



COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

ONE CONSERVATION WAY · BRUNSWICK, GA 31520 · 912-264-7218

WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER

DOUG HAYMANS
DIRECTOR

April 29, 2024

Allie Hayser
Manomet
P.O. Box 85
Tybee Island, GA 31328

RE: Letter of Permission (LOP), Beach Wildlife Area Sign Placement, Temporary Activities in Shore Protection Act Jurisdiction, North Beach Area, Tybee Island, Chatham County, and Gould's Inlet, St. Simons Island, Glynn County, Georgia

Dear Ms. Hayser:

This letter is in response to your request to install educational signage at multiple locations to help raise public awareness of designated Wildlife Beach Area (WBA) on Tybee Island, Chatham County and St. Simons Island, Glynn County. This project involves installation of signage on the dry sand beach at locations with a documented history of recorded observations of federal and state priority listed shorebird species. In addition to signage, volunteers trained as WBA Stewards will monitor the area and engage individuals to increase public awareness of Georgia's unique coastal environment and shorebird populations. The project is an attempt to enhance habitat, document shorebird roosting flocks, improve the probability of nesting success among species of high concern, identify nesting activity, and minimize shorebird disturbance from human activities. This project has the potential to benefit several beach nesting birds including high priority colonial seabirds such as Black Skimmer, Gull-billed Tern, and Least Tern. The temporary project will begin no sooner than 15 days after the date of this letter and be completed within 6 months.

The project scope includes the installation of two (2) types of signs. To increase awareness of the WBA project, educational signs on wooden posts will be strategically placed in the vicinity of high traffic public dune crosswalks on Tybee Island's north end and at access points to Gould's Inlet, St. Simons. WBA Reminder signs on stakes will be installed on the dry sand beach to identify the approximate limits of the designated habitat. In addition to educating the public about the importance of minimizing human disturbance to roosting shorebirds and suggesting voluntary behaviors that can minimize shorebird disturbance, WBA Stewards will monitor the integrity of the projects signs and posts.

The Department authorizes the temporary installation of signage and will work with the project team to install signage as depicted in the attached site plan.

This LOP is valid for the above referenced project. Any change in the use, location, dimensions, or configuration of the approved project, without prior notification and approval from this office could result on the revocation of this permission and in the required removal of the materials and related structures. This LOP is not meant to exempt the above referenced activity from future environmental laws. **No unauthorized equipment, materials or debris may be disposed of, or stored in jurisdictional areas.**

Thank you for working with the Department on this project. Please do not hesitate to contact Deb Barreiro at 912.266.3695, if you have any questions about this or any other project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jill Andrews".

Jill Andrews
Chief, Coastal Management Section

Enclosures: WBA Project Description, WBA Exhibits, WBA Support Letters

cc: Tim Keyes, Georgia Department of Natural Resources

LOP20240034



Re: Request for Letter of Permission (LOP)

Dear Ms. Jill Andrews:

Manomet, in partnership with Georgia DNR and with support from Glynn County Parks Department and the City of Tybee, requests a letter of permission to post a temporary, seasonal, and voluntary wildlife beach area above the high tide line at two sites on the Georgia coast. At St. Simons Island, the proposed Wildlife Beach Area is located at Gould's Inlet, and encompasses approximately 39 acres (Figure 1). We will post signage around the perimeter of this area, at access points and above the tideline (Figure 2) to help beach users identify when they are entering critical habitat. On Tybee Island, the Wildlife Beach Area is proposed to encompass 14 acres north of the beach groin (Figure 3.). We will post signage around the perimeter of this area, at access points and above the tideline (Figure 2.) to help beach users identify when they are entering critical habitat.

Two types of signs will be used: Reminder Signs and Educational Signs. Reminder signs will be posted at beach access areas where there is light to moderate beach user traffic. Educational signs will be posted at beach access areas where there is heavy beach user traffic. Reminder signs dimensions will be 8.5 or 11 square inches (Figure 4-5.), printed and laminated with 5 mil plastic sheets, and affixed to wooden stakes. Educational signs will be approximately 10 x 13 inches (Figure 6-7.) and printed and laminated. They will be affixed to wooden posts 3 ft in height and located strategically to provide context about the Wildlife Beach Area. These signs will be installed with hand tools and materials will be transported and carried by hand. We are planning to have 30 signs at Tybee Island and 30 at St. Simon's. Mockups of these signs and maps of these areas are attached to this document (Figures 1-7.). We plan to install these signs in May 2024. The usage, size, and placement of these signs will be coordinated with Georgia DNR to determine the appropriate number and location of signs for each site given the site conditions at the time of deployment. Given the dynamic conditions of these areas, monitoring will ensure that signs are adequately positioned to avoid tidal overwash, erosions and accretion.

Volunteers will be enlisted as stewards. We expect to have 2-3 stewards talking and engaging with the public on the beach for several hours of the day at these wildlife beach areas weekly. Stewards will check signs periodically to ensure that the signs remain in good order.

Manomet will collaborate with the City of Tybee, Glynn County Public Works, Tim Keyes and Deb Barreiro from GA DNR, the Tybee Marine Science Center, and local community groups to use signage where appropriate, continue the coastal bird steward program, provide community engagement events, and provide consistent messaging



about the benefits of the Wildlife Beach Area using Community-based Social Marketing to shift behavioral norms. This communication will spotlight the incredible example provided by these two sites, St. Simon's and Tybee Island, for other public beaches in the state and more broadly across the Atlantic Coast.

These wildlife beach areas will be evaluated each season, moved, and adjusted to fit the needs of wildlife, people, and safety. By educating beach users about which areas are important to wildlife like shorebirds, our coastal communities are empowered to act in ways to help protect good habitat and will increase local pride as well as awareness of the ecological values of these areas.

Background

Georgia's coast is internationally recognized as an important bird area and provides habitat for at least 300,000 shorebirds every year. Our coast has two Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) sites including the 2017 designation of the Georgia Barrier Islands, which encompasses 79,709 acres including Tybee and St. Simons Island. We hold more than 30% of the biogeographic population of *rufa* Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) and of the Great Lakes breeding population of Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus circumcinctus*). This area includes more than 10% of the biogeographic populations of American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) and Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*).

Manomet has been a leader in bird research and conservation for 50 years and through Manomet, the Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative (GABSCI) was launched in 2018 to address specific threats to the shorebirds dependent on the southeastern region of the Atlantic Coast. The GABSCI has been invested and involved in shorebird and seabird monitoring on the coast of St. Simons and Tybee Island for over five years. Our goals at the GABSCI include working with partner groups to reduce threats to shorebirds and protect habitat by addressing human disturbance, disturbance from dogs, loss of habitat, and other issues that impact coastal birds. To answer management and conservation questions, we have been conducting International Shorebird Surveys (ISS) and disturbance surveys to acquire long-term data to inform conservation actions of the entire coast and participate in pilot studies at a nation-wide level.

In our monitoring efforts, we have recorded state priority species using St. Simons and Tybee Island throughout the year. We have seen banded Black Skimmers from New York, Virginia, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Massachusetts resting and foraging on our barrier islands (Figures 8-9.). The Tybee Island Wildlife Beach Area has been the site of a Black Skimmer nesting colony in past years. Gould's Inlet is an active nesting site for state priority species including Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) and Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum*). Additionally, Piping Plovers have been documented



roosting during the winter on Tybee Island at North Beach and at Gould's Inlet on St. Simon's (Figure 10.). These species show a high degree of site fidelity, returning year after year, so protecting these areas through designating Wildlife Beach Areas will ensure the habitat they need will experience less disturbance. These wildlife beach areas have been and are currently listed as critical habitat for Piping Plovers and proposed for Red Knots. These areas are not being closed, but they are being highlighted for education and outreach. A small subset of this area may be roped off by Georgia DNR to protect nesting birds, but that is a separate project under their jurisdiction.

To reduce disturbance, we will educate the public about behaviors they can choose that will allow them to use the area while reducing negative impacts to wildlife, such as walking below the tideline, choosing to leash dogs, and giving birds space to rest and feed. This will create a positive strategy for management of nesting habitat and areas of recreational value to humans. On Tybee Island, we will ask that people give birds space, and to stay on the wet sand to allow roosting birds to rest. On St. Simons we will ask that people give birds space and choose to leash their dogs.

Manomet's GABSCI has partnered with Virginia Tech and Audubon groups from four other states to reduce disturbance across the Atlantic Flyway. As part of this collaboration, our state will serve as a pilot site to demonstrate that designating Wildlife Beach Areas, a non-regulatory, temporary, and voluntary section of a public beach can protect habitat for shorebirds and seabirds, while enhancing the experience of beach users. Using data from our ongoing monitoring, we have identified certain areas that are of high importance for seabirds and shorebirds and can be used for different recreational or management goals. We appreciate the active and engaging support from GADNR, including Tim Keyes and Deb Barreiro, in the formulation of this project and aiding in this process.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Allie Hayser
Shorebird Biologist
Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative
Manomet, Inc.

Figure 1. Map of Wildlife Beach Area on St. Simons Island (Area= ~32 acres):



Figure 2. Proposed area for sign installation on the beach above the tide line.



Figure 3. Map of proposed Wildlife Beach Area on Tybee Island (Area: 14 acres):

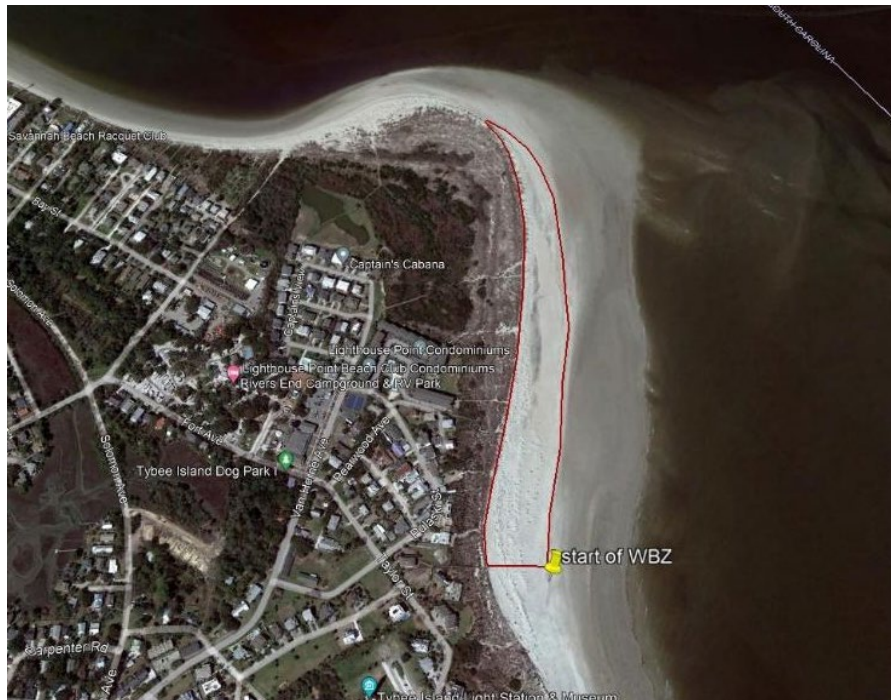


Figure 4. Reminder sign for St. Simons Island:



Please respect areas roped off by GADNR for nesting birds.

Wildlife Beach Area:
Please stay on the wet sand!

Your choices help our birds, beaches and wildlife thrive.
Walk around the flocks of birds and stay below the tideline.

manomet

GEORGIA
WILDLIFE BENCHMARKS PROGRAM

Wildlife Beach Area

These sections of St. Simons are Wildlife Beach Areas.

Please walk on the wet sand and choose to leash your dogs to help protect rare and threatened birds, wildlife and plants.

Protect our coastal birds using this beach:

Least Terns nest in colonies on our beaches. They need space to raise their chicks from April-August.

Migratory shorebirds rest and refuel here. Dogs look like a threat and often scare birds away.

Rare Wilson's Plover nest here from March-August. Unleashed dogs scare birds, and can chase and catch flightless chicks.

Figure 7. Educational Sign for Tybee Island:



Figure 8. Black Skimmers in the proposed Wildlife Beach Area on Tybee Island where we resighted color bands from New York, Virginia, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Photo taken on 2/11/2022.



Figure 9. Black Skimmer with blue-colored band from New Jersey in the proposed Wildlife Beach Area. Photo taken on 3/10/2022.



Figure 10. Piping Plovers roosting in the proposed Wildlife Beach Area on Tybee Island. The colored bands are from the Great Lakes Piping Plover Project. They've been coming here to winter on Tybee and St. Simons for years! Photo taken on 11/1/2021.





WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER

TED WILL
DIRECTOR

4/11/2024

To: Jill Andrews
Coastal Resources Division
One Conservation Way
Brunswick GA 31520

Wildlife Conservation Section biologists have worked closely with Manomet in the planning of the proposed Wildlife Beach Areas (WBA) program and support this LOP. The WBA program should improve public understanding of shorebirds and reduce disturbance at 2 key sites on the Georgia Coast. We fully support this effort which asks beachgoers to voluntarily engage in behaviors which are proven to reduce the disturbance of nesting, roosting and foraging shorebirds (either staying on the wet sand on Tybee WBA, or leashing dogs on St Simons Island WBA).

The Georgia Coast is a designated landscape of hemispheric importance for shorebirds (through the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network: WHSRN) due to the large number of conservation priority shorebirds which use the coast on an annual basis. The WBA program would significantly advance the education/outreach efforts for shorebirds on the two most heavily visited beaches in the state and we hope will continue the goal of creating a culture of conservation awareness among our residents and visitors.

This program should highlight the fact that with some planning and effort, beach recreation and wildlife conservation and appreciation can go hand in hand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Timothy Keyes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Timothy" and last name "Keyes" clearly distinguishable.

Timothy Keyes
Wildlife Conservation Section
One Conservation Way
Brunswick GA 31520
Tim.keyes@dnr.ga.gov

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CITY OF TYBEE ISLAND

March 8, 2024

Ms. Deb Barreiro
Department of Natural Resources
185 Richard Davis Drive, Suite 104
Richmond Hill, GA 31324

Dear Ms. Barreiro:

The City of Tybee Island staff members have worked closely with Manomet for the past two years planning and establishing the Wildlife Beach Zone program, and we support their application for a Letter of Permission (LOP) to establish again this season a temporary, seasonal, voluntary area encompassing approximately 14 acres north of the North Groin, as specified in the LOP, and strongly urge you to grant their request for the LOP.

As a part of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, the City recognizes and appreciates its role as stewards of our environment that plays host to the hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds each year. We expect the Wildlife Beach Zone to be an effective outreach and educational effort to the millions of visitors to the Island each year.

Thank you for your kind consideration and your continued support of Tybee Island as we work to build our coastal resilience while maintaining and even improving the natural habitat for fish and wildlife.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

All the best,

Michelle Owens
Interim City Manager

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