

# Beach Closures for Sea Turtle Nests

By Larry Hardham

*Editor's Note:*

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The “National Park Service *Beach Access Report* for July 16, 2009” lists the following six sea turtle nest sites which will have full beach closures:

1. Approximately 2.3 miles south of Ramp 38 starting July 16 which is a non-ORV area and pedestrians will be allowed to walk outside the staked area behind but not in front of this closure.
2. Approximately 1.6 miles northeast of Ramp 49 starting July 18 and only pedestrians will be allowed to travel behind this closure but not ORVs. This closure will cut off about 0.1 of a mile of ORV access.
3. Approximately 0.9 of a mile northeast of Ramp 49 starting July 22 and both ORV and pedestrians will have access behind this closure.
4. Approximately 0.4 of a mile southwest of Ramp 49 starting July 13 and only pedestrians will be allowed to travel behind this closure but not ORVs. This closure will cut off about 0.8 of a mile of ORV access. The report says that this nest is “against the toe of the dune” which it is not. The 2008 Sea Turtle report refers to a 30-50 foot closure duneward from a nest (on page 4) with no further explanation. As this closure stands now there appears to be room for one-way traffic behind the closure as the NPS seems to be driving behind it. *More on this later.*
5. Approximately 1.4 miles north of Ramp 67 on Ocracoke starting July 18 and only pedestrians will be allowed to travel behind this closure but not ORVs. This closure is in an ORV area but very close to the current ORV closure line so not much ORV access is lost.
6. Approximately 1.4 miles north of Ramp 67 on Ocracoke starting July 13 and only pedestrians will be allowed to travel behind this closure since it is beyond the current ORV closure line.

The three nests that block ORV access will do so until they hatch and thus a total of about 0.9 of a mile of ORV access will be lost for a period of time.

Sea turtle closures are put in place 50-55 days after the nest is laid and remain up until the nest is excavated after it hatches. The warmer a nest is the sooner it will hatch and depending on location, this could happen soon after 50 days or later. Nests took an average of 59.7 days to hatch last year at the Seashore.

The distance for ORV corridors behind a turtle nest of 30-50 feet raises questions as to why this distance. I submitted to USF&W (following the November, 2008 Negotiated Rule Making meeting) in writing the following questions regarding this concept.

- Do vibrations in the sand affect incubation or hatchlings?
- At what distance can emerging hatchlings hear a passing car?
- At what distance can emerging hatchlings feel a car passing at 15 mph?
- And does either of these events alter their activity?
- How far away does a stationary light source have to be to disorient a hatchling? We were told that a moving light is not as disorienting as a stationary light.

***None of these questions have been answered yet!***

No one should walk or drive, even at low tide, in front of a sea turtle or bird closure.