



NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NOAA FISHERIES AND THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ANNOUNCE DECISION CONCERNING THE LISTING OF LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLES

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that the Northern and Florida Panhandle subpopulations of loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) do not warrant reclassification as Distinct Population Segments (DPS) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

“NOAA Fisheries and the Fish and Wildlife Service find that listing the Northern and Florida Panhandle subpopulations of loggerhead turtles as Distinct Population Segments is not warranted at this time,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, assistant administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries Service. “However, this is a threatened species, and we will continue our efforts for its recovery, including protection of these subpopulations which are essential for that recovery.”

All loggerhead sea turtles are now listed as threatened throughout their range. On January 10, 2002, the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund petitioned NOAA Fisheries and FWS to designate the Northern and Florida Panhandle subpopulations as DPSs, with endangered status, and to designate critical habitat under the ESA.

Both agencies reviewed the petition, the literature cited in the petition, comments received from the public, and other available literature and information, then consulted with biologists and researchers familiar with the loggerhead sea turtle. Based on that review, scientists determined that the Northern

and Florida Panhandle subpopulations of the loggerhead sea turtle do not meet the criteria for reclassification as DPSs under the ESA. Specifically, while numerous lines of evidence indicate the identified nesting assemblages are discrete to some degree, the separation is not highly rigid and the subpopulations are not markedly separated from each other based on the criteria for discreteness in the agencies' DPS policy. Nor are these subpopulations separated from other loggerhead sea turtles by international boundaries. Thus, the subpopulations do not warrant separate DPS listing.

Although the petitioned action was found to be not warranted, scientists are aware of the importance of the subpopulations. That knowledge has been integrated into the extensive conservation efforts being applied to this species. In addition, the Atlantic loggerhead recovery team is currently evaluating the designation of the subpopulations as separate recovery units to be included in a revised recovery plan. Designation of subpopulations as recovery units would underscore the importance and interdependence of the subpopulations and help us develop recovery actions to most effectively conserve loggerheads as a species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices, and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov>.

NOAA Fisheries is the principal steward of the nation's living marine resources, protecting marine and anadromous species under the ESA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. NOAA Fisheries develops and implements conservation and recovery plans and works to prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered. NOAA Fisheries also regulates the nation's commercial and recreational fisheries and manages species under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act throughout federal waters that extend 200 miles from the U.S. coastline. Using the tools provided by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NOAA Fisheries assesses and predicts the status of fish stocks, ensures compliance with fisheries regulations, and works to reduce wasteful fishing practices. NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.