

## Sea Turtles May Get More Help Patrols Want Equipment To Help Catch Violators

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MELBOURNE — When members of the Sea Turtle Preservation Society begin patrolling south Brevard beaches during turtle nesting season in May, they hope to have the latest equipment to catch poachers and monitor illegal lighting.

Society volunteers patrol the beaches every year from May 1 to Oct. 31, when endangered loggerhead sea turtles lay thousands of eggs in the sand. The most important stretch is between Melbourne Beach and Sebastian Inlet because more sea turtles nest there than anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.

In the past volunteers have relied on their feet and flashlights to patrol the beach.

That meant only small stretches could be watched each night, society Director Peter Bandre said.

With about \$3,000 they expect to raise this spring, the group plans to buy infrared goggles and make the last payment on a three-wheeled motorcycle. The infrared equipment senses heat emanating from objects and allows the wearer to see the objects clearly in the dark.

"Foot patrols are very limiting and time-consuming," he said. "It was very hard to work the beach. We'd only do a 7-mile stretch on one night."

"With the new equipment, we plan to have people run the whole beach every night."

In addition to looking for poachers who steal eggs and hatchlings for food and bait, volunteers will help to enforce a county ordinance that restricts artificial lighting. Light shining on the beach confuses the hatchlings, which crawl toward it instead of toward the moon and into the ocean. Violators of the ordinance are given two warnings and can be fined \$250 a day.

To raise the money, the society will have businesses sponsor warning signs for \$35 to \$50. The signs, to be posted at county parks, will state that sea turtles are protected by law and are distracted by beach lighting. Included on the sign is a telephone number to call to report problems.

The signs were approved for county parks by Brevard commissioners last month. The society eventually will ask cities from Cape Canaveral to Melbourne Beach to do the same.

In return, volunteers will patrol their beaches during nesting season, he said.

"The society is a very dedicated group and this gives a means for them to purchase equipment," County Commissioner Andrea Deratany said.

"I think it would be a source of pride for businesses that they have participated and put their money toward preserving turtles, which are an important part of Brevard County."