

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 17, 2026

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Lighting Violations Persist on Garden City Beach as Sea Turtle Hatchling Season Approaches; SCEL P and SCUTE Escalate Response

Garden City, SC — Despite improvements following initial outreach this spring, lighting violations continue to threaten sea turtles on Garden City Beach, the South Carolina Environmental Law Project (SCEL P) and the Garden City & Surfside affiliate of South Carolina United Turtle Enthusiasts (Garden City Surfside SCUTE) announced. With hatchling season approaching on the North Coast, the organizations are escalating their response by sending follow-up letters to properties in violation. The Garden City Surfside SCUTE team has notified the rental management companies of specific observations of lights on after 10 P.M.

Garden City Surfside SCUTE volunteers have continued documenting lighting violations throughout the summer on Garden City Beach. Volunteers have documented multiple false crawls this season – incidents in which nesting females approach the shore but turn back without nesting – many of which are caused by artificial lighting.

"Our goal has always been for all structures to become compliant without the need for reporting violations to law enforcement," said Vickki Hardwick, Co-Leader of Garden City Surfside SCUTE. "We are still hopeful for that, but we must act quickly. Hatchlings will soon be emerging, and they need and deserve dark beaches like nature intends to get to the ocean safely. Compliance is easy. Shields over existing lighting, timers, or even a simple change to turtle-friendly bulbs are all easy and inexpensive. If a place like Miami Beach can have a successful lighting ordinance, it should be a piece of cake for our Georgetown County beaches."

SCEL P and Garden City Surfside SCUTE's follow-up letters reiterate the obligations outlined in Georgetown County's Lighting Ordinance. Under the ordinance, structures built after 1989 must use hooded wall-mounted and balcony lights without floodlights, while structures built before 1989 must use shielded or screened lighting or turn lights off by 10:00 PM from May 1 through October 31. Properties that fail to come into compliance

within 30 days of notice face fines ranging from \$50 to \$100 per day. Residents who observe lighting violations are encouraged to call the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office non-emergency line at 843-435-5102.

"There is still time to safeguard hatchlings from artificial lights," said Monica Whalen, Staff Attorney at SCELPA. "We remain committed to a collaborative approach with property owners, but where violations persist and turtles are at risk, we will pursue available enforcement tools."

SCELPA and Garden City Surfside SCUTE are asking all beachfront property owners and vacation rental companies on Garden City Beach to survey their properties immediately, correct any noncompliant lighting and designate a point of contact to address violations observed by SCUTE volunteers during the remainder of the nesting season.

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The South Carolina Environmental Law Project is a nonprofit public interest law firm. We have used our legal expertise to protect land, water and communities across South Carolina since 1987. Learn more at scelp.org.

Garden City & Surfside affiliate of the South Carolina United Turtle Enthusiasts is a group of volunteers dedicated to sea turtle conservation in Georgetown and Horry counties. Organized in 1990, Garden City Surfside SCUTE is permitted by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to protect turtle nests, relocate turtle nests if necessary, and record turtle deaths through the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network.