



March 28, 2023

Town of Highland Beach Commission  
3614 South Ocean Blvd.  
Highland Beach, Florida, 33487

Dear Commissioners:

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) is the oldest sea turtle conservation group in the world with more than six decades of experience in the research and protection of sea turtles. For the past 13 years, STC's lighting experts have worked with hundreds of beachfront property owners throughout Florida to retrofit their lights with wildlife friendly lighting, which utilizes long wavelength lights, shielded fixtures and lowered mounting heights.<sup>1</sup> Science supports that white, unshielded light is harmful to wildlife and humans. Problematic light disrupts the sea-finding ability of hatchling sea turtles and discourages nesting in adult females.<sup>2</sup> After decades of tireless conservation work by government entities, nonprofit organizations, scientists and advocates, Florida's sea turtles are beginning to show signs of recovery, but coastal development and artificial light threaten to upend this progress. The good news is that coastal light pollution is manageable through effective protection laws and enforcement.

**STC is writing to encourage the Commission to approve the proposed language to the Town's Sea Turtle Protection Ordinance, with one minor addition mentioned below,** as we believe it will better protect the local population of threatened and endangered sea turtles from the threat of artificial lighting.

STC applauds the Town's decision to update its Sea Turtle Protection Ordinance to better reflect advances in technology and research. After reviewing the proposed ordinance language, it is clear that the Town has implemented language from the Florida Department of Environment Protection's (FDEP) Model Lighting Ordinance for Sea Turtle Protection, which is the most ideal ordinance language that local governments can use to protect their local sea turtle population.<sup>3</sup> However, while the proposed language's recommendations for tinted glass reflect what is in the Model Lighting Ordinance, preliminary research by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in 2022 recommends a tint transmittance of 30% or less. By slightly adjusting this number in the language, the Town will have the ability to better protect sea turtles from interior light trespass, which can be just as harmful as misused exterior lighting.

After making this adjustment to the ordinance language, STC highly encourages the Town to invest in resources that will allow code enforcement personnel to work at night. An ordinance cannot be effective without proper implementation. Although disorientation reports collected in the morning by Marine Turtle Permit Holders can point to potential lighting problems, they are often under-reported and can miss important pieces of information that can only be collected at

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<sup>1</sup> Over the past 13 years, STC has [retrofitted](#) more than 280 beachfront properties with wildlife-friendly lighting.

<sup>2</sup> Witherington, B (1992). Behavioral Responses of Nesting Sea Turtles to Artificial Lighting. *Herpetologica*, 48(1), 1992, 31-39

<sup>3</sup> [https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/62B-55\\_ModelLightingOrdinance\\_NPR\\_0.pdf](https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/62B-55_ModelLightingOrdinance_NPR_0.pdf)

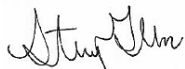


night. Hundreds of code enforcement officers in Florida conduct nighttime surveys throughout the year to identify potential violations of their ordinance in real time and provide property owners with recommended solutions. STC offers free workshops for code enforcement personnel that discuss pertinent lighting solutions and enforcement strategies. The workshops also offer code enforcement personnel Continuing Education credits. STC would be happy to invite your code enforcement staff to attend these workshops.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, if the Town approves the new ordinance language, STC recommends that staff conduct an educational campaign to inform local residents about the ordinance change. This will remind coastal property owners that an ordinance exists and allow them time to make the necessary changes to their lighting to ensure that they are not in violation of the new ordinance. This can be done through physical mailers, social media posts, email communication, or tabling at local events. STC has free resources dedicated specifically to helping local governments educate their constituents about ordinance updates. Please contact STC if you are interested in receiving these materials.

To summarize, STC applauds the effort that the Town of Highland Beach has made to improve its Sea Turtle Protection Ordinance. **After adjusting the tint transmittance requirement, allowing code enforcement officers to work at night, and educating the community about the change, the Town will have the ability to reduce disorientations of federally-protected sea turtles in its jurisdiction.** Please do not hesitate to contact me at [Stacey@conserveturtles.org](mailto:Stacey@conserveturtles.org) if you have questions about this letter or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Stacey Gallagher  
Development and Policy Coordinator/Sea Turtle Lighting Project Specialist

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<sup>4</sup> <https://conserveturtles.org/beachfront-lighting-education-outreach-materials/>

