

## Background

All species of sea turtles found in the U.S. are listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Incidental capture in fisheries (bycatch) is a primary threat hampering the recovery of sea turtles in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. There is a need to evaluate and address sea turtle bycatch comprehensively for gear types in state and federal waters of the U.S. NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the agency responsible for protecting sea turtles in the marine environment, has implemented conservation and monitoring programs, issued regulations, and taken other actions under the ESA to recover these species. To further assist in meeting sea turtle recovery goals and specifically to evaluate and address sea turtle bycatch, NMFS is implementing the Strategy for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery in Relation to Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries (Strategy).

### What is the Strategy?

**PURPOSE:** To reduce bycatch of sea turtles by comprehensively evaluating and addressing bycatch by gear type in commercial and recreational fisheries.

**WHERE:** State and Federal U.S. waters of the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico

#### GOALS:

- Characterize fisheries in state and federal waters
- Evaluate sea turtle bycatch by gear type
- Develop and implement measures to reduce sea turtle bycatch by gear type
- Recover and protect sea turtles

## Benefits of the Strategy

- Increased knowledge about where, when, and how best to reduce sea turtle bycatch
- Increased likelihood of sea turtle recovery
- Decreased likelihood of the need for emergency measures over the long-term
- Implementation of a comprehensive, integrated state and federal management approach
- Stakeholder involvement in the development of bycatch reduction measures
- Shared responsibility for sea turtle conservation across state and federal waters and fisheries
- Broader fishery compliance with ESA take prohibition

## Why A Gear-based Approach?

Certain types of fishing gear are more prone to the incidental capture of sea turtles than others, depending on the way the gear is fished and the time and area within which it is fished. An evaluation of sea turtle interactions based on the type of gear used will provide a more comprehensive assessment of fishery impacts across fishing sectors as well as state, federal, and regional boundaries and will increase management effectiveness.



Trawl net  
Photo: NOAA



Scallop dredge  
Photo: Andy Applegate



Whelk pot  
Photo: NMFS



Gillnet  
Photo: NOAA

## Primary Components of Strategy Implementation

- Characterize fisheries and develop a geographical information system depicting sea turtle distribution, bycatch data, and fisheries information.
- Solicit constituent input on the strategy framework, prioritization of gears, fisheries characterization, and management alternatives.
- Develop and implement management measures to reduce sea turtle bycatch.



Removing turtle from pound net  
Photo: Craig Harms



Turtle escaping from a turtle excluder device (TED)  
Photo: NMFS

## How Can You Participate?

NMFS is actively seeking input from the regional fishery management councils, the states, the fishing industry, non-governmental organizations and other interested members of the public on the components of the Strategy.

## Sea Turtles Commonly Found in the Western North Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico



### Leatherback

**Status:** Endangered

**Primary Distribution in Strategy Area:**

Texas to Maine

**Primary Prey:** Jellyfish

### Loggerhead

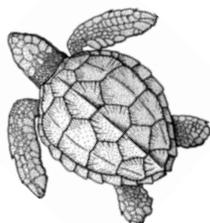
**Status:** Threatened

**Primary Distribution in Strategy Area:**

Texas to Maine

**Primary Prey:**

Crustaceans and mollusks



### Hawksbill

**Status:** Endangered

**Primary Distribution in Strategy Area:**

Texas to Florida

**Primary Prey:** Sponges

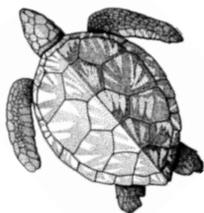
### Green Turtle

**Status:** Endangered/  
Threatened

**Primary Distribution in Strategy Area:**

Texas to Massachusetts

**Primary Prey:** Seagrass  
and algae



### Kemp's Ridley

**Status:** Endangered

**Primary Distribution in Strategy Area:**

Texas to Massachusetts

**Primary Prey:** Crabs



To implement the Strategy for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery in Relation to Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries (Strategy), NMFS has developed a core team with members from Headquarters and Regional Offices in the Northeast and Southeast. NMFS Northeast and Southeast Fisheries Science Centers help support the data and analysis needs of the Strategy.

**For more information on the Strategy, please contact:**

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Loggerhead sea turtle  
Photo: George Schmahl

## Strategy for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery in Relation to Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries

**NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service**

Background Courtesy of Sea Grant, Connecticut