SEA TURTLE REPORT

Cliff Hanging Nest Hatched on Sand Dollar

By Maria Lamb

"A picture is worth a thousand words," and the image of the cliff-hanging nest that hatched conveys its meaning more effectively than any narrative. Or maybe we should say, "one look is worth ten thousand words." These are the lucky hatchlings that, against the obstacles created by humans, beat the odds and hatched."

The berm project is a joint permit between the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the U.S Army Corps of Engineers and the City of Marco Island and is good for 15 years, expiring on February 11, 2037. The initial project started in 2022 and was completed in May 2023 and called for event-driven repairs and periodic maintenance (every two years).

The project was to establish a flow channel within the overwash and shoaled areas of Tigertail Lagoon using sediment hydraulically dredged from the flow channel or from a borrow area – to create a berm on Sand Dollar Island to act as the first line of defense for the homes on Hideaway Beach.

Since 2024 and 2025, significant repairs were performed to build a "bigger, better berm," resulting in a substantial increase in height and width to the original version, which had completely collapsed. In 2025, despite the lack of rainfall and storm winds, the 2025 berm experienced significant erosion into the gulf and lagoon.

Prior to 2023, Sand Dollar Island was the most successful nesting habitat for sea turtles in Marco Island. But for 2024 and 2025, the berm area recorded the highest number of false crawls based on data provided by FWC on sea turtles' GPS locations on Marco Island.

For the berm repairs and maintenance, the City of Marco Island (15-year permit holder) and Hideaway Beach Taxing District continue to seek funding from the County Tourist Development Funds (TDC) on the basis that this project has positive tourism impact.

On August 27, 2026, the City of Marco Island and Collier County Commission held a joint workshop, the first in the last ten years. On the agenda on Beach Management was, "Tigertail Lagoon-Sand Dollar Island restoration planned for late 2027."

With 11 more years to go on the joint permit with expected yearly dredging and repairs, already Sand Dollar Island is experiencing an environmental failure not just on sea turtles:

Nitrogen and phosphorus limits on the lagoon are above the limits set by FDEP but being blamed on "bird poop."

Mangrove roots that were buried by summer tropical storm have not recovered.

Absence for the last three years of nesting shorebirds such as black skimmers.

Sea Turtle Activity August 24-30, 2026

Beach	Nests		False Crawls		Hatched Nests		
	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	This Year	Last Year	Disoriented
Barefoot	247	300	257	270	171	212	12
Delnor Wiggins	61	65	63	99	53	59	2
Vanderbilt	204	274	228	205	138	217	23
Parkshore	240	217	184	272	164	169	41
City of Naples	316	268	291	224	196	200	26
Keewaydin Is.	630	556	851	736	391	351	0
Sea Oat Island	37	19	19	24	36	10	0
Marco Island	170	118	251	310	101	68	13
Kice and Cape Romano	183	187	305	216	108	50	0
10,000 Islands	138	155	165	171	88	98	0
Collier County Totals	2226	2159	2614	2527	1446	1434	117

To report dead, injured or disoriented sea turtles on Marco call 239-289-9736 or 239-289-9687

According to J. Jewett, sea turtle monitor for Marco Island, "against the obstacles created by humans, this nest beat the odds and hatched."

Photos by J. Jewett

Digging out of their nest is a daunting task for the little sea turtle hatchling, showing a downward journey for them to the ocean.

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