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**NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service revise loggerhead sea turtle listing**  
*Changes will help guide conservation efforts*

NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final rule today changing the listing of loggerhead sea turtles under the Endangered Species Act from a single threatened species to nine distinct population segments listed as either threatened or endangered.

Scientists believe this will help focus their sea turtle conservation efforts to the specific needs of the distinct populations. NOAA and FWS share jurisdiction for loggerhead sea turtles listed under the ESA.

“This division of loggerhead sea turtles into nine distinct population segments will help us focus more on the individual threats turtles face in different areas,” said Jim Lecky, NOAA Fisheries director of protected resources. “Wide-ranging species, such as the loggerhead, benefit from assessing and addressing threats on a regional scale.”

“Both agencies agreed that loggerhead sea turtle conservation benefits from an approach that recognizes regionally varying threats,” said Cindy Dohner, FWS southeast regional director. “Today’s listing of separate distinct population segments will help us better assess, monitor, and address threats, and evaluate conservation successes, on a regional scale.”

On March 16, 2010, the agencies proposed to list seven distinct population segments, also known as DPSs, as endangered and two as threatened. In the final rule issued today, five were listed as endangered and four as threatened.

Two of the final statuses, for the Southeast Indo-Pacific Ocean and Northwest Atlantic Ocean DPSs, were changed from endangered in the proposal to threatened. Scientists determined that the Southeast Indo-Pacific Ocean DPS is threatened because the majority of nesting occurs on protected lands and nesting trends appear to be stable. In addition, some of the fisheries bycatch effects appear to have been resolved through requirement of turtle excluder devices in shrimp trawlers, and longline fishery effort has declined due to fish stock decreases and economic reasons.

Scientists found that the Northwest Atlantic Ocean DPS is threatened based on review of nesting data available after the proposed rule was published, information provided in public comments to the proposed rule, and further analysis within the agencies. Even so, substantial

conservation efforts are underway to address the threats to these DPSs.

Retaining their proposed status, five DPSs were listed as endangered--Northeast Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, North Indian Ocean, North Pacific Ocean and South Pacific Ocean--and two others were listed as threatened -- South Atlantic Ocean and Southwest Indian Ocean..

## **Background**

Loggerhead sea turtles were listed as threatened throughout their range in 1978. In 2008, a biological review team of scientists from NOAA, FWS and the states of Florida and North Carolina identified nine biologically discrete and significant DPSs. Since then, NOAA and FWS have been evaluating threats to and the status of each of the nine DPSs, to determine if they should be listed as threatened or endangered.

Under the ESA, an “endangered” species is “in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.” A “threatened” species is “likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.”

On July 16, 2007, NOAA and FWS received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) and Turtle Island Restoration Network requesting that loggerhead sea turtles in the North Pacific be reclassified as an endangered DPS, and that critical habitat be designated. On November 16, 2007, the agencies received a second petition from CBD and Oceana requesting similar action for Northwest Atlantic loggerhead sea turtles.

On November 16, 2007, and March 5, 2008, respectively, NOAA and FWS announced their 90-day findings that the requested actions may be warranted, and that they would proceed with an assessment of the loggerhead’s listing. This effort resulted in a formal status review of the loggerhead turtle in August 2009.

The biological review team, appointed by the agencies, assessed whether different populations met the criteria for designation as DPSs, looked at threats to the turtles, and assessed the extinction risks for each identified DPS. Nine scientists with expertise in loggerhead sea turtle biology, genetics and modeling independently reviewed the team’s report.

Following this detailed review, and an assessment in accordance with the statutory requirements of the ESA, the two agencies determined that the petitioned actions were warranted, and that seven other populations could also be identified as DPSs and listed separately as threatened or endangered. In March 2010, the two agencies published a *Federal Register* notice that included the 12-month petition findings and a proposed rule for all nine identified DPSs.

Both agencies solicited public comment on the proposed listing determinations, and received more than 109,000 comments.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Visit the service online at <http://www.fws.gov> or <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/>

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On the web:

Final loggerhead DPS listings:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/loggerhead.htm>

