From the desk of Commissioner Robert S. Weinroth

Avoiding election debacles

I am pleased to report that on February 5, the Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved new voter equipment for the Supervisor of Elections office.

This was one of my priorities upon taking office and an important step in restoring voter confidence while running expedient and efficient elections.

Expected to debut in March 2020 for the presidential primary election, the new $15.6 million system includes new scanners, voting machines, high-speed tabulators, and a new voter registration and check-in system.   Other highlights include:

- ☐ A bar-coded tracking system for absentee ballots (allows voters to track their ballot)
- ☐ Smaller and thinner ballots reducing postage from an estimated $1.65 down to 30 cents (over 600,000 ballots are mailed during an election)
- ☐ New ballot layout requiring voters to color in an oval instead of drawing a line.

Helping save lives

With the help of an $18,000 grant from the county, the City of Boca Raton recently connected to the Pulsepoint system. Pulsepoint is a free app that lets a bystander with CPR knowledge provide life-saving assistance until paramedics arrive.

The app alerts trained individuals simultaneously with the emergency dispatch of local fire rescue crews. It will also provide the closest location of accessible defibrillators.

Several local fire departments share data with PulsePoint including those from Delray Beach, Palm Beach Gardens and Palm Beach County. For information on signing up, visit http://www.pulsepoint.org/download/.

Turtle talk

The sea turtle nesting season officially starts in March. Within the next few months, over two million hatchlings are expected to emerge from approximately 30,000 nests on beaches countywide.

The process starts when the female sea turtle crawls ashore at night to lay her eggs. It usually takes about one to three hours for the turtle to lay approximately 80 to 120 eggs (shaped like ping pong balls).

The nests are dug approximately 18 inches below the surface and are usually located on dry beach above the hide-tide area. Eggs and nests must remain undisturbed in the warm sand for 47 to 60 days before they hatch.

The majority of the hatching occurs from July through September, and hatchlings usually emerge from their nests as a group at night. In a natural situation, they crawl down the beach to the water where they must swim for many hours to reach the open sea.

Unfortunately, thousands of hatchlings die every year in their attempt to reach the water. Instinctively, newly hatched sea turtles follow the natural light reflected on the water by the moon and waves. However, they become disoriented by artificial light from homes, businesses, street lights and cars, and crawl in the wrong direction. Consequently, they die from exhaustion, dehydration, predators and debris.

Here are some simple tips to help protect sea turtles:

- ☐ Beaches must be free of debris and potential obstacles. Sea turtles have poor vision on land and cannot go backwards. Many times, they return to sea without nesting if an obstacle is encountered.

- ☐ Do not disturb sea turtles, nests or eggs; it's against the law.
- ☐ If you encounter a nesting turtle, keep lights off, remain still and keep your distance.
- ☐ Keep flashlights and phones off while on the beach at night.
- ☐ Keep pets away from nesting females, nests and hatchlings.
- ☐ Do not disturb nest markers. Numerous organizations including the county's Department of Environmental Resources Management monitors sea turtles.
- ☐ Operate your boat with caution. Sea turtles are found offshore, nearshore and inshore and have to surface to breath.

Sea turtle facts:

- ☐ Sea turtles are among the oldest creatures on earth, unchanged for over a million years.
- ☐ After epic migrations at sea around the world, loggerhead sea turtles return to almost the exact spot where they were born to mate and lay their own eggs. Reportedly, this is based on the coastline's magnetic signature, which the turtle remembers and uses as an internal compass.
- ☐ Sand temperature can determine gender. For example, cooler sand tends to produce male hatchlings.
- ☐ Palm Beach County has more sea turtle nests per mile than anywhere else in the United States.

Source: National Geographic

Sea turtle walks:

Supervised sea turtle walks are available at locations throughout Palm Beach County such as Gumbo Limbo Nature Center in Boca Raton. For more information visit http://discover.pbcgov.org/erm/Publications/SeaTurtleWalks.

Kudos for our volunteers

The county's Department of Environmental Resources Management (ERM) has a volunteer program that does incredible work countywide. With over 31,000 acres of protected natural areas, volunteers play an integral role in maintaining these areas while saving taxpayer dollars.

ERM reported that over 858 volunteers spent over 2,200 hours removing 27,000 pounds of trash and debris this past year.

If you are interested in volunteering at our natural areas, please visit http://discover.pbcgov.org/erm/Lists/Calendar/Events.aspx, or call our office at 561-355 -2204.