Common questions

What authorizations do I need to mechanically beach clean?

To clean the beach using mechanized equipment, you need a permit from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. You may also need a permit from your county or city.

Where is shorebird nesting habitat?

Most sandy beaches in Florida have the potential to support imperiled shorebirds. They typically nest on open, sparsely vegetated beaches, and their nests are shallow depressions in the sand or shells. Their eggs and young are very well-camouflaged. These birds may move around in response to changing beach conditions such as wash-overs or nourishment projects.

Contact FWC's CWCI Coordinator at **Coastal@myfwc.com** for assistance determining which species may be found in your area.

When is shorebird nesting season?

- West coast of FL: February 15-August 31
- East coast of FL: March 15-August 31

Where can I find more information about reducing impacts to wildlife when driving on the beach?
myfwc.com/media/1339528/beach_drive_flyer_clr.pdf.

Who to contact

To find a beach-nesting bird monitor near you:
Shorebird@myfwc.com

Information on permits in shorebird posted areas:
Coastal@myfwc.com

In summary, the best beach management practice for shorebirds and other wildlife:

No mechanical cleaning. Leave wrack in place. Remove litter by hand.

- **Next best practice:**
  Limited mechanical cleaning, outside of shorebird nesting season (and following mandatory permit conditions to protect sea turtles).

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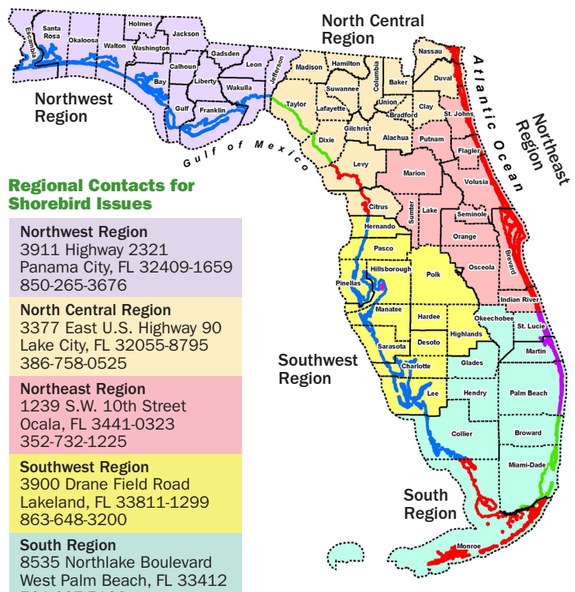
Shorebird breeding seasons and regional shorebird contacts



Regional Contacts for Shorebird Issues

Northwest Region
3911 Highway 2321
Panama City, FL 32409-1659
850-265-3676

North Central Region
3377 East U.S. Highway 90
Lake City, FL 32055-8795
386-758-0525

Northeast Region
1239 S.W. 10th Street
Ocala, FL 3441-0323
352-732-1225

Southwest Region
3900 Drane Field Road
Lakeland, FL 33811-1299
863-648-3200

South Region
8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

myfwc.com/shorebirds

Shorebird Breeding Season

- February 15 - September 1
- Spoil Islands Hillsborough Bay March 1 - September 1
- March 15 - September 1
- April 1 - September 1
- Spoil Islands and Estuaries March 15 - September 1
  Coastal Beaches April 1 - September 1

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Beach cleaning practices to minimize impacts to protected shorebirds

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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Beach-dependent shorebirds

Florida beaches vary widely in their wildlife value, habitat attributes, degree of human development and recreational use. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has developed the following recommendations, with assistance from partners, to aid coastal managers in choosing practices that yield clean beaches and minimize negative impacts to protected shorebirds and seabirds (collectively called "shorebirds").

Beach wrack and beach cleaning

Beach wrack, seaweed and natural debris that washes ashore, benefits wildlife by providing an important food source for migratory birds. Wrack also provides cover for wildlife and helps maintain coastal habitats. It is best for these species if wrack remains on the beach, but this can create a challenge for those who conduct mechanical beach cleaning.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issues state authorizations for mechanical beach cleaning. To ensure compliance with state and federal laws protecting migratory birds, mechanical cleaning must avoid the take of these protected species. The following management options should reduce the impact of mechanical beach cleaning on protected birds, while still allowing some cleaning to continue.

**It is important to note that the practices outlined here will reduce negative impacts to wildlife, but any impacts that do occur from beach cleaning may still violate state and federal laws protecting migratory birds.*

Beach cleaning practices for imperiled shorebird protection

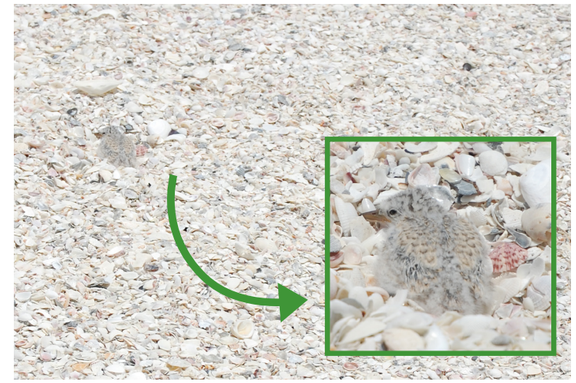
Most sandy beaches in Florida have the potential to support imperiled shorebirds, but not all beaches are used by these species regularly. On beaches that support imperiled species or important concentrations of wildlife, the FWC recommends practices to protect these species.

- Limit routine mechanical beach cleaning on beaches when imperiled shorebirds are nesting or migrating. Nesting seasons typically run from February through August on the west coast and March through August on the east coast.
- Remove human trash – preferably by hand – but leave the vegetative wrack in place to provide cover and foraging habitat for wildlife.
- Schedule organized clean up events outside of nesting or peak migration periods. The times of these important periods will differ for different sites.
  - *Contact **Shorebird@myfwc.com** to find local partners that can help determine the best times to schedule clean up events.*
- Promote "pack-in/pack-out" practices for garbage and the ecological value of leaving beach wrack intact.
- Use wildlife-proof garbage cans located off the beach to discourage predators and to reduce the need for service vehicles on the beach.

Exceptional events

Exceptional events that create a health risk may require removal of large amounts of wrack, such as high winds or storms, red tide or drift algae events. These activities require an administrative permit from the DEP, and the following measures to minimize impacts to wildlife should be taken:

- Wait for one full tidal cycle to pass. Vegetation may naturally wash offshore.
- Leave at least one-third of the fresh wrack intact, at the strand line in a natural configuration.
- During shorebird nesting season, a beach-nesting bird monitor should check the area for well-camouflaged nests or flightless chicks and take appropriate protective measures **prior** to vehicles operating on the beach.
  - *A **monitor** is experienced in recognizing beach-nesting bird behavior and will record and report those observations in accordance with FWC's breeding bird protocol. Contact **Shorebird@myfwc.com** to find out if there is a monitor in your area.*
  - *Shorebird nests are very well camouflaged and are not easily seen by untrained observers, even on foot Nests are difficult to see from beach-cleaning vehicles. Areas should be carefully walked by beach-nesting bird monitors before cleaning.*



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Mechanical beach cleaning for imperiled shorebirds

Use of mechanical beach cleaning equipment is discouraged on beaches with imperiled species. If mechanical cleaning is used, the following practices will help protect shorebirds:

- When possible, conduct mechanical cleaning only during times when shorebird nesting is not occurring.
  - Leave as much fresh wrack as possible in place — at least one-third — to provide foraging habitat and cover for migrating and wintering shorebirds.
  - Remove human-generated debris (plastics, balloons, monofilament line) in or near the wrack line by hand.
- If mechanical cleaning must occur where shorebirds are present during the nesting season, special precautions should be taken.
  - A **beach-nesting bird monitor** should check the area for nests or flightless chicks prior to vehicles operating on the beach.
  - Install symbolic fencing (sign posts connected with twine) at least 100 feet around breeding territory scrapes and nests to act as a buffer, provided the fencing does not impede public lateral beach access.
    - *Symbolic fence posting should be done according to Florida Shorebird Alliance guidelines, available at **flshorebirdalliance.org/our-work/posting.aspx**.*
    - *Posting should be coordinated in advance with your **FWC regional biologist**. Contacts can be found at **myfwc.com/Shorebirds**. If an area needs immediate posting due to eggs on the ground, you can post and then notify the FWC regional biologist in your area.*

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- Mechanical cleaning equipment should remain 200 feet from the symbolic fencing, or 300 feet from any nest, to reduce disturbance.
- Leave one-third of the wrack intact.
- Once nests are identified, limit mechanical cleaning to once per month until the first egg hatches.
- Once the first egg hatches, mechanical cleaning should stop until all chicks have fledged (i.e., are flight-capable) to avoid crushing flightless young.
- Mechanical cleaning may resume seven days after a monitor confirms the last chicks have fledged and no breeding or nesting adults are present on the beach.
- Permit holders are encouraged to advise DEP and FWC staff when installing symbolic fence posting. Permit holders will require DEP authorization if they seek to remove (at the end of nesting season) any vegetation that grows in the posted area during the nesting season.
  - *Contact FWC's Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative (CWCI) Coordinator, **Coastal@myfwc.com**, for more information.*

Beach cleaning options

Additional practices can help lessen the impact of beach cleaning on wildlife.

Option 1: If a property includes a long stretch of beach, zones can be created and managed for different purposes. Some areas may be identified as good for wildlife, while others may be reserved for recreation.

- Identify areas that could serve as a wildlife enhancement zone. These may be areas farther from facilities or access.
- Mechanical beach cleaning should not occur in the wildlife enhancement zones.
- Remove man-made litter in wildlife enhancement zones by hand. Do not enter posted nesting areas, even to remove litter.

Option 2: Limit the frequency of mechanized beach cleaning to once per month, year-round (still using **beach nesting bird monitors** during shorebird nesting times). Leave fresh wrack in place to reduce disturbance to wildlife and to retain the wrack's function as foraging habitat for shorebirds.