



September 14, 2011

David Godfrey
Sea Turtle Conservancy
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Gainesville, FL 32609

Dear David,

I can't believe September is here already. For only the second time in 30 years of data collection we had a Green turtle nest here on Anna Maria Island. It hatched out at midnight and, lucky for us, we happen to be out on the beach. Unfortunately for our little Green turtles, at that moment a big lit up barge was anchored just off shore. This nest would have done fine without the lights from the barge, but we had to scoop them up & release them down the road. Nevertheless, I am sure that this rare nesting green turtle was attracted to our beach because of its new level of darkness.

As we were shepherding our little turtles to sea, my staff was saying, aside from this unusual disorientation from the barge lights, how few disorientations we've actually had this year. I went home and did a little calculating.

Sea Turtle Conservancy, with the grant from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Recovered Oil Fund, carried out lighting retrofit projects at six of our beach's big resorts and condos in order to bring old lights into compliance. In just the last few years alone, those businesses collectively caused the disorientation and death of approximately 5,000 hatchlings here on this island.

This year the number of disoriented turtles from those six businesses was.....**ZERO!**

With these turtle-friendly lighting projects in place, I feel like I won the lotto even before the nesting season started. I can't remember exactly how many adult and juvenile turtles were lost in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, though my recollection is that less than 5K actually washed ashore. We are way ahead of the game in terms of hatchlings saved here on just my island of Anna Maria. While hatchlings don't have the same "ecological value" as turtles that have reached the juvenile or adult stage, we at least are helping replace a portion of what was lost in the immediate aftermath of the spill.

You cannot know what this means to me and to my community. This is my 20th year working in sea turtle recovery. On this island we have merged Sea Turtle & Shorebird monitoring into one program. For each of these programs, improper lighting is the biggest hurdle. So with the projects you have been able to implement so far, we've gotten double the impact for saving both birds & turtles.



In 2001, we had no lighting laws in place here. My first job was to sit & write a different ordinance for each city. They all have different needs and enforcement. Over the past five years, with the economy being hit so hard, asking someone to put money into an environmental issue has not been well received. Your project helped overcome that obstacle at the properties that had some of the worst lighting problems.

It was not easy for me and Karen Shudes to decide who would get help for lighting retrofits during the first phase of your project – and who would not. I had to go back to some people and tell them we had to let STC move to other areas of the state because time was running out for the grant. Lucky for me, Karen helped teach me how to lay out a pretty good light plan. I was able to set some up for other properties and give them something to work toward for the future.

Another wonderful item that we uncovered is that we have lowered our carbon footprint big time. One of the largest condos on our beach has informed me that they have had a 70% drop in the electricity used in the common areas from tinting windows, replacing fixtures and bulbs. This was from a seven story building.

I could go on and on here.....isn't that fun!!!!!!

This September 19 will be one year from the time they sealed that BP well. It has been a scary, long year. There were days when I looked at the Gulf of Mexico and wondered if it would ever be the same. With your lighting projects making our shoreline darker and more inviting for sea turtle nesting, sometimes it seems even better.

In the name of the 5,000 hatchlings saved from disorientation already, we all give a big wave of a flipper and say thanks for the chance that Sea Turtle Conservancy and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Recovered Oil Fund gave them to survive.

In my world that speaks volumes.

Please pass this on.

Sincerely,

Suzi Fox

Director

Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch & Shorebird Monitoring