

**Kemp's Ridley Recovery Team Meeting**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Hacienda Santa Engracia, Ciudad Victoria, Mexico**  
**29-30 October 2003**

Team members in attendance (in alphabetical order):

Dr. Patrick Burchfield - Gladys Porter Zoo  
Ms. Robyn Cobb - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ms. Therese Conant - U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service  
Ms. Sheryan Epperly-Chester - U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service  
Sr. Oscar M. Ramírez Flores - Director General de Vida Silvestre /

SEMARNAT

Mr. Les Hodgson - National Fisheries Institute  
Dr. Patricia Luevano - Estado de Tamaulipas, SEDUE  
Dr. Steve Morreale - Cornell University  
Dr. David Owens - Grice Marine Laboratory, College of Charleston  
Mr. Earl Possardt - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Mr. Mike Ray - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Dr. Donna Shaver - U.S. National Park Service

Guest participants:

Mr. Bryan Arroyo - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Sr. Antonio Fuentes Montalvo - PROFEPA  
Sr. Luis Elizalde - SEMARNAT  
Sr. Carlos Suarez Flores - SEMARNAT  
Sr. Sergio Gomez N. - SEMARNAT  
Sr. Rodrigo Cesar Gutierrez Guevara - PROFEPA  
Sra. Lilia Estrada - Director General de Vida Silvestre / SEMARNAT  
Mr. Luis Jaime Peña - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Mr. Tom Shearer - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Sr. Octaviano Perez T. - Estado de Tamaulipas, SEDUE  
Dr. Thane Wibbels - University of Alabama at Birmingham

Rapporteur:

Ms. Kristy Long - U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service

Translator:

Ms. Sonia Ortiz - Aventur

**Introductions and review of recovery planning process:**

Sr. Oscar Ramirez Flores, Director General De Vida Silvestre/ SEMARNAT, Sr. Luis Fueyo MacDonald, PROFEPA, SEMARNAT, and Dr. Alberto Abreu, UNAM-Mazatlan are new members of the team from Mexico. Dr. Abreu was unable to attend. Sr. Antonio Fuentes Montalvo as representing PROFEPA on behalf of Sr. Luis Fueyo who could not attend this meeting. Mr. Possardt reviewed the recovery planning process that the Team will follow throughout development of the plan. Mr. Possardt explained that there are occasions where an

individual or a small group will develop a recovery plan, however, in this case there are many experts, hence the recovery team. The Kemp's ridley recovery plan will greatly benefit from the input of all the experts and stakeholders. Sr. Oscar Ramirez suggested drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize this binational process and describe the US and Mexican processes. An MOU will likely lead to more confidence in relations and commitments. Mexico also has legislation on applying recovery plans and involving the public. An MOU can assist in linking the processes of both nations. Another Team member noted that there are already many binational conventions and treaties in place, but implementation mechanisms are lacking. However, there are many legal issues to developing and implementing an MOU, which are not under the purview of the recovery team. Mr. Arroyo offered to coordinate and draft an MOU between Mexico and the US on this issue. There is an existing binational agreement between NMFS and Mexico that is in need of revising after the reorganization of the Mexican government. This revision is already in process, so Mr. Arroyo will coordinate with the NMFS contact on this issue as well. Mexico does have a slightly different approach to public involvement (i.e., stakeholders meeting), which the team decided would assimilate nicely into the US process.

#### **Review of progress to date:**

The Team has begun to draft the introduction section, but there are many remaining gaps. Due to changeover of the Mexican portion of the Team, new assignments related to the threats table will need to be discussed and passed out. At the June 2003 meeting, the Team agreed to hold two stakeholder meetings, one each in Mexico and the U.S., due to cultural differences and logistical challenges.

#### **Website setup and status:**

The Kemp's ridley recovery plan website is modeled after the Atlantic Loggerhead turtle recovery plan to ensure consistency. The purpose of the website is to provide information to stakeholders on the Kemp's recovery planning effort to date and on the status of the plan's revision. Mr. Shearer will be adding several more logos to the website. There are English versions of the development schedule, meeting schedule, meeting minutes, and 1991 recovery plan; however, these documents are not yet available in Spanish. About 300 photos were submitted by the team for inclusion on the website. The Team decided there should be a mix of photos from terrestrial and in-water sites to convey that both habitats are important for recovery. Team decided to include pictures that represent different life phases, e.g., emergence, digging nest, laying eggs, in-water, turtle in a net, examples of research, maps, etc. These changes will be made and the site should be up by the end of 2003. The Contact us email address will likely be [kempstridley@fws.gov](mailto:kempstridley@fws.gov). The Mexican delegation will draft the Mexican counterparts to the existing webpage content in addition to providing logos and translations. The Mexican content will also be translated to English. The Mexican delegation decided they could have their portions of the overview and frequently asked questions (FAQs), and maybe some history, drafted by the end of January 2004. PROFEPA will also provide information for the website by the end of January 2004. The US delegation will translate English information to Spanish also by the January 2004 deadline. One team member suggested contracting a translator to assist with this effort. The team decided to include a link to a photo gallery where pictures will have captions

and photo credits. One team member suggested putting an edited version of the Herrera film on the website. The Mexican delegation will check with Andres Herrera's daughter in Tampico about using the film. The team also decided to include a short video of several individual turtles coming up the beach to nest from a recent nesting season.

**Stakeholder meetings:**

One team member suggested having two meetings that were open to both Mexican and US stakeholders so as to allow more flexibility to participants by offering two dates. Because Mexico has its own legislation which dictates public involvement, the two stakeholders meetings will not be exactly the same. Each country will operate under its guidelines, regulations, and legislation. The team discussed and agreed on a format, so that both meetings will have similar approaches. Team members noted concern that the meetings would take place during the fishing season, which may reduce industry participation.

**US Stakeholders meeting:**

The team noted that this will not be a public meeting; it is by invitation only such that a balanced and representative sample of stakeholders will attend. Ms. Conant will send the Loggerhead stakeholders meeting follow-up questionnaire out to the Kemp's team so that they can see the comments received after that stakeholders meeting. The team decided to include an agenda item on the history of binational recovery efforts to date. The Team discussed the breakout group questions and made some changes. Ms. Long will double check the list of threats on the list of questions against the threats assessments to ensure consistency. The team decided to include both the agenda and the breakout group questions with the invitations to the stakeholders meeting. The team also decided to send invitations out 6-8 weeks prior to the stakeholders meeting. The team discussed possible dates for the meeting and noted their availabilities [Mr. Ray not available the week of March 15<sup>th</sup>, Ms Epperly not available the week of March 25<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Morreale not available on Fridays]. Depending on venue availability, the team decided that March 3-14 may work. The first two weeks of April are backup dates. The team decided to hold the meeting in either Houston or Corpus Christi, TX. Ms Epperly volunteered to inquire about venues in Houston and Ms. Cobb will check with the FWS Houston field office about rooms at the University.

**Mexican stakeholders meeting:**

The Mexican delegation presented a draft stakeholders list comprised of about 20 people from federal and state government and parliament. They believe they will add 120-130 names to their stakeholders list to get more extensive participation, especially from non-governmental organizations, federal academic institutions, power companies, etc. There are currently proposals for developing much of the Gulf coast and the development community will be invited also. For example, a hotel chain is proposing to build in La Pesca and has been coordinating with the turtle camp. One of the main themes they will present at the stakeholders meeting is local community. Local community groups are especially important to the public participation process in Mexico. It may be necessary to fund travel for these community representatives since they will not be able to otherwise attend. The team decided to be very clear about the objectives of the meeting during

the introduction and to stress that all stakeholders are represented in order for the team can get a full range of comments on the recovery process. One team member suggested that the invitation clearly lay out the objectives and what is expected from stakeholders at the meeting. Then at the meeting, those objectives will be reviewed during the introduction and breakout group facilitators will reiterate these objectives.

The stakeholders meeting in Mexico will occur after the US stakeholder meeting, but before July 2004. The Mexican delegation will forward the draft agenda as soon as it is developed for to the team to comment. The Mexico stakeholders meeting will likely be one day in duration as opposed to two in the US. One team member noted that in Mexico, this process of stakeholder involvement requires more than one meeting.

### **Presentation on interactive CD:**

A company called Visteon developed a Kemp's ridley interactive cd as their conservation project. The cd is geared toward school children and will be distributed through schools. The company coordinated with Dr. Luevano on biology of Kemp's ridleys. The cd covers three different areas: description of the species, habitat, and protection. Mr. Hodgson is featured in the video explaining the fishing industry's involvement. The company is willing to allow the recovery team to host the video on the plan website. It will be translated in English soon. The contact at Visteon is: Msaldiva@visteon.com.

### **Threats assessment and reproductive equivalents:**

The team went through the changes the Loggerhead team has made to their threats assessment thus far and decided which of those changes apply to the Kemp's ridley threats tables (to increase consistency between recovery plans). Ms. Epperly explained the process to estimate reproductive equivalents and the team discussed which method was most appropriate for Kemp's ridleys, based on age at maturity, e.g., 10, 12, or 14. If age to maturity is later, more turtles are necessary for recovery. The best mathematical fit in the model is obtained by using 10 years to maturity, based on information about hatchling production and recruitment (a proxy for reality). Recent skeletochronology results suggest age at maturity is 12. One turtle tagged in NC was estimated to be around 4 years old and was seen nesting 8 and a half years later; therefore suggesting 12 years to maturity. Of four turtles tagged as juveniles on the Atlantic coast, the overall interval to nesting was 4-11 years. One of those animals was a large juvenile of ~50cm straight carapace length. Headstarted turtles initially found on nesting beaches were 10-15 years old. The younger the age of maturity the more valuable eggs and hatchlings will be compared to an older age of maturity. There is a difference between age of sexual maturity in males and females. Data presented in Melissa Snover's dissertation showed that females mature around 12 years whereas males mature around 15 years based on skeletochronology studies.

This dissertation is posted on the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center website ([www.sefsc.noaa.gov/seaturtlesprogram.jsp](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/seaturtlesprogram.jsp)). The team decided to use an estimated average age at maturity of 12 years, which the team feels is justified by a preponderance of data. Ms Epperly will prepare text explaining the reasoning for using 12 years as the estimated age to maturity.

The team continued discussion on the model. One issue for the model is how many eggs will be put in corrals. At present, corrals are at maximum capacity of approximately 8000 nests. Nest survival and emergence rate for *in situ* nests are needed to input into the model. Mr. Peña will send Ms Epperly the information on *in situ* nests from all camps in the database. One team member was concerned because hatch rate for *in situ* nests is known, but not emergence because there is no one observing hatchlings entering the water. The team will use a best estimate from last years's protected *in situ* nests. Part of the study on *in situ* nests, as discussed by the Kemp's ridley working group, will observe hatchlings entering the water to get a good estimate from a representative sample. One team member suggested using known size class information from incidental captures to improve the model. However, other team members noted the lack of size class data, especially regarding fisheries interactions. Additionally, this size class data must be mined from databases, is not easily accessible, and is fairly time intensive. The purpose of using reproductive equivalents in conjunction with the threats analysis is as a qualitative tool to determine which threats warrant more attention. One team member suggested using a geometric mean as opposed to assuming a stable age distribution.

The team also decided to present the threats tables including the data gathered thus far at the stakeholders meeting. The team decided to designate a color only for those cells that have fairly good estimates of mortality. The cells for which mortality is uncertain will be stippled to illustrate that the estimate is preliminary.

One team member suggested splitting the bottom trawl category (on the resource-use fisheries spreadsheet) into two categories: bottom trawls that use TEDs and bottom trawls that do not use TEDs. The team decided to break the bottom trawl column up into two columns on the threats assessment.

One team member was concerned that major changes are occurring in fisheries in both Mexico and the US that will highly impact numbers/data in the threats assessment. The shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico operated differently this year than any other. High gas prices significantly reduced fishing effort after January 1, 2003 and the majority of boats did not fish in February, March, or April 2003. A team member noted that April had the highest recorded strandings so far this year, and therefore, strandings are occurring even when shrimping is not. Another team member commented that there is plenty of shrimping going on in the Gulf during April and that April is always a peak month. Team members noted that fishing for wild shrimp is decreasing due to market issues and aquaculture, which is greatly affecting the economics of the shrimp industry. One team member suggested adjusting the threats assessment to reflect effort changes in the fishery. Boats fishing in deep water must register for federal permits; the number that registered was much lower than anticipated, e.g., estimated 18,000 vessels and only 5,000 registered. The team agreed to use the most current effort data available. Team members also suggested considering inshore versus offshore fishing seasons, target species, and size classes. The relationship between shrimp trawling and strandings is weaker than it was in the mid-1990s, but a relationship does still exist. One team member noted that the US Coast Guard is currently prosecuting a case where a TED was sewn shut; therefore, compliance cannot be assumed as

100%. Ms. Epperly explained how fisheries mortality is estimated. A team member noted that a proportional change in effort could scale down the estimate of turtles taken, but the team needs to agree on what that effort is. NMFS cannot change current estimates until the new effort is determined. Effort is determined by hours fished as reported by dealers in accommodated logbook and dockside interviews.

### **International Marine Turtle Coastal Park Proposal:**

One team member initiated a discussion on an international marine turtle coastal park to protect Kemp's ridleys on land and in the water. The concept was first discussed around 12 years ago during the 1991 recovery plan deliberations. One suggestion was to extend Padre Island National Seashore from Corpus Christi, TX to Tampico, MX. The previous recovery team decided not to include this idea in the first recovery plan because there were too many unresolved issues in both the US and Mexico in terms of private land owners and in-water protection. However, there is currently a whole science based on protection mechanisms, e.g., marine protected areas, refuges, etc. Many levels of protection exist and new strategies can be considered now. Some team members believe there may be a way to implement a marine park that is agreeable to all parties, in other words, the purpose of this park would not be to ban all activities. The proposal would hopefully balance economy with efficiency by implementing multiple zones with varying levels of protection. Some team members referenced the Laguna Madre park in Mexico (from Matamoros to the Laguna Madre river), which is somewhat similar to this proposal, and noted the difficulty in implementing it. One team member suggested designating a corridor to link one area to another as opposed to having a park from Corpus Christi to Tampico.

The discussion primarily focused on protecting Kemp's ridleys, for which there are new funding opportunities and mechanisms available, especially within the US. A permanent system with permanent funding would alleviate current issues of juggling multiple budgets. Mexico is trying to redirect money from Rancho Nuevo to other camps, education, community development, etc. **(Jaime please clarify this with MX - sounds strange)** This process could be formalized and improved by incorporating funds into an international marine turtle coastal park. One team member proposed incorporating this into the plan, possibly as a recovery action, while others would like more time to explore possibilities. Based on the threats assessment, the team will go through and identify ways to alleviate those threats through recovery actions. Recovery actions will be developed after recovery criteria are determined.

Within Mexico, a process already exists for developing protected areas that includes ecological ordering to determine allowable activities. Additionally, national academic institutions must be consulted. Some team members noted that heavy industry already exists along the Mexican Gulf coast. Another team member suggested inviting a representative from National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONAP) to give a presentation on the status of protected areas in Mexico at the next recovery team meeting.

### **Translation:**

The team decided to investigate costs associated with professional translation for recovery team

meetings. Some team members feel this is very important to continue binational efforts.

**Next meeting:**

The next recovery team meeting is planned for next October in conjunction with the Ridley working group meeting. Tentative agenda items will be: results of both stakeholders meetings, in terms of the impacts to the threats assessment, 2. to begin discussing recovery criteria, and 3. have a presentation by CONAP on protected areas in Mexico.

**Assignments:**

Threats assignments will be completed and sent to Ms. Conant by **31 JANUARY 2004**.