



NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOAA's FISHERIES SERVICE AND THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSE ESA LISTING CHANGES FOR THE LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

NOAA's Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), jointly referred to as the Services, announced today their joint determination that the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) is globally comprised of nine distinct population segments (DPSs) that qualify as "species" for listing as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The *Federal Register* notice, scheduled to publish on March 16, will formally announce the findings on petitions to list the North Pacific and Northwest Atlantic populations of the loggerhead as DPSs with endangered status and proposes to list nine separate loggerhead DPSs worldwide, including the two petitioned populations.

"Following a thorough assessment of the global loggerhead populations it was clear the nine populations were distinct," said Eric Schwaab, NOAA assistant administrator for NOAA's Fisheries Service. "Our joint analysis of the nine loggerhead DPSs also lead us to the finding that two of these populations should be proposed for listing as threatened, while the other seven should be proposed for listing as endangered." The two DPSs proposed as threatened are the South Atlantic Ocean and the Southwest Indian Ocean. The seven DPSs proposed as endangered are the North Pacific Ocean, South Pacific Ocean, Southeast Indo-Pacific Ocean, North Indian Ocean, Northwest Atlantic Ocean, Northeast Atlantic Ocean, and Mediterranean Sea.

Loggerhead sea turtles are currently listed as threatened throughout their range.

In August 2007, the Services completed an ESA five-year review of the loggerhead turtle and recommended that the species be fully examined in accordance with the DPS policy to determine whether the species exists as DPSs and, if so, what the status of those DPSs is. On July 16, 2007, the Services 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 a DPS with endangered status, and that critical habitat be designated. On November 16, 2007, the Services received a second petition from CBD and Oceana requesting that loggerhead turtles in the Northwest Atlantic be reclassified as a DPS with endangered status and that critical habitat be designated.

On November 16, 2007 and March 5, 2008, respectively, the Services 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 status. Subsequently, a Loggerhead Biological Review Team (BRT) was formed. The BRT evaluated the species in accordance with the DPS policy to determine whether DPSs existed, and then evaluated the status of each DPS. This effort resulted in a formal Status Review of the Loggerhead Turtle in August 2009. The BRT status report then underwent independent peer review by nine scientists with expertise in loggerhead sea turtle biology, genetics, and modeling.

"The BRT status review was not only comprehensive in its scope," said Cynthia Dohner, FWS's southeast regional director, "but represents an outstanding synthesis of the best available scientific information used to inform our joint determination and proposal."

Following a detailed review of the BRT findings, and an assessment in accordance with the statutory requirements of the ESA, the Services determined that the petitioned actions were warranted and prepared the single *Federal Register* notice that includes the 12-month petition findings and a proposed rule for all nine identified DPSs.

The Services are soliciting public comment on the proposed listing determination. Specifically they are seeking information and comments on whether the nine proposed loggerhead sea turtle DPSs qualify as DPSs and, if so, whether they should be classified as threatened or endangered.

Specific information sought includes the following areas relative to loggerhead turtles within the nine proposed DPSs:

- (1) historical and current population status and trends,
- (2) historical and current distribution,
- (3) migratory movements and behavior,
- (4) genetic population structure,
- (5) current or planned activities that may adversely impact loggerhead turtles, and
- (6) ongoing efforts to protect loggerhead turtles.

Anyone wishing to comment and/or submit information, identified by the RIN 0648–AY49, regarding the proposed actions may do so via one of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- U.S. mail or hand-delivery: NMFS National Sea Turtle Coordinator, Attn: Loggerhead Proposed Listing Rule, Office of Protected Resources, National Marine Fisheries Service, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 13657, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or USFWS National Sea Turtle Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200, Jacksonville, FL 32256.
- Fax: To the attention of NMFS National Sea Turtle Coordinator at 301-713-0376 or USFWS National Sea Turtle Coordinator at 904-731-3045.

The Services will post all information received on <http://www.regulations.gov>. This generally means that any personal information provided also will be posted. NOAA Fisheries and FWS will accept anonymous comments (enter N/A in the required fields, if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Please note that submissions merely stating support for or opposition to the action under consideration without providing supporting information, although noted, will not be considered in making a determination, as section 4(b)(1)(A) of the ESA directs that “the Secretary shall make determinations ... solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available ...”

Information must be received by June 14, 2010. Request for public hearings must be received by June 1, 2010.

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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