



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hurricane Irma Update 67

Vegetation and debris on beach prompts double-red flag flying and vehicle access ramps to close

Winds and rain from passing tropical systems are pushing storm-related and vegetative debris onto Volusia County's beaches prompting beach officials to fly the double-red flag, which prohibits people from entering the water. Beach officials have also closed the vehicles access ramps due to the rough surf and debris removing almost all of the conservation poles, which have to be in place as part of the county's Habitat Conservation Plan.

Due to the high surf and debris, beach officials do not anticipate conditions being safe for water activities until Sunday. In the meantime, beach officials have already begun replacing conservation poles misplaced from the storm, allowing some vehicle access ramps to re-open as early as Saturday.

People walking on the beach should use caution, and as possible, help with picking up litter that has also settled on the beach. Place litter inside trash cans, as high tides tonight are anticipated to make it to the seawalls again, washing away anything placed on the ground.

According to beach officials, debris that has washed ashore includes lumber, pallets, appliances, driftwood, mangrove root systems, and a large amount of plastics. In addition, there are piles of seaweed that are two to three feet high consistently across our coastline located at or near the base of the dune or seawalls.

While the rough conditions and debris will temporarily limit beach driving, overall the vegetative debris will be beneficial material to help the dune regrow as it contains organic matter including mangrove vines, roots, seaweed and seeds that will help to re-vegetate baby dune systems. This vegetative debris also assists with trapping windblown sand, further assisting growth of baby dunes. Although over the next few weeks, the vegetation will not smell pleasant, it will not be removed from the beach giving our coastline it's best chance at repairing the damages from a month of Hurricane Irma, Maria, Jose as well as the King Tide. These baby dunes will help to buffer the coastline during future storms.

Sea weed also plays a vital role in the lives of young sea turtles as they struggle to survive in the ocean. Sea weed is home to many sea creatures seeking food and shelter, including baby sea turtles. When the sea weed washes ashore it can sometimes bring these young turtles with it – this is how these turtles have earned the name "washback" sea turtles." When the washbacks come ashore, they are vulnerable to dehydration and predation and typically do not have the energy needed to make the long swim back offshore to the floating sea weed beds. All sea turtles are listed as threatened or endangered, so it is imperative these young sea turtles be recovered and brought to care rather than left on the beach or placed back in the ocean.

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Beachgoers who find sea turtles on the beach should not put them back into the water. These young turtles should be taken to the closest lifeguard tower or station on a damp towel.

If conditions do not improve by Sunday, beach officials will provide another update and advise when the remaining vehicle access ramps will reopen. Likewise, if the situation improves sooner, beach officials will announce that the vehicle access ramps have reopened.

According to the National Weather Service Melbourne, breezy east winds combined with the lunar King Tide will continue to produce minor coastal flooding during high tide along Florida's east coast. A Coastal Flood Advisory is in effect from Miami-Dade to Volusia County, with a Coastal Flood Warning in effect for the St. Johns River and tributaries through Saturday.