

# F · I · R · S · T      W · A · T · C · H

VOLUME 3, September 1999

NEWSLETTER OF BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION  
The South Walton Coastal Conservancy

ISSUE 3

## WILL OUR SINGING SANDS BE SILENCED?

– *From the Editor*

With beaches that have become legendary worldwide, the Florida Panhandle is blessed with the world's most beautiful beaches. Asian investors in the early '90s referred to our sugar white sand that squeaks

under your feet as "the singing sands".

The Walton County Board of County Commissioners (WCBCC) and the Tourist Development Council (TDC) want to change our beaches forever.



*Renourished Panama City Beach*  
Peanut butter brown Pleistocene sand

THE WCBCC HAS APPLIED TO THE Florida DEP to partially fund a Long-range Beach Management Plan. The plan includes beach renourishment on 20 miles of Walton County's 26 miles of beaches. Beach renourishment is the engineered dredging of the ocean bottom offshore. The dredged material is then pumped onto the beaches.

The State of Florida does not allow dredge and fill on state park beaches. The six miles of coastline of Topsail Preserve, Grayton Beach and Deer Lake State Parks are excluded from the plan and will remain natural beaches.

Bay County renourished their beaches this past year. Miles of their beach are now black, gray and brown. Complaints were filed with the dredge company, Coastal Planning and Engineering, Inc. and the DEP. However, the project met all legal requirements. The project allowed for 3% unacceptable sand. Coastal Planning and Engineering reports the as-built beach has 1.4% unacceptable sand. An official with the DEP has stated "We build beaches for storm protection. We don't build them because people want a prettier or a bigger beach."

The beach renourishment issue is scheduled on the agenda for 7:00PM, Tuesday, Sept. 14 during the Commission meeting at the Walton County Courthouse in Defuniak Springs.

Attend the meeting, or write or call, and tell our commissioners that a dredge and fill beach is unacceptable in South

Walton. Tell them we want our pristine world-renowned sugar sands with our hallmark meandering coastal dune lake outlets to remain as they are - a natural beach.



*Non-renourished St. Andrews State Park*  
Holocene quartz sugar sand - natural beach

The material dredged onto Bay County beaches is gray-black or brown fine-to-medium grain silty sand with abundant shell fragments. In some areas organic matter is interspersed. Dissolution of calcium carbonate shell fragments has caused cementation resulting in a crusty surface.

The dredge material is not the Holocene age sands that comprise our present-day sugar white sandy beaches. Holocene sands are nearly 100% pure quartz. Panama City Beach is now dredged and filled with Pleistocene age sand deposits. During the Pleistocene age the sea level was much lower than it is today, and

### MISSION

The mission of Beach to Bay Connection is to enhance and protect the undeveloped lands and waters within South Walton County by taking an



active role in gathering and disseminating information specific to our ecosystems, and acting as stewards of our public lands.

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deposits of lignite and peat were formed from swamps and forest that are now located in areas offshore along the coast. A thin layer of Holocene age sugar white sand overlays these lignite and peat deposits on the beach and coast.

Layered within Pleistocene sand beds are also organically rich deposits. The dredge hit these organically rich sand beds in the western end of Bay County. The same deposits are found in Eastern Walton County. Peat beds are often exposed along the Seagrave Beach shoreline after storm tides.

Some of South Walton's beaches have already been compromised. Sand with iron-

## TRAIL WORK PARTIES - SECOND SATURDAYS

On the *Second Saturday* of the month from September through May, BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION, INC. will organize work parties to maintain, mark and otherwise get the trails in the Forest and Parks of South Walton in shape.

Meet at Big Daddy's Bike Shop in Blue Mountain Beach at 8:30 am. Sept. 11, Oct. 9, Nov. 13, Dec. 11, Jan. 8, Feb. 12, March 11, April 8, May 13.

If you have a shovel, wheelbarrow, clippers or weed whacker bring them.

Otherwise bring yourself and water to drink. For more information call 267-2227 or email [c.cobena@gnt.net](mailto:c.cobena@gnt.net)

coated grains has been trucked onto Miramar Beach, Dune Allen Beach and Inlet Beach. Beaches that were once glistening white are now brownish tan. Contractors claim the sand will bleach out over time. How long? No one can answer that question.

Also included in the plan is funding for "outlet management" of the rare coastal dune lakes that are found only in the Florida Panhandle. A permit application has been filed with the Army Corp of Engineers and the Florida DEP to reroute and stabilize the outlet of Oyster Lake with rip-rap. Artificial channeling of the lake outlets will alter the natural hydrology that keep the lakes alive.

Coastal dune lake outlet manipulation is also in violation of the Walton County Comprehensive Plan. Yet, The TDC, in conjunction with Taylor Engineering, have a line-item budget allocation for coastal dune lake outlet management of \$836,000 for Western Lake and \$82,600 for Stallworth Lake.

Do the Beaches of South Walton need renourishment? **No!** *Then what should be done?*

- The WCBCC must withdraw their application to the Florida DEP for a Long-Range Beach Management Plan that includes dredge and fill activity and outlet management of coastal dune lakes.

- Walton County must stop issuing variances to allow developers to build south of the Coastal Construction Line (CCL). Buildings that are destroyed during hurricanes should not be rebuilt in the same location. In Dune Allen, houses totally wiped out by Opal were reconstructed in the same location. Rebuilding should only be allowed behind the Coastal Construction Line.

- Funds now being generated by the TDC for the beach renourishment project could be reallocated to buy out demolished property owners that no longer have adequate property left to reconstruct landward of the CCL.

Beach to Bay Connection submitted these recommendations at the August 24 Commission meeting.

## FALL ADVENTURE

**Saturday, October 23,  
8:30 a.m. Cassine Trail**

Jake Ingram, Landscape Architect and Naturalist, will lead us through the Cassine Nature Trail and into the Eastern Lake Trail System. Both trails are within Point Washington State Forest.

Length of the hike will be approximately 2 miles. Meet at the South Walton Beach Realty office on Hwy 30A in Seagrave. Kevin Carr has given permission to use his parking lot for this event. For more info call 267-2227 or email c.cobena@gnt.net.

# SOUTH WALTON TURTLE WATCH UPDATE

The summer of 1999 has so far been hot, eventful, and rewarding for our volunteers. To date we have marked 55 Loggerhead nests, and an additional 24 nests have been marked on State Park beaches, many with the assistance of Turtle Watch volunteers.

We have also investigated 31 false crawls, an unusually high number. False crawls occur when the mother turtle comes up on the beach, but fails to nest. The reason for a particular false crawl cannot always be identified, however, some known causes are obstacles encountered on the beach, harassment from people, confusion from lights, and fatigue

from an earlier failed nesting attempt. These false crawls are disturbing because if a turtle cannot successfully nest, she may give up and release her eggs into the sea.

Many inquiries have been made about possible effects on the turtles from beach renourishment. The renourishment process, which artificially rebuilds eroded beaches with dredged or trucked in sand, has been used extensively in other coastal areas, but not in the panhandle, until Bay County's recent project.

Because our beaches are unique and the process has not been studied here, many questions remain. It is known that panhandle beach sand, because of its very small grain size, is much more highly compact than the sand in the rest of the state.

Renourished beaches built elsewhere have compacted into a higher density than the natural beach, which has necessitated periodic tilling to soften the sand enough for the turtle to dig into with her flippers. Prior to the start of the current nesting season, Bay County tilled its new beach. During this, the first nesting season on a renourished panhandle beach, the coordinator of Bay County's turtle program has had to relocate most of their nests because the turtles have



*Just emerged hatchling rushes to the surf*  
© 1999 Edmond Alexander

been laying close to the water, near the escarpment that formed after the renourishment. The engineers say that these sand ledges will go away when the beach stabilizes, after some big storms come through. However, if the storms are too big, the renourishment

will probably have to be repeated.

The other effect noticed in Bay County is reduced incubation time. While hotter temperatures may have contributed to this, the coordinator is confident that the darker sand used for the project has resulted in a hotter beach. Since the sex of the hatchlings is temperature dependent,

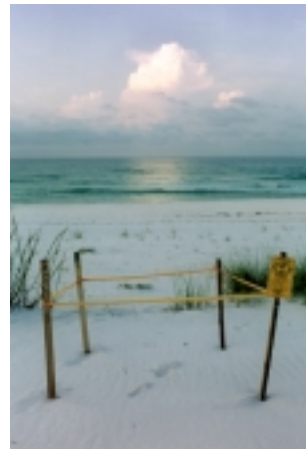
this may skew the sex ratio of the turtle population. The state began a hatchling sex ratio/temperature study last year, but no historical data is available for comparison.

While it is certainly true that the turtles must have a beach to nest on, it seems equally true that just any beach won't do. Alterations to the natural beach conditions have unforeseen consequences to sea turtle nesting success, and this must be taken into account when

considering any renourishment project.

Back in Walton County, our earlier nests have begun hatching, and the success percentage is nice and high this season. Lights that disorient the hatchlings and draw them inland remain a major concern. Beachfront residents can help by turning off lights from May to October. We hope to have a lighting ordinance in Walton County soon.

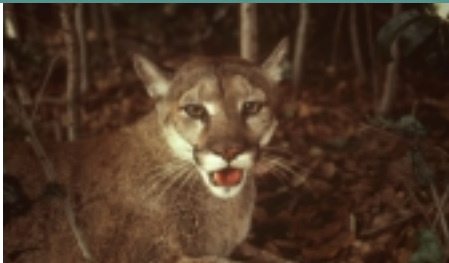
The *Tilly the Turtle* program has been a great asset to our group. T-shirts are on sale in several locations. Call 897-5228.



*Turtle nest in Grayton Dunes*  
© 1999 Edmond Alexander

# THE FLORIDA PANTHER

Second installment in *The Endangered Species of South Walton Series*



*Felis concolor coryi*

Courtesy US Fish & Wildlife Service

The panther is Florida's most endangered species. The panther was once the most widely distributed mammal in North and South America, but it is now virtually gone from the eastern United States.

Habitat fragmentation by development has divided the panther into many subspecies, and the Florida panther is the subspecies that once roamed throughout the southeastern United States.

Threatened with imminent extinction, many of the Florida panthers are confined to the swampy southwestern corner of the state.

The tiny Florida population is vulnerable to population fluctuations or catastrophic events. One bad year could wipe out

our remaining living Florida panthers. Creating another breeding population could reduce the spectre of pending extinction.

In the mid '90s the US Fish and Wildlife Service released 19 Texas cougars into the wilds of North Florida. Biologists sought to increase genetic diversity and revitalize the local panther breeding population by introducing the Texas cougars to their extremely rare Florida cousins.

At the culmination of the 2½ year study the Texas cougars were recovered and returned home. The successful experiment determined that there is enough wilderness and prey to support a self-sustaining population in North Florida of about 50 Florida panthers.



"Big Guy" White Oak Plantation, Jacksonville

Courtesy US Fish & Wildlife Service



*Felis concolor coryi*

© Joe Kenner, US Fish & Wildlife Service

The panther is a uniform creme or tawny cinnamon color on the back, with a white belly. The tip of the tail, back of the ears, and sides of the nose are dark brown or black. The male adult panther will weigh from 100 to 150 pounds, while the smaller female will generally weigh from 65-100 pounds. Adults are usually between 6 and 7 feet in length, from nose to tip of the tail, and about 2 to 2½ feet in height.

Panthers are essentially solitary and nocturnal. The range of a male overlaps those of several females.

A typical panther den site is located in a saw palmetto thicket taller than six feet. These palmettos create a canopy that shelter kittens from the rain and the sun.

Panther sightings in South Walton seem to occur most frequently during foggy winter dawns. Is the Florida panther in South Walton, or do we only see ghosts of a bygone romantic legend?



## BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

*We need your support!  
Please show you care.*

volunteer • non-profit • member-supported

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |             |  |              |
|---|-------------|--|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student/Limited Income | 10.00/year  | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate               | 15.00/year   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual             | 20.00/year  | <input type="checkbox"/> Business or Association | 100.00/year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family                 | 30.00/year  | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor              | 500.00/year  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nice Person            | 100.00/year | <input type="checkbox"/> Saint                   | 1000.00/year |

I would like to make a donation dedicated to the South Walton Greenway Network. Amount \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make a donation dedicated to the South Walton Turtle Watch. Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to Beach to Bay Connection, and mail to P.O. Box 1129, Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459

**Membership dues and donations are tax deductible**

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Newsletter

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BEACH TO BAY CONNECTION, THE SOUTH WALTON COASTAL CONSERVANCY

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