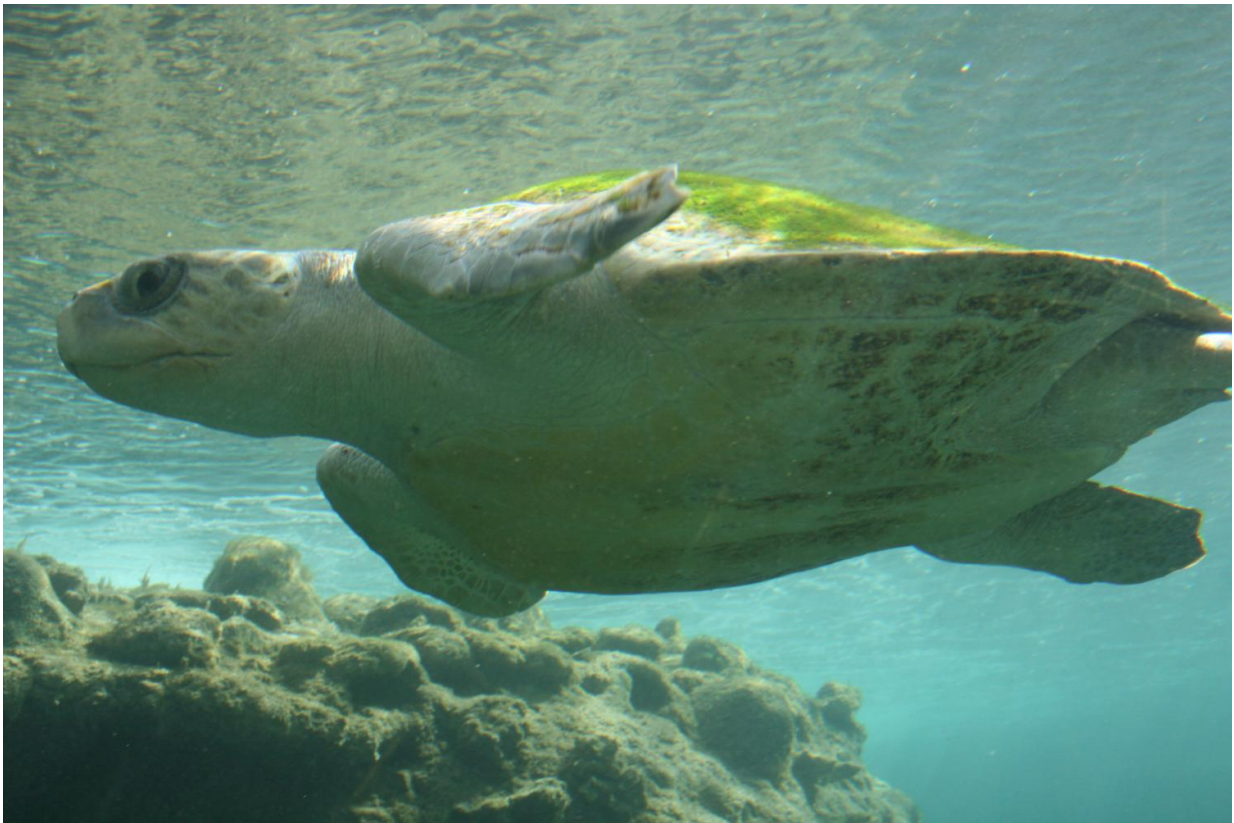


Habitats for endangered green sea turtles will be federally protected in Florida

August 24 2020, by Adriana Brasileiro, Miami Herald



An olive ridley sea turtle, a species of the sea turtle superfamily. Credit: Thierry Caro/Wikipedia

Endangered green sea turtles will have some of their nesting beaches in Florida protected by federal agencies under a new legal agreement with

conservation groups.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service must designate protected critical habitats for [green sea turtles](#) by June 30, 2023, the Center for Biological Diversity said in a statement this week.

The agencies will likely consider proposing protections for beaches where green turtles nest in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, as well as offshore oceanic habitat in the Southeast and on the West Coast, according to the agreement. These critical habitats designations don't prohibit development, but they require that any project that's permitted by a federal agency must minimize harm to these special areas.

"We're thrilled that these imperiled creatures will finally get the habitat protections required by the Endangered Species Act," said Jaclyn Lopez, Florida director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "Green sea turtle recovery has come a long way, but the fight's not over yet."

Green sea turtle populations worldwide are threatened by poaching, by catch in commercial and recreational fishing, vessel strikes and the degradation of their habitats. Global warming and sea-level rise, as well as increased pollution, are making it harder for these turtles to nest in some areas, which has led [conservation groups](#) to push for more protections.

The agreement stems from a lawsuit filed in January by the Center for Biological Diversity, Sea Turtle Oversight Protection and Turtle Island Restoration Network. The conservation groups argued that habitat protections boost the chances of recovery of species listed in the Endangered Species Act.

In 2016 the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that the [green turtles](#) still needed ESA protections because of climate change and sea-level-rise threats. But their rule to list 11 distinct green turtle population segments in the ESA didn't include federal habitat protections.

A 2019 peer-reviewed study by Center scientists concluded that most marine species listed under the ESA are recovering. Listed species with critical habitat protections are most likely to be rebounding, the study showed.

North Atlantic green sea turtle nests increased from 464 nests on Florida beaches in 1989 to 39,000 in 2017 after being protected in 1978. The total statewide population increased from 62 known nests in 1979 to 53,102 nests in 2017. The species has benefited from a ban on killing turtles and harvesting eggs, state protections for nesting beaches and measures to reduce deaths in fishing gear.

In the environmental rulemaking process, when a species is proposed for listing as endangered or threatened under the ESA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must consider whether there are habitats believed to be essential to the species' conservation. Those areas may be proposed for designation as critical habitat.

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