

# The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Sandy Point NWR



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## **U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service Mission:**

To work with others to conserve,  
protect, and enhance wildlife  
(flora and fauna) and their  
habitats for the enjoyment of  
present and future generations.



# Seven Divisions within USFWS:

- Administrative Division
- Fisheries Division
- International Division
- Migratory Bird and State Programs Division
- National Wildlife Refuge Division
- Legal Division
- Ecological Services Division



# Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex



## Puerto Rico

Cabo Rojo NWR  
Laguna Cartagena NWR  
Culebra NWR  
Desecheo NWR  
Vieques NWR  
Navassa NWR

## U.S. Virgin Islands

Sandy Point NWR  
Green Cay NWR  
Buck Island NWR





# Sandy Point NWR



# Refuge Facts

- Purchased in 1984
- Over 400 acres
- The largest beach area (3.2 km of continuous beach ) in the Virgin Islands.
- The largest salt pond in the Virgin Islands.
- Largest population of nesting leatherbacks in United States.



# Refuge Objectives

- To provide habitat and protection for threatened and endangered species, with particular emphasis on the leatherback sea turtle.
- To support the Service's commitment to implement and carry out sea turtle recovery plans.
- To provide habitat for a natural diversity of plant and wildlife species.
- To foster a sense of public commitment and understanding for sea turtles and the need for protection by providing opportunities for environmental education, interpretation, and compatible wildlife-oriented recreation.



# SEA TURTLES OF SANDY POINT NWR



# Leatherback Sea Turtle Research and Conservation Project



- DPNR, DFW
- WIMARCS
- USFWS
- EarthWatch Institute



# Leatherback Sea Turtles

- The largest reptile on Earth
- Weighs on Average 600-800lbs and is 155cm long (5.5ft)
- Long distance migrations (St. Croix to Nova Scotia), deep divers
- Leathery carapace
- Feed on Jellyfish
- Nest March - August
- Individuals nest every 2-3 years
- Lay 80 eggs, every 10 days, up to 10 times in a season





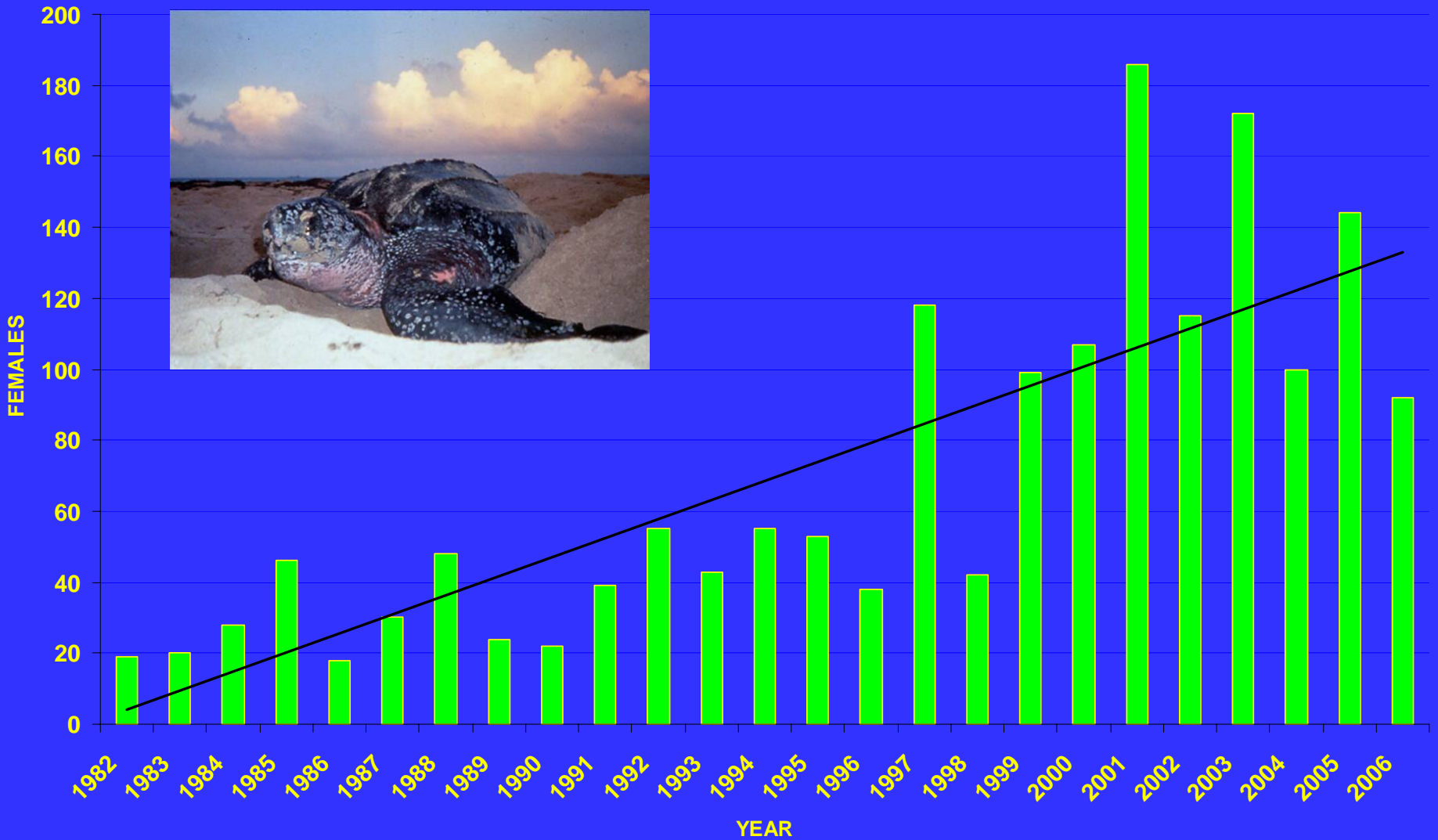


# Saturation Tagging

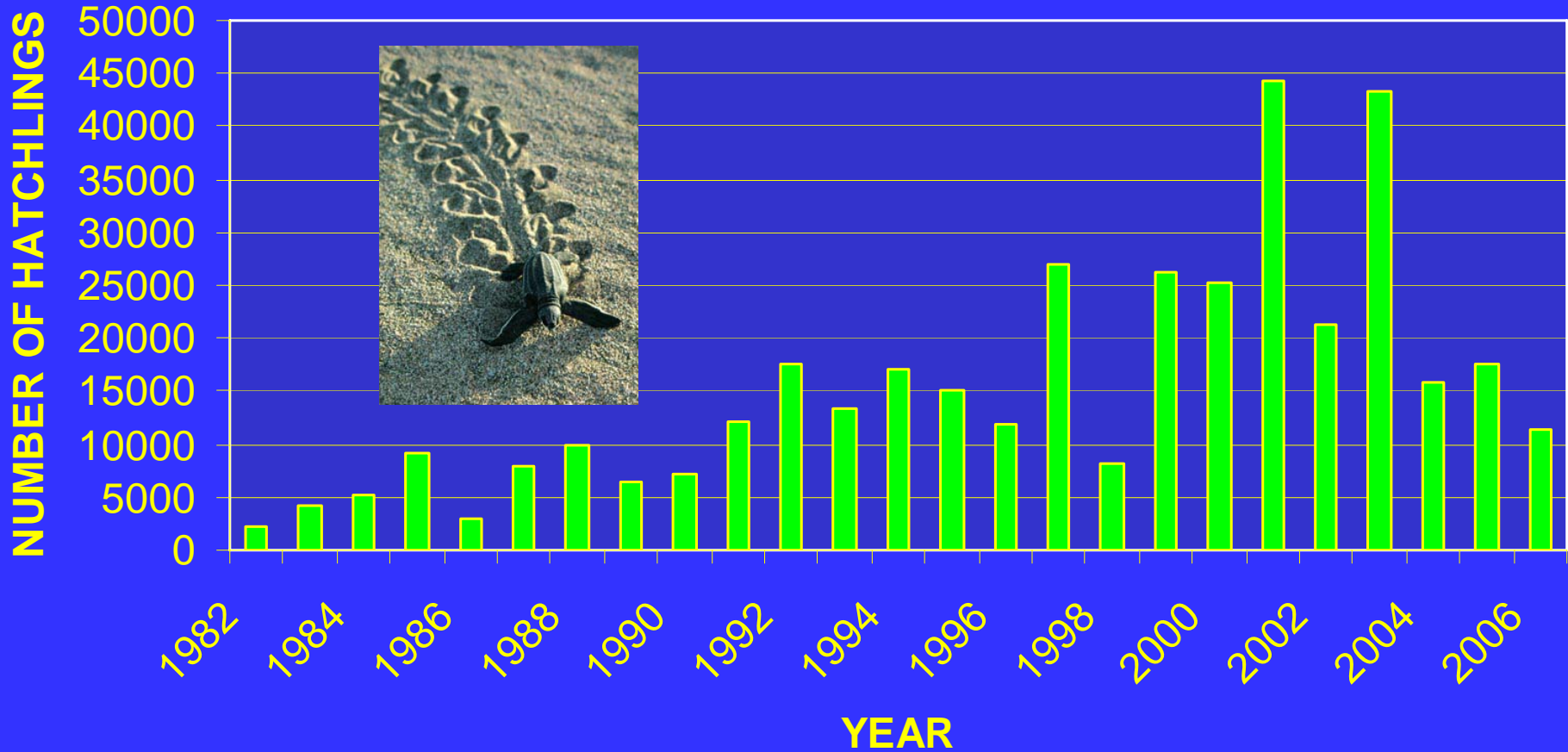




# LEATHERBACK FEMALES ENCOUNTERED AT SANDY POINT NWR FROM 1982-2006



# ANNUAL NUMBER OF HATCHLINGS PRODUCED AT SANDY POINT 1982-2006



# Results

- Population increasing rapidly (~13% annually)
- CMR analysis of 10 yrs PIT tag data yield high nesting female survival probabilities (~90%).



# Nest Relocation

30 – 40% of nests are relocated to stable beach areas





# Research Projects

- Nest excavation and hatch success analysis
- Analysis of effects of temperature, moisture, vegetation on nest success
- Blood sampling to determine population structure, age dynamics, nesting physiology, and metabolism
- Satellite telemetry to determine migration, diving, and movement patterns of nesting females



# Conclusions

- Beach protection and egg relocation can be effective management tools . . . Long term recovery efforts on Sandy Point appear to have paid off!
- Need high adult survivorship for continued recovery. . . . We estimate annual nester survival of this population to be about 89%, which is consistent with a healthy population!

# Turtle Watch Education Program



GOAL: Foster a conservation ethic within the St. Croix community

Thousands of school children and community members have participated in the Turtle Watch Program!

What do we offer tourism?



- Saturdays and Sundays 10:00am to 4:00 pm
- Birding, beach walks, interpretive stations
- Coming soon . . . . . on-site visitor center
- Volunteer opportunities . . . . .









# Earth Watch Volunteers





# QUESTIONS?

