

# 11 Years of the Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan

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# Natural Resources Management Department

## Divisions:

- Coastal Resources
- Environmental Code Enforcement
- Marine Resources
- Mosquito Control
- Natural Resources Conservation
- RESTORE
- Water Quality and Land Management

# Welcome to Perdido Key



# Welcome to Perdido Key

- 16 miles long; 2,940 acres
  - 80% Florida, 20% Alabama
- 1300 acres- Beach Mouse Habitat (44%)
  - Federal: 638 acres
  - State (AL & FL): 353 acres
  - County & Private: 309 ac
- 66 acres authorized for impacts under PKHCP



# Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan

- ✓ Considered by Florida Fish and Wildlife and USFWS as the “Gold Standard” of Plans
- ✓ 2006 – Escambia County acknowledged at the national level by US Fish and Wildlife Service “Partners in Conservation” award
- ✓ 2017 – Program acknowledged at the regional level by US Fish and Wildlife Service as “Regional Recovery Champions”

Allows county to facilitate private and public development while maintaining habitat needed for T&E species

- Streamlined Process: Processed through standard County permit process and timelines
- Pre-HCP permitting, single-family 3 years, multi-family 5 years
- Predictable and timely process for investors and builders
- Predictable conservation outcomes



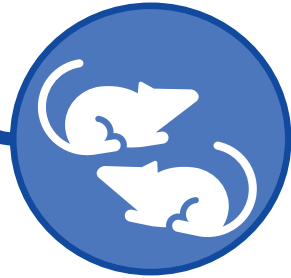
# Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan

**1985**



PKBM federally listed & critical habitat designated

**2004**



PKBM found north of Perdido Key Drive. Critical habitat expanded to majority of private lands on Perdido Key

**2005-2006**



Conservation Strategy, Mitigation Plan, and Business Plans were developed

**2007-2011**



Escambia County begins developing the Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan (PK HCP).

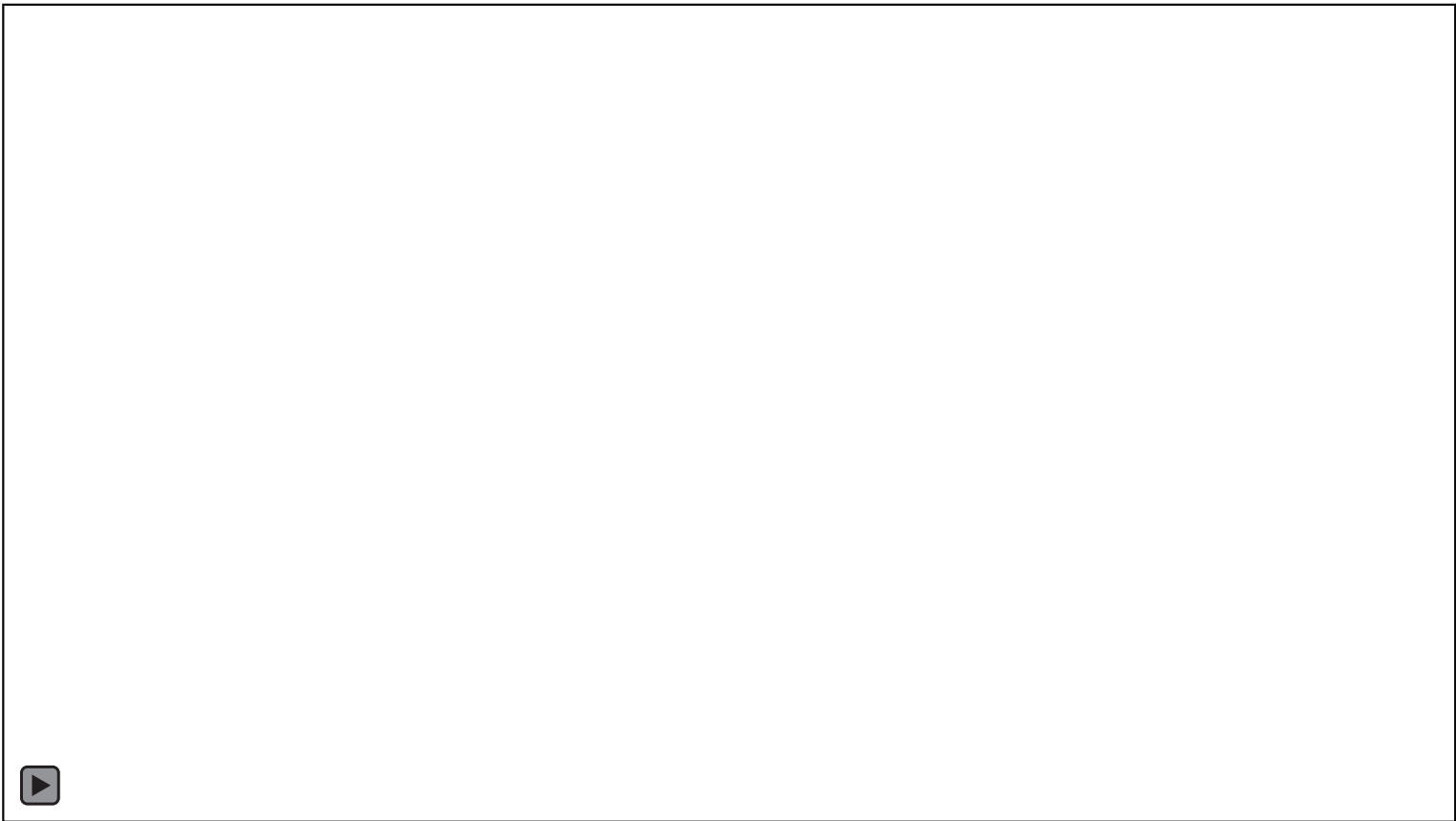
**2014**



PK HCP approved and Incidental Take Permit issued.

# Perdido Key Beach Mouse

A Star is Born



# Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan

- Covers residential/commercial development, limited roadway improvements & beach recreation
- Development Permitting, Habitat Management, Species Monitoring, Education & Outreach
- Goal is to ensure landscape-level habitat connectivity and functionality through:
  - Habitat Avoidance
  - Project Minimization
  - Wildlife corridors and connections
  - Wildlife Friendly Lighting & Design
  - Education & Outreach



# PK HCP: Permitting & Construction

- Pre-Construction Review & Application
  - Authorization of Coverage aka “Beach Mouse Permit” issued to owners
  - Single Family Home Permitting Time: < 3 months
  - Commercial & Multi Family: 12-18 months
  - Concurrent with “normal” permitting processes
- Construction
  - Pre-Construction Conferences & Bi-Monthly Inspections ensure project compliance and open communication with contractors
- Post Construction
  - Conservation Easements
  - Continued compliance: lighting, landscaping, beach services



# PK HCP: Species Monitoring

- Sea Turtle Conservation Program
  - 24 volunteers who provide daily monitoring throughout the nesting season (May-October)
- Beach Mouse Monitoring
  - Pre-Disturbance & Camera Trapping as needed
  - Bi-Monthly Track Tube Program
  - 5-year Trapping led by USFWS
- Shorebirds
  - Support state and federal efforts where needed
  - Partner with Audubon
- Gulf Coast Solitary Bee
  - *B. angustifolia* occurrence & Solitary Bee sampling
- Predators & Non-Native Species
  - Coyote, cat & fox
  - Invasive: cogongrass, beach vitex, nutria



# PK HCP: Education & Outreach

- Coastal Demonstration Garden & Native Landscaping Resources
  - Volunteer Garden Workdays
  - Native Landscaping Brochures
- Barrier Island Lighting Workshops
  - Site Visits & Retrofit Recommendations
  - Lighting Survey Web Map
  - Rental Unit Resources
- Living with Beach Mice (*Coming Soon*)
  - Signage assistance for HOAs
  - Do's & Don'ts of Beach Mouse Permits
  - On-Site Training for Contractors



# 11 Years of the PK HCP

**141** authorizations

**54 acres** conserved : **21 acres** impacted on project sites

**30 acres** purchased for permanent habitat conservation

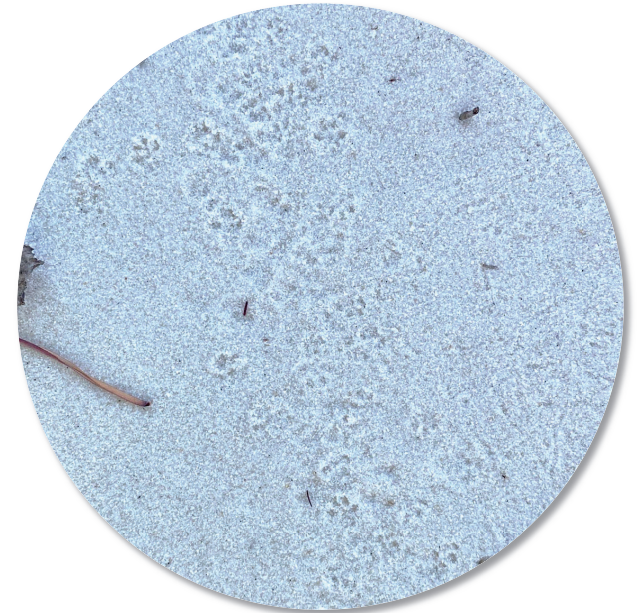
**\$3.8 million** in impact fees contributed to the Beach Mouse Conservation Fund with **\$118,000** in annual contributions

**\$4.8 million** in grant funds awarded for land acquisition and habitat restoration



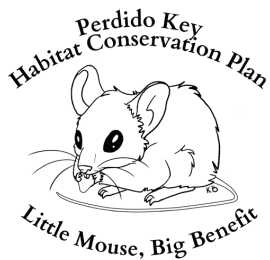
# 10 Years of the PK HCP

- Beach mice documented in:
  - All 3 core public management areas
  - Private gulf frontal lots post-construction
  - Private and county conservation lands north of Perdido Key Drive
- Lack on non-native rodents and other predators in majority of monitored areas
- High rate of juvenile and sub-adults recorded in track tubes → indicative of a strong breeding population and range expansion



# Perdido Key Wildlife Friendly Lighting Ordinance (Requirement of the HCP)

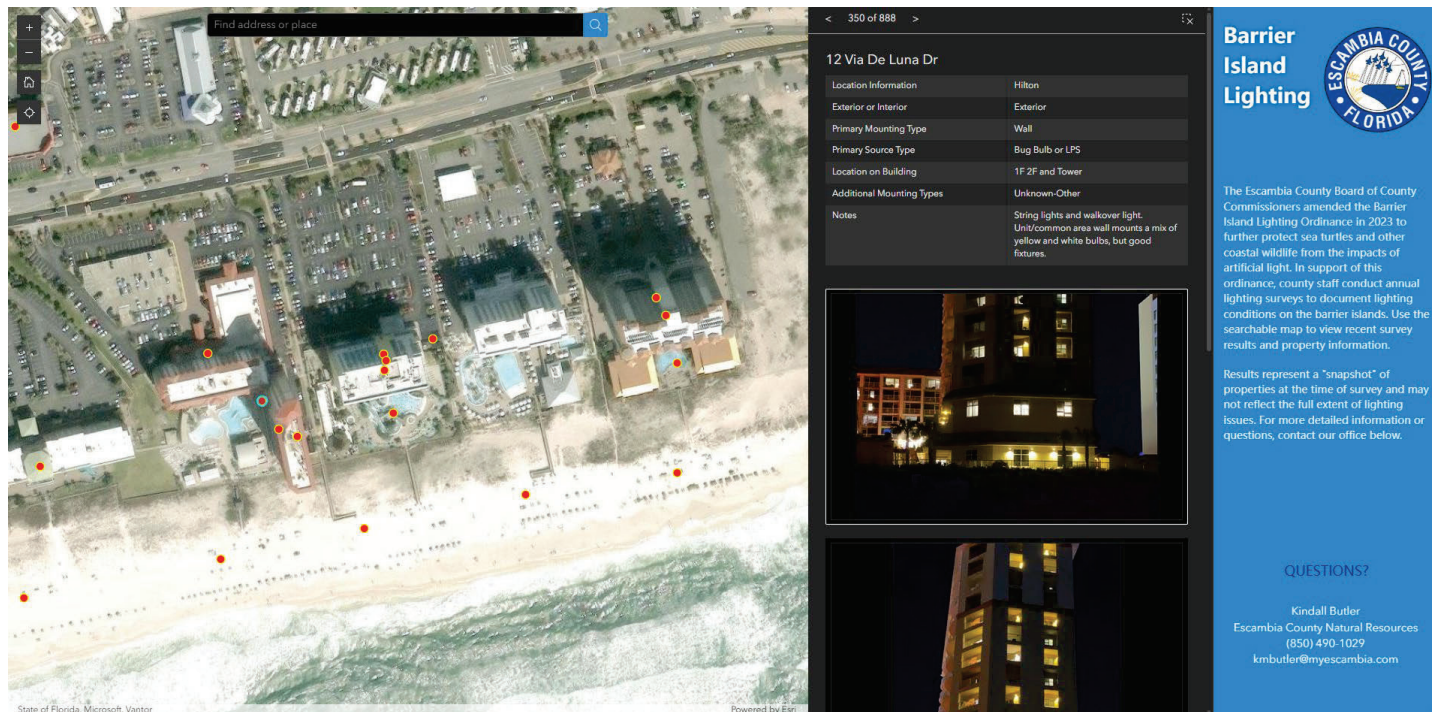
- Escambia County Land Development Code, Article 5, Section 4-5.8(c)
- New construction required since 2014
- Retrofit of properties south of Semmes Road requirement by January 1, 2028
- <https://myfwc.com/conservation/you-choose/lighting/criteria/certified/>
- Myescambia.com – search sea turtles for link to map



- **Wildlife Lighting Basics:**
- **Keep it Low:** Fixtures and light sources should be mounted as low as safely possible and utilize the lowest wattage or lumens for the intended purpose.
- **Keep It Long:** Bulbs and fixtures must produce long wavelength light (<580nm) without the use of filters or lenses. Long wavelength bulbs appear red or amber in color. Yellow bug bulbs, color changing, or coated novelty/party bulbs may appear the correct color but are usually not the correct wavelength.
- **Keep It Shielded:** Light sources should be enclosed in a full cut off fixture. Appropriate fixtures should shield the light source from being directly visible and prevent light from being broadcasted above the horizontal plane.

# Perdido Key Wildlife Friendly Lighting Ordinance

- <https://myescambia.com/our-services/natural-resources-management/marine-resources/sea-turtles/sea-turtle-lighting>




Find address or place

350 of 888

12 Via De Luna Dr	
Location Information	Hilton
Exterior or Interior	Exterior
Primary Mounting Type	Wall
Primary Source Type	Bug Bulb or LPS
Location on Building	1F 2F and Tower
Additional Mounting Types	Unknown-Other
Notes	String lights and walkover light. Unit/common area wall mounts a mix of yellow and white bulbs, but good fixtures.

**Barrier Island Lighting**



The Escambia County Board of County Commissioners amended the Barrier Island Lighting Ordinance in 2023 to further protect sea turtles and other coastal wildlife from the impacts of artificial light. In support of this ordinance, county staff conduct annual lighting surveys to document lighting conditions on the barrier islands. Use the searchable map to view recent survey results and property information.

Results represent a "snapshot" of properties at the time of survey and may not reflect the full extent of lighting issues. For more detailed information or questions, contact our office below.

**QUESTIONS?**

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State of Florida, Microsoft, Vantor

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# Public Access

- There are four County-owned public access points to Gulf-front beaches
- Three are east of Perdido Key State Park
- One is west of Perdido Key State Park
- The County is actively seeking additional parcels to increase public access to the Gulf
- The property adjacent to Access #3 that has been targeted is no longer an option for purchase.
- Staff has begun to look at additional options for acquisition



# Sunset Island Restoration Project

- In planning and permitting
- Long-term sand disposal location for maintenance of the intracoastal waterway
- End deposits along Waterview Drive
- Similar to Admirals Island at Pensacola Pass
- Recreational Destination
- Habitat Creation



# Customary Use Discussion by Escambia County Board of County Commissioners

## **Board Direction as of 5 March 2026**

- The Board has not directed staff or the County Attorney's office to develop an ordinance regarding customary use
- As such, staff is not actively working on this concept other than maintain situational awareness of a variety of related court cases and public comments.

## **Florida Constitution, Article X, Section 11**

- The public has the right to access shorelines and beaches that are located below the mean high-water line as the state holds title to the lands under navigable waters...including beaches below the mean high-water line..

# Customary Use Discussion by Escambia County Board of County Commissioners

## Customary Use Doctrine

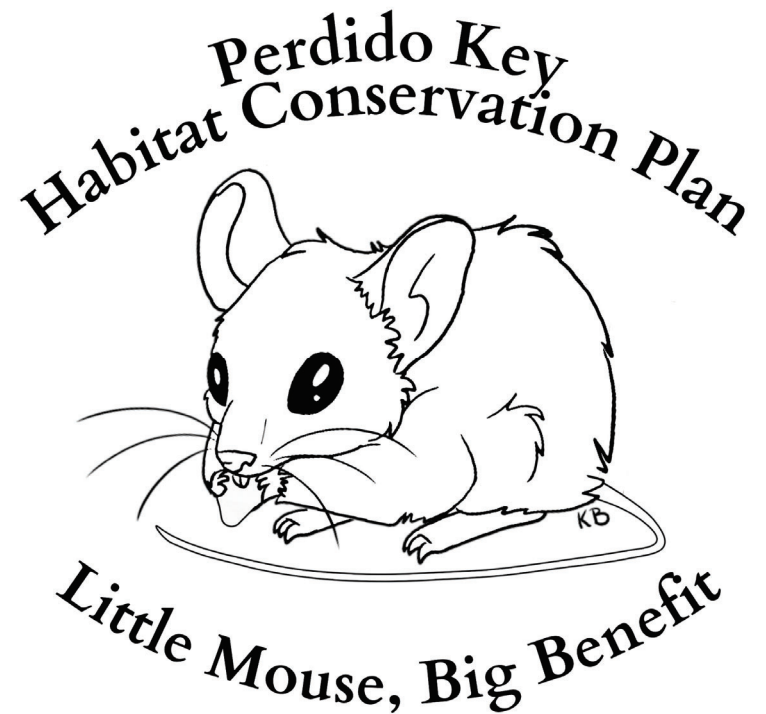
- If the recreational use of the sandy area adjacent to the mean high-water line (MHW) has been ancient, reasonable, without interruption and free from dispute, such use as a matter of custom, should not be interfered with by the owner. However, the owner may make any use of his property which is consistent with such public use...
- Mean High Water – F.S. Chapter 177.27(14) means the average height of the high waters over a 19-year period. For shorter periods of observation, "mean high water" means the average height of the high waters after corrections are applied to eliminate known variations and to reduce the result to the equivalent of a mean 19-year value. For Perdido Key the elevation of Mean High Water is approximately +0.93 above NAVD 88 (North American Vertical Datum of 1988)

## Relevant Florida Statute

- F.S. 163.035 (effective June 24, 2025)
- Bill Staff Analysis:
- Return to customary use rights prior to enactment of F.S. 163.035
- A governmental entity may declare the existence of a customary use and adopt a local customary use ordinance without following the procedures in s. 163.035, F.S.
- Property owners must file a lawsuit challenging the ordinance with burden to prove public does not enjoy customary use rights over their privately owned beaches.
- Courts will apply the common law doctrine of customary use when ascertaining, on a case-by-case basis, whether the public enjoys customary use rights over privately-owned beaches.

# Questions?

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