



Contact: Connie Barclay
301-713-2370

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 2, 2008

NOAA's Fisheries Service Seeks Comments on Loggerhead Sea Turtles *Agency Petitioned to List Distinct Population*

NOAA's Fisheries Service has determined that a petition to reclassify loggerhead turtles in the western North Atlantic Ocean as a distinct population segment with endangered status may be warranted, and is seeking comments on the petition action. Currently, loggerhead turtles are listed as a threatened species throughout the world.

NOAA's Fisheries Service found that the petition submitted by Oceana and Center for Biological Diversity presents substantial scientific and commercial information indicating the western North Atlantic population may be distinct due to physical, genetic, physiological, ecological, and/or behavioral factors, and thus, may warrant a separate listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

"We are assessing the global status of the loggerhead turtle. Identifying unique population segments and determining how each population contributes to the species' ability to survive is a key factor in the assessment," said Jim Balsiger, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service.

NOAA's Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who share jurisdiction of loggerhead turtles under the ESA, convened a Biological Review Team (BRT) to identify whether distinct populations exist, and to look at the threats these populations face. The team will assess the extinction risk for each distinct population segment they identify. NOAA's Fisheries Service and the USFWS would then determine which of these distinct populations should be listed as threatened and which should be listed as endangered.

NOAA's Fisheries Service and the USFWS concluded in a recent five-year review of the status of the loggerhead sea turtle that the annual number of nests laid on beaches in the southeast U.S. are declining significantly, indicating that fewer adult females are nesting annually. The number of nests recorded along the Atlantic coast from Georgia to North Carolina has declined approximately 2 percent each year from 1983 to 2005. The number of nests recorded along Florida's coasts shows a decrease of 22 percent from 1989 to 2005.

"The observed decline in nests over the past two decades represents a loss in the number of hatchlings that will enter the population, which in turn may further reduce the adult population over time," said Barbara Schroeder, NOAA Fisheries Service scientist and National Sea Turtle Coordinator. "With fewer breeding adults, the decline in nests may continue and affect the species' ability to survive and recover."

NOAA's Fisheries Service is asking the public to submit comments and information related to the loggerhead petition finding no later than May 5, 2008. Information on how to submit comments and information may be found at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/turtles/>

The results of the loggerhead global assessment will publish in the Federal Register, and will be available to the public.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

##