

The Strategy for Sea Turtle Conservation and Recovery in Relation to Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fisheries (Sea Turtle Strategy)

**NOAA's National Marine Fisheries
Service (NMFS)**

**Presentation to the
Atlantic Trawl Gear
Take Reduction Team
September 2006**



Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

- What is it?
- Why is it needed?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the current Strategy efforts?



Photo credit: NOAA

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What is it?

A new approach to address sea turtle bycatch across similar gear types rather than fishery by fishery



SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What is it?

- Key Elements:
 - characterize state and federal fisheries (commercial and recreational) in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico
 - evaluate bycatch by gear type
 - analyze existing regulations and identify gaps in protection
 - develop solutions to reduce sea turtle bycatch
 - implement, monitor, and evaluate solutions

based on best available data:

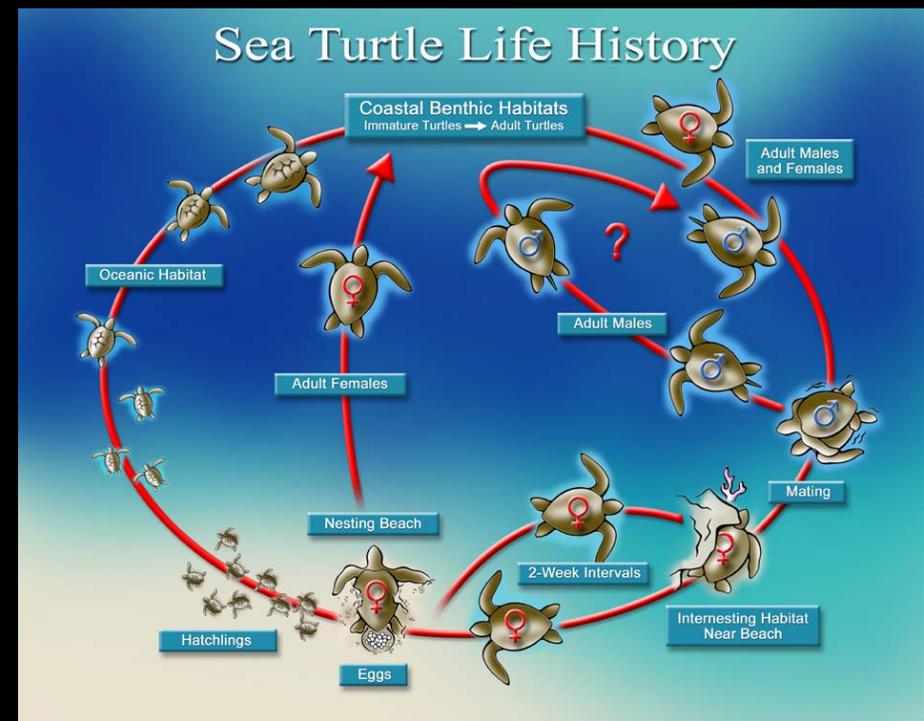
improve monitoring and assessment of sea turtle populations

improve monitoring and bycatch estimates

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

Why is it needed?

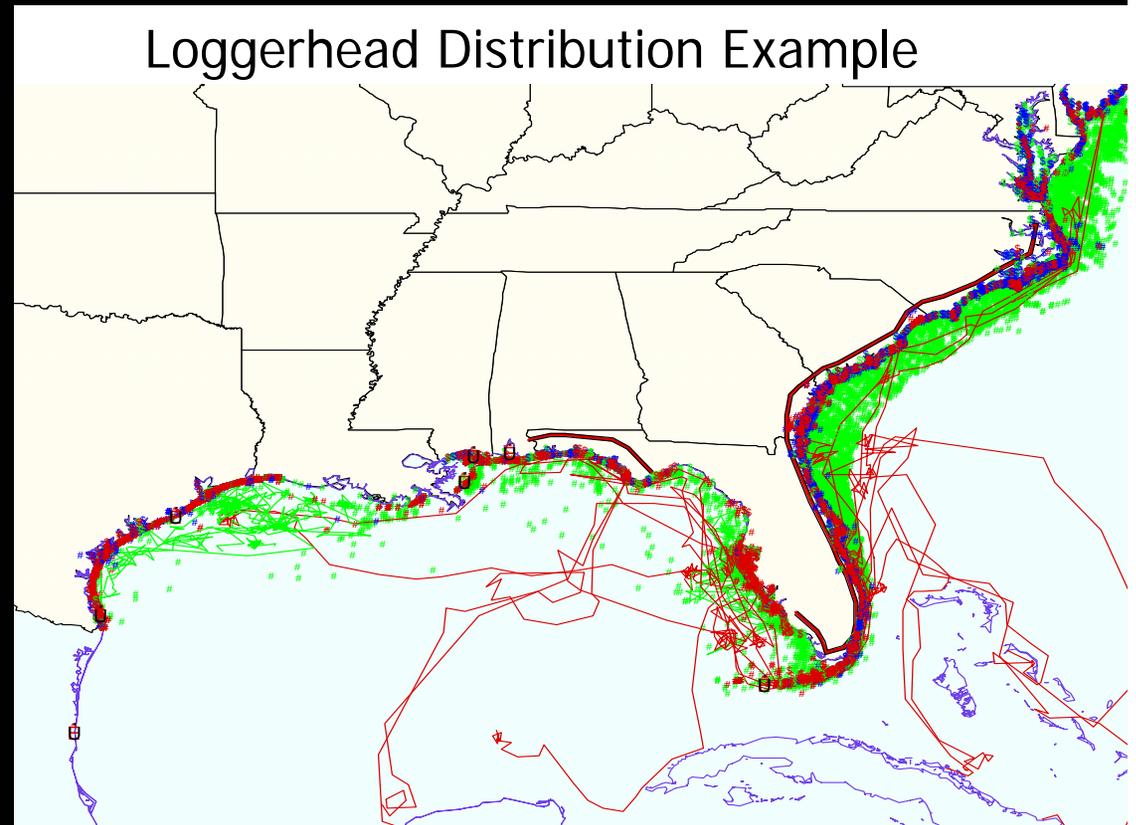
- Conserve and recover sea turtles
- Sea turtles inhabit estuarine, nearshore, offshore and pelagic waters



SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

Why is it needed?

- Sea turtles are highly migratory and widely distributed



SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

Why is it needed?

- Sea turtles are prone to capture in certain types of gear, for example:
 - trawl (e.g. bottom)
 - gillnets (e.g. large mesh, stationary, drift)
 - longlines (e.g. pelagic)
 - dredges (e.g. scallop)
 - pot and trap gear (e.g., whelk, lobster)
 - hook and line (e.g. recreational, commercial)

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

Why is it needed?

- Ensure a comprehensive and integrated plan across fisheries of concern
 - federal fishery management plans
 - state fishery management
 - non-managed fisheries
 - lacked ESA 'take' coverage for all fisheries
 - 'take' is prohibited; exceptions may be granted through federal regulation or permit for legal activities such as fisheries

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

Why is it needed?

- Provide an ordered approach:
 - management can be reactionary (e.g. emergency closure due to high strandings)
 - loss of benefit to sea turtles
 - increase in uncertainty for fishermen
 - management effectiveness can be improved by prioritizing gear types based on level of use and impacts to sea turtles

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What are the benefits?

- 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
- Shared responsibility for sea turtle conservation across state and federal waters and fisheries
- Implementation of a comprehensive, integrated federal management approach
- Broader compliance with ESA take prohibition

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

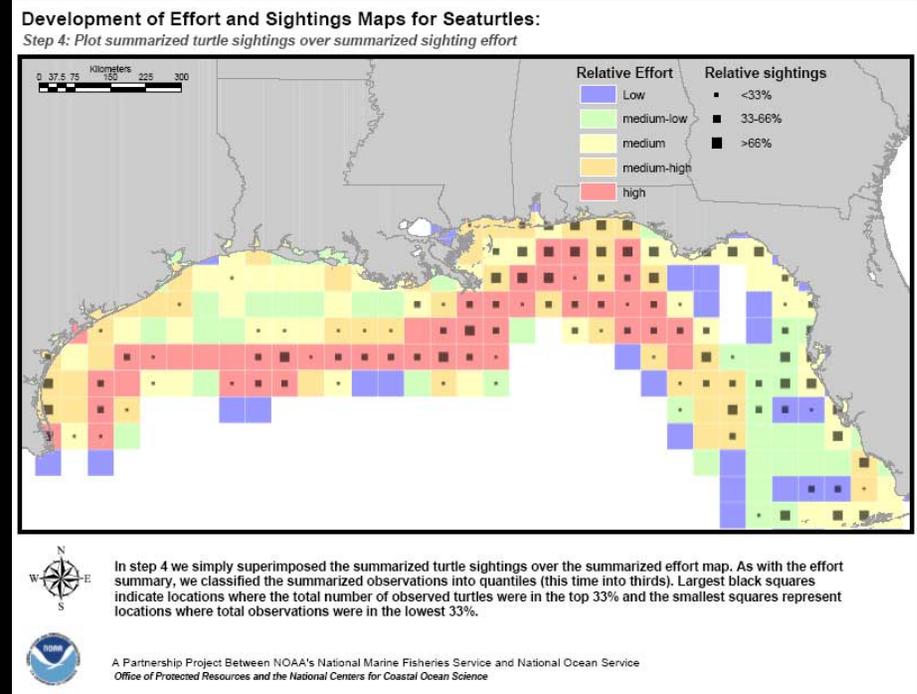
What are the current efforts?

- Federal and state fisheries characterizations
 - description of gear and its deployment
 - description of fishing effort (e.g., number of vessels, number of trips)
 - recent and anticipated trends in effort
 - summary of sea turtle bycatch information
 - relevant regulations

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What are the current efforts?

- Development of a Geographic Information System to display:
 - sea turtle distribution
 - fishing and observer effort
 - observed sea turtle bycatch
 - existing regulations
 - oceanographic information (e.g., SST, depth)



Preliminary Data
Only

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What are the current efforts?

- Trawl gear
 - TED research in non-shrimp trawls
 - flynet
 - scallop
 - summer flounder (larger opening)
 - Geographic extent of TED requirements
 - Monitoring skimmer trawls



Photo credit: NOAA

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What are the current efforts?

- Other gears
 - pound net leader modifications (implemented 2006)
 - chain-mat modified sea scallop dredge (implemented 2006)
 - modified sea scallop dredge (benthic interactions) research
 - whelk pot research
 - monitoring Chesapeake Bay pot/trap fisheries
- Facilitate future research
 - NMFS National Working Group on Fishing Technology

SEA TURTLE STRATEGY

What are the current and future efforts?

- Outreach and feedback
 - Information gathering
 - councils, commissions, states, and other constituents
 - supply additional information on fisheries, sea turtles, and gear to help fill “information gaps”
 - Develop bycatch reduction technologies
 - participate in meetings to develop solutions for reducing sea turtle bycatch
 - trawl gear workshop (October)
 - Implementation
 - employ effective management

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