

# THE AUGUST ISLANDER

Next meeting August 15 in the Civic Hall at the SGI Firehouse, 324 E. Pine Avenue

Social 6:30 p.m., Meeting 7:00 p.m. The speaker will be Lisa Lehnhoff, (See article below)

*BYOB and a covered dish*

## Feds want lights out for turtles

(The following article appeared in The Apalachicola and Carrabelle Times and is reprinted with permission – Editor)

By [LOIS SWOBODA](#)

*Published: Tuesday, July 2, 2013*

Stiff penalties may be in store for as many as 140 St. George island property owners who fail to remedy problems with lighting that disorient sea turtles during nesting season.

At the June 18 county meeting, commissioners were told the US Fish and Wildlife Service may invoke the Endangered Species Act on St. George Island.

County Planner Alan Pierce said he received a letter from USFW last month, asking the county to be “more diligent in protecting nesting sea turtles.” The letter requests a meeting with commissioners to discuss sea turtle protection.

“Last year there were a number of sea turtle

disorientations and the USFW wants the county to work to diminish those numbers,” Pierce said.

Franklin County, with one of the largest populations of nesting sea turtles in the state, has wrestled for years with problems with disorientations of both adults and hatchlings due to improperly shielded residential and commercial lighting. Since all sea turtles are considered to be at risk of extinction, turtle deaths resulting from improper lighting may violate the Endangered Species Act.

Bill Mahan, Franklin County extension agent called USFW the “the 600-pound gorilla in the room waiting to pounce.”

Mahan said the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is cooperating with the county to use outreach to educate island property managers and owners.

About a dozen property owners and managers on the island attended a June 19 sea turtle workshop at the St. George Island

firehouse led by Kelly Roberts, an FWC wildlife biologist. Roberts said she was delighted because she had held county wide workshops where only five had attended.

Last September, USFW threatened to fine island properties with lighting that disorients sea turtles to the tune of \$5,000 or more for each violation. A letter from USFW said the county sea turtle protection ordinance, passed in 1998, is not being properly enforced and that the federal agency would invoke the Endangered Species Act if the county continues to ignore its own ordinance.

A second letter received last month repeated that warning.

Dan Garlick, owner of Garlick Environmental Services Inc., said USFW can and will levy stiff fines in order to enforce the Endangered Species Act.

“In my experience what often happens is they impose the fines, which can’t be paid and are not (See *Turtles*, page 2)

*(Turtles, from page 1)*

paid by the violator but the whole process gives the community a black eye,” he said. “It’s very bad from a public image point of view.”

According to the Act, civil penalties can be up to \$25,000 per violation. Criminal penalties are not to exceed \$50,000 in fines and a year of imprisonment. Lisa Lehnhoff, a spokeswoman for USFW said the amount of the fine is largely at the discretion of the USFW enforcement officer.

“There might be one disorientation with more than one hatchling involved and the officer could choose to treat it as a single violation and fine, say, \$1,000,” she said. “If a second disorientation occurs involving the same property, the officer might fine the owner for each turtle affected.”

Over the last five years, the Endangered Species Act has rarely been invoked for violations involving sea turtles except where there was criminal activity, for example the sale of turtle meat or purposeful destruction of a nest. Charges against property owners causing disorientations appear to be unprecedented. However, there is funding

available from the Deepwater Horizon settlement targeted at improving and protecting sea turtle nesting areas and it may be that the infusion of this money makes enforcement of the law more feasible.

USFW agents returned to the island in May and conducted a survey that identified 140 residences that may be out of compliance. A copy of this list was attached to the USFW letter sent to Pierce. The list includes beachside and first tier properties from Sunset Beach, on the extreme eastern end, to Bob Sikes Cut on the west.

Businesses are not included in the list; about half the properties on the list appear to be vacation rentals but many are private homes.

In a telephone interview, Lehnhoff said, “The county has had an ordinance since 1998 and (USFW) has been active in trying to bring people into compliance. This is just a continuation of that initiative.”

Donald Imm, a USFW project leader, said USFW’s sea turtle effort “isn’t as much about sea turtles as the lifestyle on St. George Island. People have enjoyed the beach there for many years.

Being able to coexist with sea turtles and their nests is an important part of that. At some point, it could get so developed local people won’t be able to enjoy that lifestyle. In south Florida, there are plenty of islands where every day Florida residents can no longer afford to go and enjoy those resources. This is about sustained growth, sustained economy and sustaining conditions on the island.

“We fully support a healthy economy and a healthy county. In no way are we trying to oppose any of those things,” he said. “We really hope to give the county residents some options.

“Right now, plans for enforcement of the Endangered Species Act are on hold, but the time will come when law enforcement will get involved,” said Imm.

Susan Ficklen, of Collins Vacation Rentals, was among those who attended the June 19 workshop.

“In the past, Franklin County has stated that there was an ordinance but no money to enforce it,” she said in an interview last week. “A volunteer organization led by Bruce Drye was formed. Each season the turtlers turn a  
*(See Turtles, page 3)*

*(Turtles, from page 3)*  
list of non compliant houses to the county. The county sends a letter to the owner.”

Ficklen said Collins has one owner who recently received such a county notification and told the rental company he wanted to be in compliance.

“He contacted the Turtle Conservancy. They provided him with advice and funding for fixtures and installation,” she said. “(Property managers) represent the owners and we are responsible to inform them about anything that will affect them or their renters or property.

“I think it’s important to recognize that we are still a part of the ecoheaven,” Ficklen said. “We already remind every guest when they arrive that this is turtle season. It’s like the beach the way it was when we were kids and people respect that.”

She said the rental companies have received copies of the list of 140 properties and will work to inform affected property owners. “I’m certain that we have the support of all rental companies,” Ficklen said.

Imm said USFW and FWC hope to obtain

environmental restoration money from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlement to assist in bringing the island into compliance, and will work with homeowners and property management companies to that end.

Lehnhoff began visiting island businesses last week to provide information and answer questions about compliance. She will speak at the August meeting of the St. George Island Civic Club.

At the June 18 county commission meeting, Pierce and Mahan said they had received word from USFW the county too may be eligible for grant money to protect turtles under “Restoring the Night Sky,” a project funded by the Deepwater Horizon settlement.

Pierce said the county’s grant proposal requests funds for education and to pay a code enforcement officer to work nights and evenings inspecting lighting on the island. He said the grant would also provide money to retrofit structures with compliant lighting. The program would be run out of Mahan’s Sea Grant office at the Armory.

Pierce said some portions of the island, including the commercial district, would

be difficult to bring into compliance. He said his plan is to create a wide swathe of dark beach on the east end of the island where housing is less dense than at island center.

Commissioner Smokey Parrish expressed concern for public safety if lighting in the business district is reduced.

“Some folks, because they love turtles, get kind of extreme,” said Commissioner Noah Lockley said. “We don’t want that.”

Commissioner Pinki Jackel suggested commercial lighting and signs could be retrofitted to protect the turtles. “They were here before us and we need to try and live with them,” she said.

Commissioners voted unanimously to allow Pierce and Mahan to apply for the grant.

Imm said USFW will continue to document turtle disorientations and collect information that will be needed to prosecute violators of the Endangered Species Act.

### ***Summer Bingo Returns***

So far this summer, the Civic Club sponsored Bingo has made over \$2,700. We have averaged around 180 players each night with people having to

(See *Bingo*, page 4)  
(*Bingo*, from page 3)  
be turned away on 2  
nights. Bingo is held on  
Tuesday nights at 7 p.m. at  
the SGI firehouse.



### ***Upcoming Events*** **The 10th Annual Kingfish Shootout**

August 3rd & 4th, 2013 at  
the Captain's Meeting at C-  
Quarters Marina, 501  
Highway 98, Carrabelle,  
on the night of August 2nd.  
The Shootout will be for  
kingfish only.

The guaranteed payout will  
be \$16,500 with 10 places.  
You can win \$5,000 for the  
biggest kingfish. The boat  
registration will remain  
\$250 per boat.

With continuing thoughts  
of Lisa Crowder Jackson,  
we are excited about the  
potential positive impact  
this event is going to have  
not only for the charity, the  
Leukemia Research  
Foundation, but the City of  
Carrabelle and Franklin  
County as a whole.

Thank you to all our  
previous sponsors and  
fishermen. We hope to see  
you the first weekend in

August with the catch of a  
lifetime, winning the  
\$5,000. For more  
information, call 850-697  
8400 or go to [www.c-  
quartersmarina.com/shooto  
ut.html](http://www.c-quartersmarina.com/shootout.html)

### ***Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve***

The St. George Island  
Turtlers will be at The  
Anerr Center at 108 Island  
Drive, Eastpoint, giving  
presentation at 2:00 p.m.  
on Sea Turtles - Franklin  
County's Oldest Visitors  
on the following dates in  
August: 7, 14, 21, 28  
ANERR will also host a  
wildflower lecture,  
slideshow and nature walk  
on August 8. The  
presentation is scheduled  
from 3-4 p.m. at the  
ANERR visitor center  
located at 108 Island  
Drive.

### ***Apalachicola Maritime Museum***

Head to the Apalachicola  
Maritime Museum on  
Saturday, August 10 at  
7:00 p.m. for a lecture all  
about ice! The block ice  
era may have passed, but  
author and photographer  
Elli Morris brings it back  
to life in her award-  
winning book "Cooling the  
South", an affectionate  
look at the manufactured  
ice business that helped

shape the American South.  
Cooling the South gives  
tribute to how block ice  
changed commercial  
fishing and its ensuing  
economic impact. After all,  
where would shrimp and  
oyster eating be without  
ice? Elli Morris is a  
professional photographer  
based in Richmond,  
Virginia. Her commercial  
business focuses on  
products and portraits  
while her personal projects  
range from history books  
to river videos. Admission  
to the lecture is free. Join  
us after the lecture for a  
shrimp boil on the docks  
for \$12. This event is part  
of Historic Apalachicola  
Main Street's Festival of  
Ice ([www.historicapalachic  
ola.com](http://www.historicapalachicola.com)).

### **George Island Sizzler 5K Race Race & Fun Run**

Saturday, August 10th.  
The 16th Annual St.  
George Island Sizzler 5K  
Race Race & One Mile  
Fun Run. Come on down  
to beautiful St. George  
Island, Florida & run in the  
sunshine! On-site  
registration begins at  
3:00pm, the one mile fun  
run begins at 5:30pm and  
the 5K begins at 6:00pm.  
This is a Tate's Hell Track  
Club production & A Gulf  
Winds Track Club Grand  
Prix event in  
(See *Sizzler*, page 5)

(Sizzler, from page 4)  
2013. Proceeds benefits the Franklin County Humane Society. Post Race Party



and Awards at SGI Lighthouse Park at 6:30pm. For more info & pre-registration information visit [www.StGeorgeIslandSizzler.com](http://www.StGeorgeIslandSizzler.com).

**Ice Festival in Apalachicola**



Join the fun at the Water Street Festival of Ice on Saturday, August 10 and 17 in Historic Apalachicola as the town salutes Dr. John Gorrie, the inventor of the ice

machine. This year's event coincides with the town's Second Saturday event and will feature a history lecture at the Apalachicola Maritime Museum, ice carving, ice cream and snow cones at the Gorrie Museum. For more information go to [www.historicapalachicola.com/](http://www.historicapalachicola.com/)

**Rock ByThe Tee 2013 - Golf & Rock Charity Event**

Golf Tournament on September 7th at 9am [St. James Bay Golf](http://www.stjamesbaygolf.com) Resort in Carrabelle. [Click here for a registration form](#)



**Live Music**  
September 5th, 6th & 7th Harry A's Restaurant & Bar on St. George Island. For more information, go to [www.rockbythesea.org/rbtee2013](http://www.rockbythesea.org/rbtee2013) or email [rick@rwatsonandassociates.com](mailto:rick@rwatsonandassociates.com)

**Franklin County Coastal Cleanup**  
Saturday, September 21 - 8:30-11:30 a.m. Volunteers should wear/bring: Sunscreen, Bugspray,

Protective Clothing (hats, long pants, long-sleeved shirts). Work/Closed Toe Water Shoes. Volunteers will be provided: Trash bags, Gloves, Data Cards, Snacks, Drinking Water, T-Shirts. Sponsored by Franklin County Department of Solid Waste & Recycling and Franklin County Parks & Recreation, Apalachicola Riverkeeper and International Coastal Cleanup. For more information, call 850-927-3776.

Thanks to the Franklin County Tourist Development Council for Upcoming Events.

<http://www.saltyflorida.com/events>

Visit our website: [www.sgcivicclub.org](http://www.sgcivicclub.org) for the latest news from St. George Island and the surrounding area.

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