



**Scuba Centers**  
**Pompano Beach, Boca Raton, and Riviera Beach**

**Oct 30, 2015**

**To Whom It May Concern:**

**My name is Nicole Ordway and I work at Force-E Scuba Centers in South Florida as the social media director and event coordinator. Force-E has been in business for over 30 years and we are a full retail dive center, which offers dive equipment, scuba lessons and dive trips.**

**I started working with the Florida Hawksbill Project in 2010 with Dr Larry Wood as one of his assistants. Over the years, I have help Dr Wood with tagging numerous hawksbill sea turtles as well as helping him promote sea turtle conservation and research to the South Florida diving community.**

**When I started working at Force-E, I saw the opportunity to bring the diving community and the research community together by offering fun and educational activities in which divers can learn about the environment that they love to dive in. So, one of the activities Force-E offers numerous times a year is dive trips in which divers are onboard watching Dr Wood conduct his research. This dive is so popular, that sometimes we sell out of spots on the boat in 48 hours (20 spots)! We also charge a little more than our regular price so we can offer a donation to the Florida Hawksbill Project.**

**What is great about offering this experience is they get to watch research in action but also learn about why it is important to do this work with a critically endangered species. Before the divers enter the water they are given a briefing about the intent of the project and also the proper dive etiquette when diving around sea turtles; example, don't get too close, don't harass, don't touch, don't chase, etc. Because Dr Wood and his assistant are the only ones permitted to catch the turtles, the divers onboard are useful tools because there are more eyes on the look out for a hawksbill sea turtle. When a diver identifies a turtle, they are instructed to hold their hand up and give the signal for which type of sea turtle it is, this is a great tool because the divers become more aware of the types of sea turtles we have in our area. If Dr Wood locates a hawksbill turtle to bring up for research, the divers are instructed to stay down with the dive guide and continue the dive, that way the boat and Dr Wood and assistant can work on the safety of the turtle and the people involved in getting the turtle onboard. Once onboard, Dr**

Wood starts the work-up on measurements, photo id, tag placement, tissue sample, etc. By that time, the divers are now back onboard and get to see the turtle up-close and Dr Wood gives them a summary of what data he is collecting and why it's important. The divers are always super involved in asking great questions and seem to like learning about the turtle that they saw underwater moments ago. At no point do the divers think that the animal is being hurt or is stressed out because we only keep the turtle onboard for a short time. Plus we keep the turtle in the shade and ask the divers to give the animal space.

Once Dr Wood completes his data collection, the turtle is release back into the ocean at the same GPS location in which we found it. Every single turtle released has always swum away from the boat with no assistance. I have been on several dives where we re-dropped in the same spot where the turtle was captured from and have seen the turtle swimming along like nothing happened and a couple of times they were already back to feeding on the reef. So in my experience, I feel that the turtles seem unfazed by their experience on the boat. I also observe numerous times that turtles that have tags on them are not fearful of divers and I have plenty of video of these turtles forging for food while divers are around which to me indicates that they are perfectly comfortable with divers around.

This not only has been profitable for Force-E but it really has helped the divers understand the importance of sea turtles in our area. I believe that any dive community that has sea turtles at their dive sites could offer this great program as well, and could be as successful as we are in the promoting sea turtle conservation.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Nicole Ordway