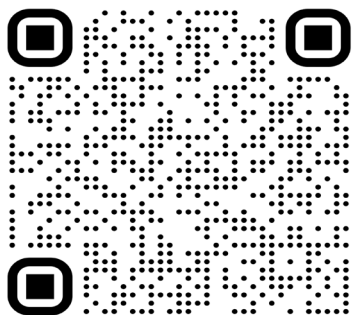
To learn more about the Sea Turtle Grants Program visit
www.helpingseaturtles.org

In-Water Sea Turtle Sighting App

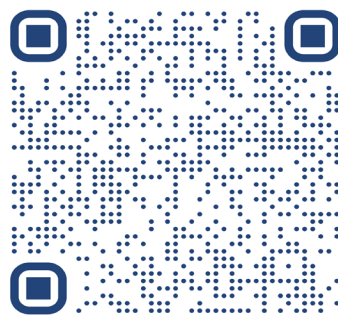
STC developed an app, the In-Water Sea Turtle Sighting App, that allows boaters, fishermen and others who spend time on the water to help researchers identify where sea turtles are congregating in the waters along the northern Gulf Coast of Florida, Bermuda and The Bahamas. The app is a citizen science type experience, allowing people to share sea turtle encounter information with STC and to help people identify the species of sea turtle they encounter. Users are able to upload the location, species (if known), behavior, and size of sea turtles they encounter while out on the water. The app includes example photos of the species to help users identify the turtle. If a user is able to get a photo of the turtle (without chasing or harassing the turtle), they can also upload a photo.



Users can register in the app, allowing them to receive communications from STC about issues impacting sea turtles or their habitats. STC is working to build a community of engaged turtle advocates along the north Gulf Coast of Florida, and invites users to get engaged with STC through membership or attendance at events. While the app is initially focused on the northern Gulf Coast of Florida, Bermuda and The Bahamas, it can be used by anybody, anywhere out on the water. Download the app for free using the QR codes below!



Apple



Google

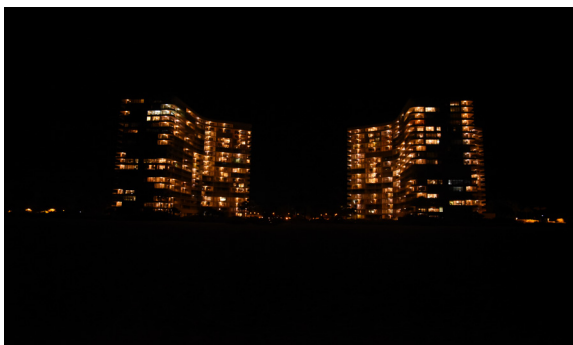
STC Concludes Six-Year Wildlife Lighting Project on Southwest Florida Beaches

In July, Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) completed its Phase III lighting retrofit project, which aimed to reduce the negative impacts of artificial lighting on Florida's nesting turtles, hatchlings, and nesting habitat and mitigate the impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. The project was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund.

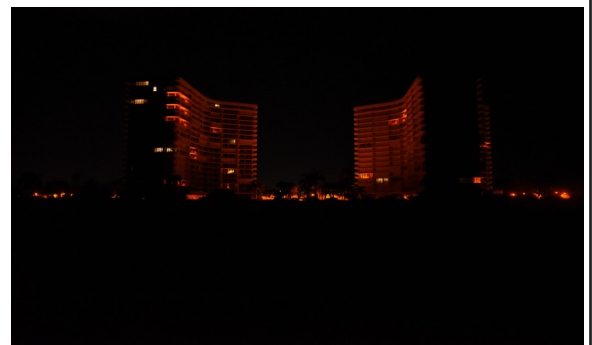
From March 2019 to June 2025, STC retrofitted problematic lighting on beachfront properties using wildlife lighting in Pinellas, Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, Lee, and Collier counties (see infographic, right). In addition to these accomplishments, during Phase III, STC coordinated dune plantings at eight retrofitted properties to further screen artificial light and stabilize the primary dune; empowered 552 code enforcement officials and building professionals to manage problematic beachfront lighting in their jurisdictions through interactive workshops; and educated thousands of people about wildlife lighting through educational literature, local and national media coverage of the project, presentations at international conferences, social media pages and website.

Through this project, STC built bridges between the conservation world and the lighting industry, resulting in better availability of wildlife lighting products in the target area. STC restored critical sea turtle nesting habitat in this region and beyond, which will decrease the number of hatchlings disoriented by lights and increase the number of turtles in Peninsular Florida. By establishing a conservation ethic among coastal communities in Southwest Florida through reducing problematic lights and educating key stakeholders, the Phase III lighting retrofit project will improve sea turtle survivorship for years to come. 🐢

By Stacey Gallagher and Rachel Tighe



STC retrofitted South Seas West, a large condo in Collier County, during the GEBF Phase III grant. STC replaced white, unshielded lights with wildlife friendly alternatives.



Phase III Lighting Retrofit Program

115 PROPERTIES RETROFITTED

Sea Turtle Conservancy covered the cost of wildlife lights on participating properties.



13K LIGHTS REPLACED

Problematic lights were replaced with shielded, long wavelength, amber LED lights.



15.1 MILES DARKENED

STC retrofitted neighboring properties to create an extended stretch of darkened beach.



66 % DECREASE IN FOOT CANDLES

Average light illuminance readings (foot candles) collected on the beach decreased.



100 % DECREASE IN DISORIENTATION

The disorientation rate decreased in front of 16 properties after they were retrofitted.



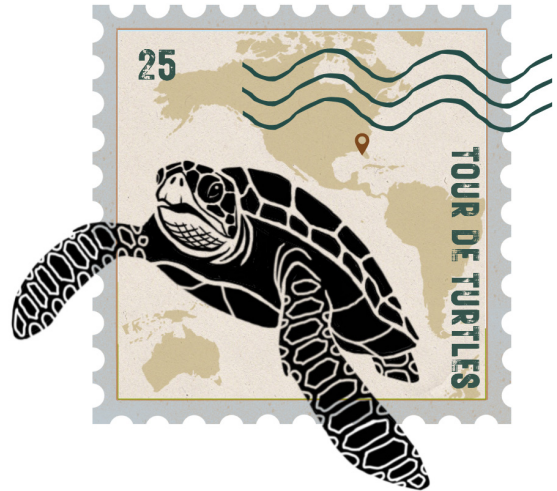
Funded by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.
To learn more about Sea Turtle Conservancy's Beachfront Lighting Program, visit www.conserveturtles.org.



Tour de Turtles

This summer, STC kicked off its 18th annual Tour de Turtles migration marathon! The Tour de Turtles is a fun, educational journey that follows the migration of sea turtles from their nesting beaches to their foraging grounds. Through the use of satellite telemetry, STC is tracking 22 sea turtles, including leatherbacks, loggerheads, greens and hawksbills to determine how far they swim. The one to swim the furthest distance by October 31 “wins.”

Each turtle is also swimming to raise awareness about the threats sea turtles face. These threats include light pollution, beach erosion, marine debris, oil spills, commercial fisheries, illegal hunting, invasive species predation, climate change and more. The data collected during the Tour de Turtles helps researchers, conservationists and governing agencies make more informed decisions about sea turtle conservation methods and policies. Since the launch of the Tour de Turtles in 2008, STC has tracked more than 250 turtles. Meet this year’s turtles and their sponsors below!



Leatherbacks

- Pebbles - Fahlo
- Tingum - Atlantis
- Riptide - Ripleys Aquariums
- Buddy - Buddies for Paws
- Seayonce - World Nomads
- Crush - Turtle
- Honu - Wow Wow Lemonade
- Turt Reynolds - NOGU
- Sol - CaribbeanSol
- Cuperina III - Cobre Panama



Chelonians

- Winnie - Hurricane Hanks & Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch
- Wassaw Will - UF Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research
- Miso Speedy - Gimme Seaweed
- Seartina - Certina
- Esmeralda - Shark Reef Aquarium
- Moana - Disney Conservation Fund
- Ariel - Disney Cruise Line
- Nugget - SEA LIFE Trust
- Clarissa Cobblecrumb - Gideon's Bakehouse
- Billy - Four Seasons Nevis
- Rush - Four Seasons Nevis
- Haven - The Turtle Hospital

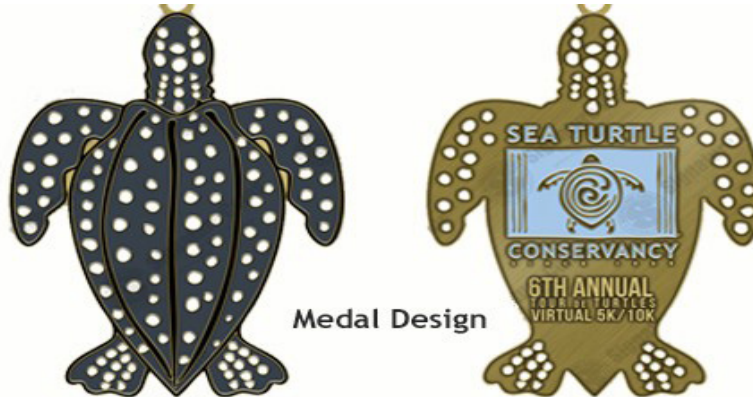


Photo credit: Celeste McWilliams

You can support the turtles by “adopting” them or sharing on social media to help raise awareness! Learn more about each turtle and follow their migrations at www.tourdeturtles.org. 🐢

Tour de Turtles Virtual 5k Race

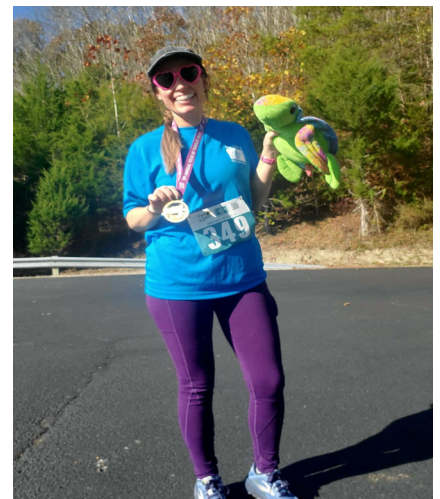
Join our sea turtles at the Tour de Turtles finish line by participating in Sea Turtle Conservancy's 6th Annual 5K/10K Virtual Race! The official event dates are October 30 - November 2 but since the event is virtual, you can participate any time you choose and support sea turtle conservation!



This summer, STC released 22 satellite-tagged sea turtles as part of our annual Tour de Turtles migration marathon. Why? Because sea turtles don't spend all their time at the nesting beach—they travel hundreds of miles, independently, through the world's oceans! To adequately protect sea turtles in all their habitats, we must learn more about their migratory patterns, their behavior at sea, where their marine habitats are located, how turtles use these different habitats, and the migration routes turtles travel between habitats.

This year's tracked turtles have already swum more than 50,000 km collectively and are nearing the half-way point of their own virtual migration marathon. What better way to celebrate their amazing journey than by hosting our own virtual race!

You can participate in our official virtual 5K/10K event by running or walking between October 30 – November 2, but participants are also welcome to join anytime, from wherever you are! Basic registration is \$45 per person and includes a special edition turtle medal and a runner's bib (while supplies lasts). This year, STC worked with FLOAT to provide the official Tour de Turtles Virtual Run Shirt. We will also announce special contests and prizes just for event participants as we get closer to the event dates. All funds raised will be used to support our ongoing sea turtle conservation and research programs! 🐢



Register online at conserveturtles.org/event/tour-de-turtles-virtual-run or email lexie@conserveturtles.org



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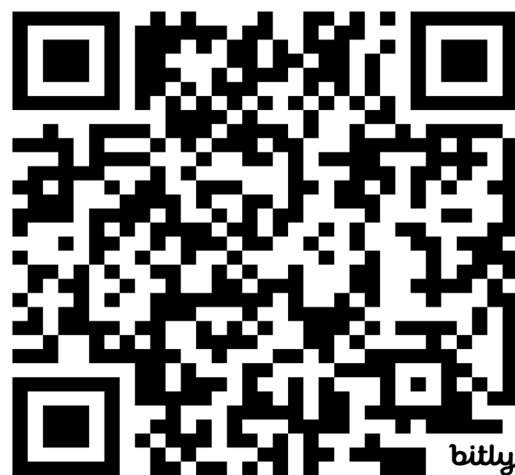
Printed with vegetable based inks on recycled paper that is
PCF and ECF.



Vote for STC in the Caribbean Green Awards!

Sea Turtle Conservancy and STC Executive Director David Godfrey have both been nominated for the E-Finity Caribbean Green Awards! Created to spotlight the region's most forward-thinking green initiatives, the awards celebrate those helping to shape a cleaner, more resilient future across the Caribbean. Sea Turtle Conservancy is nominated under the "Marine Conservation Award" category and STC Executive Director David Godfrey is nominated for the "Green Leadership Award."

Public voting for the 2025 awards runs through Oct. 31. Winners will be announced in mid-November. To vote for STC use the QR code on the right or visit
www.surveymonkey.com/r/T5XP889



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