



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPNR REMINDS BOATING COMMUNITY TO LOOK OUT FOR SEA TURTLES

Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources strongly advises the boating community to exercise caution while out at sea and be mindful of sea turtles. Within the last month, five green sea turtles were found dead along the eastern shorelines of St. Croix. All of these turtles sustained fracture wounds to their shells consistent with boat strike interactions.

DPNR reminds the community that as air breathing reptiles, sea turtles must regularly swim to the surface to breathe. In addition, throughout the months of May through September, mating pairs of sea turtles may be seen around all the coasts of the Virgin Islands. While mating, these pairs have limited maneuverability at the surface where they are very vulnerable to boats. Sea turtles can be seriously injured or killed if hit by the hull or propeller of a boat. DPNR encourages the boating community to help protect sea turtles throughout the territory by following these recommendations:

- Always operate boats at safe and responsible speeds especially when traveling close to any shoreline, coral reef, or sea grass bed. Respect “no wake” regulations in all designated anchoring and mooring areas (<6 knots speed) and other posted areas.
- Please be hyper vigilant of sea turtle activity in high boat traffic areas like the Buck Island Cut, Green Cay area and Christiansted Harbor on St. Croix.
- When possible, stay in deep water channels while boating. Proceed carefully while boating over sea grass beds and coral reefs where sea turtles might be feeding. However, be aware that sea turtles also use deep water channels when traveling.
- Stay alert and avoid sea turtles which are swimming, basking, or mating on the surface. Consider having a skipper on the bow be on the lookout for a head, shell or flipper breaking the surface. As a turtle dives down a swirl or flat spot can often be seen on the surface. If spotted, slow immediately, but safely, to allow the turtle to depart the surface.

- If you see a sea turtle when operating a powerboat, remain a safe distance away -- 50 feet is the suggested minimum.

If you encounter a sick, injured, imperiled, or dead sea turtle please call the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue (STAR) Network at 340-690-0474. Green Sea Turtles are listed as Federally Threatened in the Territory. All sea turtles are indigenous to the Virgin Islands and protected under territorial laws 12 VIC § 105 and 12 VIC § 318. Any persons found to have injured a sea turtle are subject to a penalty no less than \$100 pursuant to 12 VIC § 107 and 12 VIC § 325. For more information on the species, and other turtle species in the territory, please visit <https://dpr.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/facts/>