



COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION

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

WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER

DOUG HAYMANS
DIRECTOR

April 24, 2026

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

Re: Letter of Permission (LOP), Beach Wildlife Area Sign Placement, Temporary Activities in Shore Protection Act (SPA) Jurisdiction, Tybee Island, Chatham County, and 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 Wilson's Plover, 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 six 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 and Coast Guard Beach on St. Simons Island. 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 project signs and posts.

The Department authorizes the temporary installation of signage as depicted in the attached site plan. This LOP is valid for the above-mentioned project. Any change in the use, location, dimensions, or configuration of the approved project, without prior notification and approval from this office could result in 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,



Jill Andrews
Chief, Coastal Management Section

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

cc: Tim Keyes (by email)
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Resources Division
One Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520

Michelle Ownes (by email)
City of Tybee Island
P.O. Box 2749
Tybee Island, GA 31328

LOP20260040



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Re: Request for Letter of Permission (LOP) to Post Seasonal Wildlife Beach Area Signage at Public Beaches

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 all beach 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 ~25 acres from the Gulick Street Beach Crossover to Polk Street Crossover (Figure 3.). We will post signage around the perimeter of this area, with an emphasis at all beach 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 on beach access areas where users may walk through the dune instead of the established beach paths. Educational signs will be posted at all beach access areas where there is any 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 12×18 to 13×19 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 40 signs at Tybee Island and 40 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 April and May 2026. 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



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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*).



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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 six years. Our goals at 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. In 2025, the Tybee Island Wildlife Beach Area supported a successful Wilson's Plover nesting attempt, demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach (Figure 11).



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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, Fletcher Smith, and Deb Barreiro, in the formulation of this project and aiding in this process.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allie Hayser".

Allie Hayser
Shorebird Biologist
Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative
Manomet Conservation Sciences



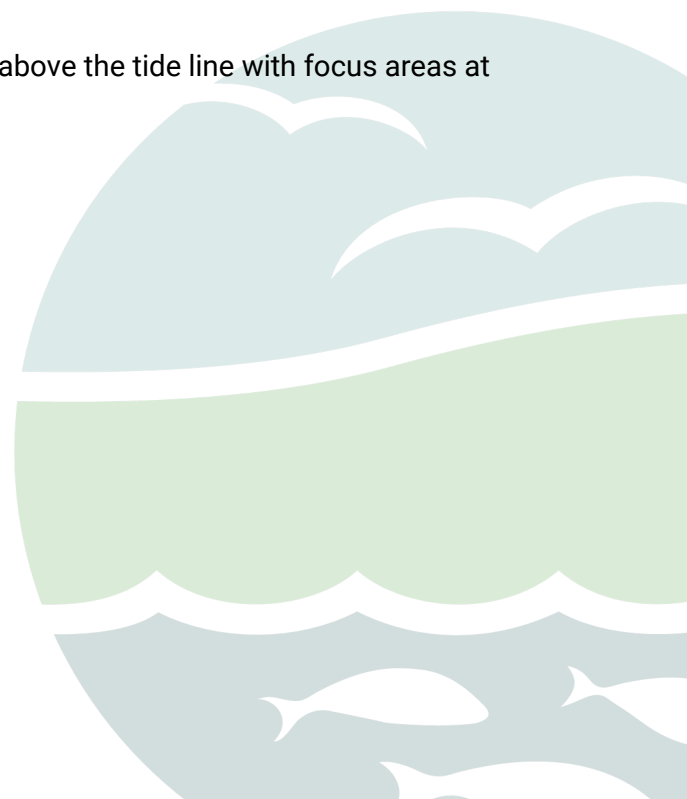


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Figure 1. Map of Wildlife Beach Area on St. Simons Island (Area= ~32 acres):



Figure 2. Proposed area for sign installation on the beach above the tide line with focus areas at the entrance to beach.





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Figure 3. Map of proposed Wildlife Beach Area on Tybee Island (Area: ~25 acres of upper beach):

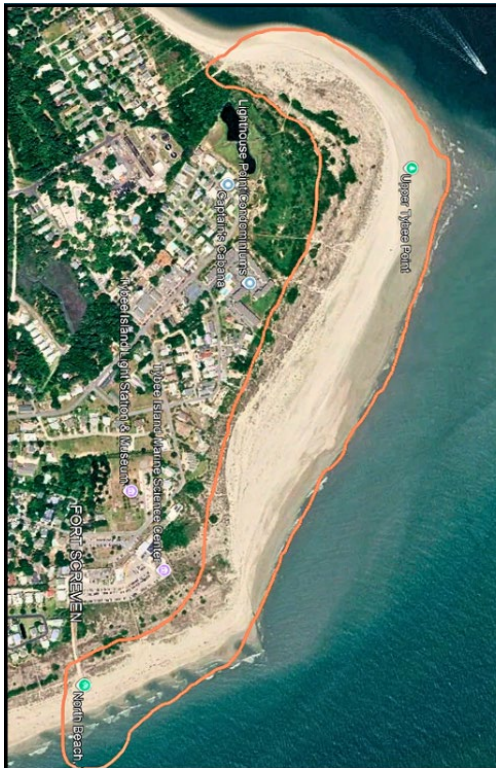
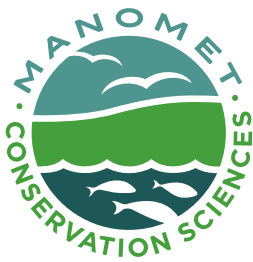


Figure 4. Reminder sign for St. Simons Island:





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Figure 5. Reminder Signs for Tybee Island:



Figure 6. Educational sign for St. Simons Island:

WILDLIFE BEACH AREA



This section of our beach is an important habitat for shorebirds, sea turtles, and native plants.

Please walk on the wet sand and leash your dogs to protect this incredible habitat!

Stop, Look, and Listen:

Nesting shorebirds like Wilson's Plovers and American Oystercatchers lay eggs on the dry sand of islands and sand bars. Seabirds, like terns and skimmers, nest in large numbers in colonies just above the tideline. They need space to raise their chicks on our beaches!





From March to August, Be Alert!

Eggs and chicks are difficult to see and blend perfectly with the dry sand! Humans and dogs may keep birds from protecting their eggs and chicks from predators and cooking in the heat.

It only takes 10 minutes for their eggs to fatally overheat in the hot sand!!!

Even Good Dogs Can Scare Birds:

Dogs can keep birds from important food resources, protecting their nests, and feeding chicks. Birds do not know if your dog is a *pet or a threat*.

Having your pup on a leash can help these birds with nesting, raising chicks, resting, and feeding.




To learn more and get involved in shorebird conservation, visit this website:






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Figure 7. Educational Sign for Tybee Island:

WILDLIFE BEACH AREA

The North End of Tybee Island is an important habitat for shorebirds, sea turtles, and native plants.

Please walk around the flocks and give birds space to protect this incredible habitat!

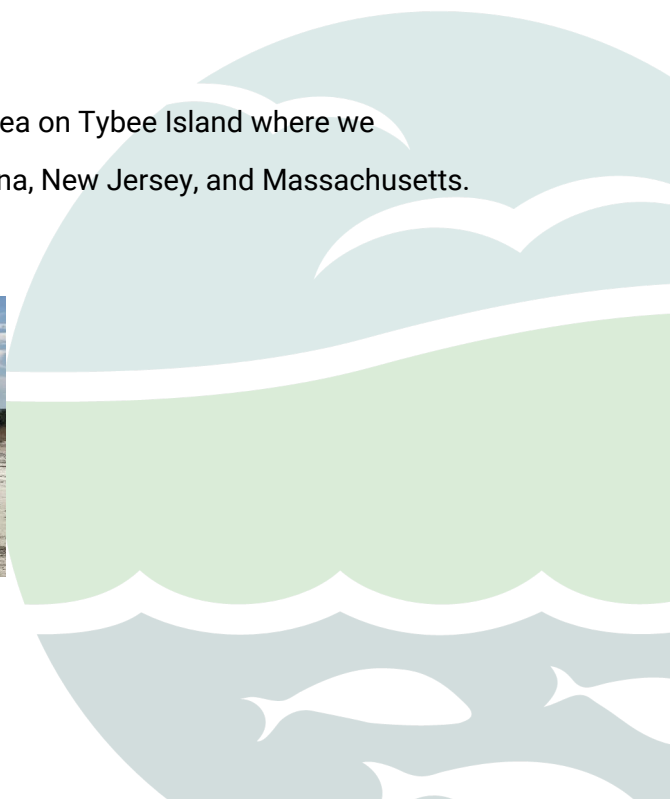
Walk Around the Flocks:
During spring and fall, shorebirds like Red Knots use our beach to rest and refuel during their 20,000 mile journey. Shorebirds need space to feed and rest for survival.
If you see flocks of birds feeding or resting, choose a different spot to set up or walk out wide around them.

Stop, Look, and Listen:
Nesting shorebirds like Wilson's Plovers and American Oystercatchers lay eggs on the dry sand of islands and sand bars.
Seabirds, like terns and skimmers, nest in large numbers in colonies just above the tideline. They need space to raise their chicks on our beaches!

From March to August, Be Alert!
Eggs and chicks are difficult to see and blend perfectly with the dry sand! Humans and dogs may keep birds from protecting their eggs and chicks from predators and cooking in the heat.
It only takes 10 minutes for their eggs to fatally overheat in the hot sand!!!

MANOMET CONSERVATION SCIENCES
GEORGIA Department of Natural Resources WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION
To learn more and get involved in shorebird conservation, visit this website: [QR code]

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.





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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.





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Figure 11. Wilson's Plover family from the success of the designated Wildlife Beach Area on Tybee's North Beach- submitted by one of our beach stewards!





WALTER RABON
COMMISSIONER

CHRIS HARPER
DIRECTOR

4/6/2026

To: Jill Andrews

Coastal Resources Division
One Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520

Georgia DNR's Wildlife Conservation Section biologists have worked closely with Manomet staff in the proposed Wildlife Beach Areas (WBA) program and enthusiastically support this LOP. The proposed WBA program for 2026 encompasses approximately 39 acres of critical bird habitat at Gould's Inlet on St Simons Island and approximately 25 acres of critical bird habitat on Tybee Island from the Gulick Street Beach Crossover to the Polk Street Crossover.

The WBA program improves the public understanding of shorebird and seabird conservation and reduces disturbance to several Species of Greatest Conservation Need (from within the most recent GA DNR State Wildlife Action Plan published in 2025). The Georgia Coast supports many hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds, and more than ten thousand breeding shorebirds and seabirds, including the Federally listed Red Knots, Piping Plovers, Least Terns, and many species of high conservation concern including American Oystercatcher, Royal Tern, Gull-billed Tern, and Whimbrel. The coast is designated as a landscape of hemispheric importance for shorebirds (through the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network). The primary goals of the program are to encourage people to walk below the tide line, to choose to leash dogs, and to walk around roosting or feeding birds when possible. These requests are voluntarily in nature, but have been proven to reduce disturbance to coastal beach birds.

In short, by prioritizing public outreach and encouraging voluntary behavioral changes, the WBA program bridges the gap between coastal recreation and ongoing conservation efforts that will ensure an experience of the "wild" on our local beaches, without sacrificing enjoyment on the beaches.

Sincerely,

Fletcher Smith

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One Conservation Way
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Brian West

MAYOR PRO TEM
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Bret Bell

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Michelle Owens

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Edward M. Hughes
Tracy O'Connell

CITY OF TYBEE ISLAND

April 14, 2026

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 has worked closely with Manomet for the past four years to plan, establish, and maintain the Wildlife Beach Zone program, and we support their application for a Letter of Permission (LOP) for the 2026 season. We understand they are seeking to maintain recognition of North Beach as a Wildlife Beach Area, with a slight extension of the zone to better encompass the stretch of beach from the point to the jetty. As specified in the LOP, this would remain a temporary, seasonal, voluntary area, and we urge you to grant this request.

This expansion will address increasing disturbances observed in this area, including people walking and biking through shorebird flocks, and chasing and feeding birds. Extending the Wildlife Beach Zone will allow for clearer communication with beach users and more consistent protection across the most heavily impacted section of North Beach.

We support the continued placement of educational signage at every dune crossover, consistent with prior years; and installation a small number of clear, educational signs at key entry points and crossovers, with limited additional signage throughout the area as needed, including:

- Two signs at the Polk Street beach entrance as visitors turn right toward the point
- One sign at each of the three crossovers from the North Beach parking lot

As a designated site within the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, the City of Tybee Island recognizes and values its role as a steward of a critical coastal habitat that supports hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds each year. We believe the Wildlife Beach Zone continues to be an effective outreach and educational initiative for the millions of visitors, while also supporting the conservation of sensitive species and habitats.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Tybee Island.

Sincerely,
Bret Bell



City Manager, City of Tybee Island

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