

American Oystercatcher 2019 State and Country Updates

South Carolina

SCDNR

Felicia Sanders, Mary-Catherine Martin, Janet Thibault

Although we did not focus specifically on American Oystercatcher nest protection, SCDNR protects nests of multiple species by annually posting sites as closed that have beach nesting seabirds and shorebirds. Approximately 30 sites are seasonally closed or roped off comprising ~25 miles of beach. These sites include State and County Park property, DNR Seabird Sanctuaries, DNR Wildlife Management Areas, US Fish & Wildlife Service Refuge property and private communities where American Oystercatcher, Wilson's Plover, and Least Terns, as well as Royal and Sandwich Terns, Black Skimmers, and Brown Pelicans nest.

SCDNR published a brochure with Best Management Practices (BMPs) for use of vehicles on beaches which emphasizes the protection of nesting shorebirds including American Oystercatchers. Since South Carolina also has a large nesting sea turtle population (over 3,000 nests this season) and vehicles are essential in turtle nest searching and transporting equipment, we present these guidelines each year at sea turtle permit holder meetings. This resulted in an increased awareness of nesting oystercatchers especially at beaches with high density sea turtle nesting and with intensive management. At Cape Romain NWR where the highest density of turtle nesting occurs in the state, sea turtle staff no longer drive ATVs around the ends of islands (where the majority of shorebirds, skimmers and Least Terns nest). The BMPs and trainings resulted in sea turtle staff reporting locations of oystercatcher nests and reproductive efforts to SCDNR biologists. A poster about Vehicle BMPs was presented by SCDNR at the International Sea Turtle Symposium in February in Charleston, SC bringing greater attention to the negative impacts of beach vehicles to nesting shorebirds.

SCDNR modified a sign designed by the Florida Shorebird Alliance that says, "Please Keep Out – American Oystercatcher Nesting Area." The artwork and message on this sign helps the public identify oystercatcher nesting habitat. Additionally, signs with images of nesting oystercatchers were placed at all boat ramps at the entrance of Cape Romain NWR during the nesting season.

In the spring, SCDNR organized a shorebird steward/volunteer workshop which included information about available signs, posting techniques, as well as presentations on shorebird stewardship. From the momentum of this meeting, two stewardship programs at private island communities were very active this year with involvement of volunteers educating the public throughout the shorebird nesting season.