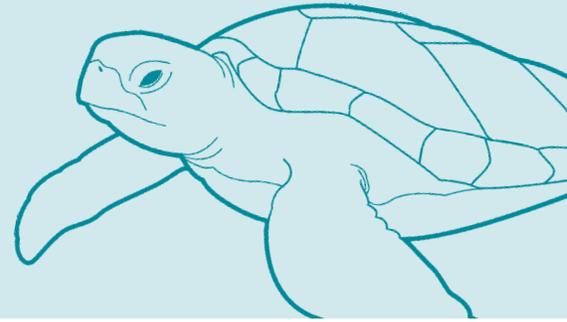


Distinct Population Segments of Green Sea Turtles under the U.S. Endangered Species Act



Sea Turtle Biology and Behavior:

- Worldwide distribution in tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions
- Late maturing, long-lived
- Complex life histories includes 3 main ecological zones
 - Oceanic (>200m depth) – neonates, juveniles
 - Nearshore (<200m depth) – juveniles, adults
 - Terrestrial – nesting females, eggs, hatchlings, basking males and females
- Nesting occurs on sandy beaches during summer
- Habitat transitions/migrations occur between developmental stages and on a seasonal basis for foraging or reproduction (breeding, egg laying)
- Seagrasses and algae are the primary food of sea turtles

Frequently Asked Questions

APRIL 2016

Q: Why did you reevaluate the green sea turtle listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)?

Our last 5-year review of the green sea turtle, completed on August 31, 2007, recommended that we review the species in the context of the distinct population segment (DPS) policy. In 2012, we received a petition from the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs to identify the Hawaiian green sea turtle population as a DPS and “delist” it under the ESA. We decided to review the Hawaiian population in the context of green sea turtles globally with regard to application of the DPS policy and in light of significant new information since the global listing of the species in 1978.

Q: What is a Distinct Population Segment (DPS)?

A DPS is a vertebrate population or group of populations that is discrete and significant in relation to the entire species. The ESA provides for listing species, subspecies, or DPSs of vertebrate species.

Q: Why did you examine the status of green sea turtles globally and not just in Hawaii?

Since the global listing of the green sea turtle, a substantial amount of information has become available on population structure (through genetic studies) and distribution (through telemetry, tagging, and genetic studies). We took this opportunity to determine the application of the DPS policy to currently listed populations of the green sea turtle, as well as to the species globally.

Q: What information did you use to make your proposed decision under the ESA?

We convened a Status Review Team to compile and evaluate all relevant scientific and commercial information to determine whether any of the populations qualify as DPSs and determine the extinction risk for each DPS. The Status Review Team considered abundance, growth rates/trends, spatial structure, diversity/resilience, threats, and conservation efforts. We used the resulting Status Review Report and other pertinent information to identify DPSs and evaluate their status under the ESA.

Q: What are the decisions found in the rule?

After conducting a review of the global status of green sea turtles and incorporating public comments, the Services (NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) found that the green turtle is composed of 11 DPSs that qualify for listing as endangered or threatened under the ESA — we listed eight as threatened and three as endangered. The Central West Pacific DPS (includes Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) and the Central South Pacific DPS (includes Pacific Remote Island Areas and American Samoa) are listed as endangered. The Central North Pacific DPS (includes Hawaii and Johnston Atoll) is listed as threatened. The new classifications provide a more targeted approach for managers to address specific threats facing different populations, while maintaining federal protections for all turtles.



Q: What is the difference between an endangered and a threatened species?

An endangered species is a species that is currently at risk of extinction. A threatened species is one that is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future.

Q: What did you decide regarding the petition to delist the Hawaiian green sea turtle?

Although we find that the Hawaiian green sea turtle population (referred to in the proposed rule as the Central North Pacific population) does constitute a DPS, we do not find delisting this population under the ESA is warranted at this time. Instead, we proposed listing the DPS as threatened because of its small and narrowly distributed nesting population and because continued threats such as climate change and sea level rise are likely to endanger the DPS within the foreseeable future.

Q: How will the DPS designation and listing affect me?

For the public, the rule will change very little. You will continue to have the ability to use the beach or ocean (e.g., surf, swim, recreate on the beach) just as you do today. Green sea turtles have been protected under the ESA since 1978 and will continue to be protected.

Primary Threats to Sea Turtles:

- Loss or degradation of nesting and foraging habitat
- Incidental capture in fishing gear
 - Gillnets
 - Trawls
 - Dredges
 - Hook and line
- Disease (e.g., fibropapilloma)
- Climate change and sea level rise, warming of beaches, effects on prey and marine ecology
- Harvest of turtles and eggs in some locations (a historical and current problem)
- Vessel strikes
- Pollution such as marine debris, oil, and other contaminants



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