



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan. 5, 2010

NOAA Proposes Critical Habitat Revisions for Leatherback Sea Turtles *Agency Seeks Comments*

NOAA's Fisheries Service is seeking public comment on a proposed rule to expand critical habitat for the endangered leatherback sea turtle by designating more than 70,000 square miles in three areas in the Pacific Ocean off the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington.

Critical habitat designations primarily affect federal projects and projects that are federally funded or authorized, and do not typically directly affect citizens engaged in recreational activities, such as recreational boating and fishing. This proposed rule is in response to a petition to revise critical habitat for leatherbacks to include habitat in the Pacific Ocean.

Currently, leatherback critical habitat is the Atlantic coastal waters adjacent to Sandy Point Beach, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The proposed revision would expand critical habitat to include approximately 70,600 square miles (182,854 square km) of marine habitat in the Pacific Ocean off the U.S coast, including two adjacent areas stretching along the California coast from Point Arena to Point Vicente; and one area stretching from Cape Flattery, Washington to the Umpqua River-Winchester Bay, Oregon east of a line approximating the 2,000-meter depth contour.

The leatherback sea turtle, the largest marine turtle in the world, was listed as endangered throughout its range in 1970. Leatherbacks have the largest range of any living reptile and occur throughout the oceans of the world. Leatherbacks feed primarily on jellyfish, lay their eggs on tropical and subtropical beaches, and although very little is known about their lifespan, it has been estimated that they may live for 45 years or more. Leatherbacks face many dangers both in the marine environment and on land, including bycatch in fishing gear, habitat destruction and the harvest of eggs and adults on nesting beaches.

Comments may be submitted for this proposed rule as listed below. All comments received become part of the public record and will be posted to:
<http://www.regulations.gov>

Comments and information regarding this proposed rule must be received by March 5, 2010.

You may submit comments, identified by RIN 0648-AX06, addressed to: David Cottingham, Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division, by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal [http:// www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov).
- Facsimile (fax): 301-713-4060, Attn: David Cottingham
- Mail: Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Protected Resources, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD, 20910.

For More Information Contact: Sara McNulty, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Protected Resources, 301-713-2322; Elizabeth Petras, NOAA Fisheries Southwest Region, 562-980-3238; Steve Stone, NOAA Fisheries Northwest Region, 503-231-2317.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/noaa.lubchenco>.

Figure: Map of proposed critical habitat for leatherback sea turtles. The map depicts the three proposed areas (colored polygons) and the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ (blue line) along the U.S. West Coast.

