Habitat Conservation Plan

I. Endangered and Protected Species Information

What is the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

The ESA of 1973, as amended, is the most comprehensive and powerful Federal regulation protecting imperiled species and their habitat. It establishes the framework for minimizing harm to these threatened and endangered plants and animals and establishes guidelines to aide in their recovery.

What Federal and State Protected Species Occur on Walton County's Beaches?

The threatened loggerhead sea turtle regularly nests on the County's Gulf coast beaches, and the endangered green sea turtle occasionally nests here. Two others, the endangered leatherback and Kemp's Ridley sea turtles, occur in the Gulf of Mexico and could potentially nest here. The Choctawhatchee beach mouse resides along portions of the County's coastal dune system, and the piping plover spends its winters along our shoreline. All of these species, as well as several plants and numerous migratory shorebirds found along County beaches, are protected by the both the ESA and State laws.

What is Take?

"Take" is a regulatory term for harm that occurs to State and federally protected species and is prohibited under both the ESA and Florida laws. As defined in Section 9 of the ESA, take means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, kill, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such activity. Harm is further defined to include significant habitat modification or degradation that results in the death or injury to listed species by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, or sheltering. Harass is defined as actions that create the likelihood of injury to listed species to an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavioral patterns. Thus, both direct and indirect impacts, such as modification of habitat, constitute take under the ESA. The Section 9 prohibitions against take apply to any activity described above conducted by states, counties, municipalities, and individuals.