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North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Gordon S. Myers, Executive Director

September 8, 2009

Mr. Mike Murray  
 Superintendent, Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
 1401 National Park Drive  
 Manteo, NC 27954

*Mike*  
 Dear ~~Mr.~~ Murray,

This letter is to follow-up on previous discussions and comments regarding public access to Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA), including position statements by the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC). I appreciate and support your position in trying to balance natural resource conservation and sustainable human use of CAHA. The WRC recognizes your important mandates relative to the federal listing of individual wildlife species; however, unless all mortality factors impacting sea turtles can be addressed, options for regulating beach access that are theoretically designed to result in zero take of turtles on the beach are not viable.

Relative to terrestrial elements of sea turtle mortality issues, we continue to accept that lighting is of dominant importance; however, additional investigation and consideration has led us to conclude that at this point, it is not a practical or realistic expectation to use significant reductions in levels of lighting along Dare County beaches during turtle nesting season as a metric to allow additional beach access in CAHA. This concept was recommended in our addendum to the final report dated March 27, 2009 and thus it is necessary to submit this letter to clarify the current position of the WRC.

The WRC endorses development of public awareness campaigns to encourage voluntary community supported reductions of lighting impacts and we recommend continued collaboration with stakeholders to examine turtle friendly lighting ordinances that could incentivize reduction measures associated with new construction or renovations of existing buildings. We also recommend that the NPS continue to work with state and federal agencies to fully implement turtle friendly lighting within CAHA.


The WRC supports allowing daytime ORV driving during turtle nesting season until one hour after sunset and reopening as early as possible but not later than one hour after sunrise. We further believe there is high probability of success that collaborative development of an adaptive management nighttime driving plan could lead to reduction of nighttime driving restrictions including additional nighttime driving opportunities during portions of the months of May and September. This effort should be coordinated with the NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and other stakeholders very soon to ensure timely integration with the federal rulemaking process. I offer the assistance and cooperation of the WRC in these efforts.

An important component of a beach access management plan that appeared to have consensus potential near the end of the REGNEG process was routes and areas. Routes and areas were intensively discussed among the Integration Workgroup members; however, they were unable to develop a single recommendation to test consensus. It is the WRC position that Option A developed by the ORV access caucus represents a sustainable balance of human and wildlife needs. The WRC endorses the routes and areas specified in Option A.

Finally, much discussion relative to these issues has been based on extrapolated data from other locations. The WRC recommends that the NPS implement long-term monitoring efforts to specifically evaluate impacts to critical natural resources resulting naturally changing conditions as well as competing uses within the CAHA. Long-term monitoring will provide site specific baseline information that will equip the NPS with information necessary to implement adaptive modifications on an ongoing basis. The WRC is interested in collaborating with the NPS to accomplish research and monitoring necessary to expand the current knowledge base applicable to specific conditions that exist within CAHA.

I look forward to our continued cooperation on these important resource conservation and utilization issues.

Sincerely,

  
Gordon S. Myers  
Executive Director