

VELADOR

Using Science-based Conservation to Protect Sea Turtles and Their Habitats Since 1959

Issue 2, 2009

Emergency Action Taken to Protect Threatened and Endangered Sea Turtles



Jim Angy

On April 15, 2009, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, along with several other environmental organizations, sued the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to force quick action to protect sea turtles that are being imperiled by longline fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. The groups urged the federal agency to impose immediate protections for the endangered and threatened sea turtles that are being injured and killed by the Gulf of Mexico bottom longline reef fish fishery.

Two weeks after being sued, NMFS ordered an emergency closure of the fishery in the Gulf of Mexico to protect sea turtles. During the closure, which will prohibit fishing in waters less than 50 fathoms (300 feet), NMFS will determine whether and how the fishery can operate while ensuring the survival of the turtles over the long term.

NMFS data indicate the fishery had captured more

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Upcoming Events

CCC 50th Anniversary Gala!

On November 12, 2009, CCC will celebrate 50 years of sea turtle conservation with an Anniversary Gala in New York City. Founded in 1959 by world-renowned sea turtle biologist, Dr. Archie Carr, CCC is the world's oldest sea turtle research and conservation group.

Research conducted at Tortuguero and other project sites has uncovered much of what is known about sea turtle biology and habitats. And CCC continues to pave the way today! Satellite-tracking, educational programs and our dedicated commitment to advocacy are setting the stage for the next generation of research and conservation efforts.

With so much to celebrate, we hope that you will join us at New York City's Harvard Club on Thursday, November 12 at 7 pm. For more information or to RSVP, please visit us online at www.cccturtle.org/gala. 🐢



Tour de Turtles

As nesting season is underway, the buzz around Florida and Caribbean beaches is that nesting females are getting ready for this year's Tour de Turtles Migration Marathon!

Last year, CCC launched the first sea turtle migration marathon to educate audiences about the threats to sea turtle survival using satellite-tracking technology. This mock sea turtle marathon challenged nine individual turtles to be the first to travel 26.2 hundred kilometers – a play on a human marathon distance of 26.2 miles.

This summer, twelve sea turtles from five different locations representing four species will compete again to see which one can reach the distance first. On July 31, join CCC as we follow these tenacious turtles in real time on their Tour de Turtles quest to be the champion! Visit www.tourdeturtles.org to learn more. 🐢



VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, **Velador** translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now CCC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the Caribbean, CCC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors.

The **Velador** is published for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Caribbean Conservation Corporation** and its **Sea Turtle Survival League** program.

CCC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and the protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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...from cover

than eight times the number of sea turtles authorized previously by its 2005 biological opinion. A Federal Register notice that was published on Friday, May 1st, explained that further bottom longline fishing could jeopardize the existence of loggerhead sea turtles “unless action is taken to reduce the fishery’s impact on this threatened species.”

“This is a great victory for those who believe in protecting sea turtles from unnecessary harm and illegal capture to ensure their continued survival in the wild,” said Marydele Donnelly, CCC International Policy Director. “We commend NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco for setting a new course for NMFS that relies on sound science to manage our oceans and protect marine wildlife for the future of all Americans.”

There has been a decline of over 40% in Florida’s loggerhead turtle nesting during the last decade; without a doubt, fisheries are a culprit in these declines. The closure of the bottom longline reef fishery in the Gulf of Mexico begins to address one of the greatest threats to sea turtles in the United States and improves this species’ chance at survival.

Bottom longline reef fishing is a process that uses hundreds, or even thousands, of baited hooks along miles

of lines laid behind fishing vessels and stretching down to the reef and Gulf floor. The fishing hooks target species like grouper, tilefish, and sharks, but often catch other fish or wildlife, including endangered and threatened sea turtles. Many times the turtles drown or are unable to recover from the extreme physiological stress and die soon after being released from the longlines.

The closure, which became effective May 18, 2009, will last for 6 months, or until the NMFS completes a new biological opinion. The biological opinion will evaluate the impact of the fishery and insure that it is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the captured sea turtle species. It will also consider measures that could be used to reduce turtle capture and killing by the fishery, to allow it to reopen at a future date.

NMFS also stated that it is working with the Gulf Council to implement “long-term measures to reduce bycatch of sea turtles in the eastern Gulf of Mexico” which “are needed to provide protection for loggerhead sea turtles” in particular due to the long-term decline in their nesting population in Florida. Consideration for such long-term measures on a permanent basis would be implemented after a period of public notice and comment.

By Marydele Donnelly
Director of International Policy

Florida Legislative Update

During the 2009 Florida legislative session, which ended May 8, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) testified at a legislative committee hearing addressing coastal armoring issues and worked with the Florida conservation community to support passage of a landmark land conservation law.

Geotubes (again!)

CCC has been working for years to ensure that the installation of 1000-ton rock hard sand bags, known as geotubes, on Florida’s beaches is done in a way that does not harm turtles or the nesting beach. As has been reported in the Velador, when this type of coastal armoring is placed on the beach and covered with sand it can have serious impacts to nesting turtles, beach environments, and coastal processes. These sand tubes often become partially uncovered or cannot maintain the necessary and required depth of sand cover to provide a suitable nesting environment. When this occurs, the sand tubes can block access to suitable nesting areas, cause an increase in false crawls, or compromise the nesting environment resulting in a decrease in the number of nests that successfully incubate and hatch. Studies of geotube systems in Florida have conclusively documented these impacts.

Advanced Coastal Technologies (ACT), an Alabama-



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based company that owns the patent, has been lobbying the Florida legislature for years to make it easier to permit and install geotubes. In 2007, the legislature passed a law governing the installation of geotubes. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection was then required to develop rules regulating the permitting, installation and maintenance of these structures. After being lobbied by geotube company representatives, a House Committee held a “workshop” on DEP’s rulemaking process in April. The Committee members threatened to “override” the agency’s rule making process if it did not finalize the rule immediately. It appeared that the Committee had only been provided with one side of the geotube story. CCC testified at length about the potential and actual harmful

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Recycle Logo and associated text

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impacts of geotubes and their continued failure to perform as intended. CCC testified that DEP's careful and deliberative rule making process was necessary due to the complicated issues surrounding the unprecedented installation of these massive structures on Florida's beaches. The Committee asked DEP to commit to a timeline to finalize the geotube rules (To view CCC's testimony visit <http://freethebeach.cccturtle.org>).

Amendment 4

In November 2008, Florida voters unanimously approved Amendment 4, which amended the Florida Constitution to require the state legislature to make a property tax exemption for landowners that place a perpetual conservation easement on their land. It also required the legislature to establish a classification process for land used for conservation. In May, the 2009 Florida Legislature passed House Bill 7157, the enabling legislation for the amendment. CCC worked with the bill's sponsors and other conservation groups to support the legislation.

The new law allows the tax break for qualifying parcels greater than 40 acres. However, there are qualifying exemptions for smaller parcels if they can be shown to provide a public conservation benefit and meet other criteria. CCC worked to ensure that smaller ocean front parcels may qualify for the tax break, thereby providing an incentive to not develop on the dunes of eroding beaches and to support the conservation of coastal lands. Parcels that are encumbered with a perpetual conservation easement and that provide habitat for threatened and endangered species, provide protection or restoration of




D. Schrieble

- : vulnerable coastal resources or preserve natural shoreline
- : habitat will qualify for the property tax exemption. Time
- : will tell if property owners will take advantage of this new
- : law to conserve land by forgoing its development potential. CCC would like to thank the Florida Wildlife Federation, Audubon of Florida and other conservation groups
- : for their support of this landmark conservation legislation.
- : We would also like to especially thank Senator Thad Altman for his leadership on this legislation.

Seagrass beds and reefs

Of particular interest to the sea turtle conservation community is House Bill 1424, which added new protections for Florida's coral reefs and sea grass beds. Both these habitats are heavily used by different age classes of the species of marine turtles that visit Florida's waters or nest on the state's beaches. For example, the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle can be found in large numbers foraging or resting on the extensive coral reef track offshore of Palm Beach County. House Bill 1424 included the Coral Reef Protection Act. It authorized

- : the Department of Environmental Protection to establish
- : methods for calculating damages to and assessing civil
- : penalties for the damage to coral reefs in Martin, Palm
- : Beach, Broward, Dade and Monroe counties. Careless and
- : unintended boat groundings and anchoring on coral reefs
- : do permanent damage. Along similar lines, the bill also
- : included fines for damaging sea grass beds in Florida's
- : aquatic preserves. This legislation will discourage these
- : activities and provide a mechanism to mitigate any harm
- : that does occur. 
- :

By Gary Appelson
 CCC's Policy Coordinator