

Kemp's Ridley Recovery Team Meeting
Gladys Porter Zoo, Brownsville, Texas, USA
October 27-29, 2004

Team Members in Attendance:

Alberto Abreu-Grobois - National University of Mexico
Patrick Burchfield - Gladys Porter Zoo
Robyn Cobb - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Therese Conant - U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service
Antonio Fuentes - PROFEPA
Les Hodgson - U.S. National Fisheries Institute
Carmen Jimenez - Mexico National Fisheries Institute
Patricia Lueveno - Secretaria de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecologia, State of Tamaulipas
David Owens - College of Charleston
Earl Possardt - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Oscar Ramirez - Vida Silvestre, SEMARNAT
Mike Ray - Texas Parks and Wildlife
Georgita Ruiz - CONANP, SEMARNAT
Donna Shaver - U.S. National Park Service, Padre Island National Seashore

Rapporteur:

Kristy Long - U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service

Translator:

Sonia Ortiz, Adventure Translation

Observers:

Thane Wibbels - University of Alabama
Luis Enrique Ortega- PROFEPA, Matamoros

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Possardt opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda. Mr. Possardt explained to the Team that its goal is to develop a draft recovery plan by the end of 2005.

Sea Turtle Program in Mexico

Mr. Ramirez and Dr. Ruiz gave an overview of the recent changes in turtle programs in Mexico. There is now one national program for the recovery of sea turtles. The Minister of the Environment decided it needed its own entity separate from Division of Wildlife. They separated responsibility such that one agency deals exclusively with permits and authorizations while another designs, implements, coordinates recovery programs for endangered species. The new entity for the latter is the National Coordination for Recovery of Priority Species. Most of programs have moved under the National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONAP), but part of the program still resides under Vida Silvestre. Several staff from Vida Silvestre transferred with Georgita Ruiz to CONANP, but are not officially with CONANP. CONANP's jurisdiction extends to all areas necessary for conservation, not just protected areas, and therefore offers tremendous flexibility within the program. For Dr. Ruiz to officially participate on the recovery team, they must revise the internal regulations to the institute. They have made the recommendations to formalize this association and it is currently in the legal department.

Currently, there is some turtle nesting in protected areas, but no management plans exist for any of the protected areas in Mexico. CONANP is working on management plans, especially with regard to the threat of development on turtle nesting beaches. The Mexican sea turtle program received a small increase in the budget in 2004 (230,000 pesos). CONANP launched a one-day fund-raising campaign with major partners BANAMEX and a television station that brought in 14.8 million pesos.

Memorandum of Understanding

Mexico raised the issue of possibly having the states (Texas and Tamaulipas) added to the MOU. Mexican Recovery Team members believe the MOU will be too vague if the country of Mexico signs without a state counterpart also signing. This would allow for internal consistency in Mexico. U.S. Recovery Team members expressed concern about including Texas in the MOU. Ms. Conant was concerned with regard to authorities and responsibilities if Texas signs. Further, if Texas signs, it brings up the question of whether all U.S. states that have documented Kemp's ridleys in state waters should also sign. To complete the MOU most expeditiously it was agreed that the MOU would go forward just between the Federal entities and later States could be included.

U.S. Stakeholder Meeting Summary

Mr. Possardt gave an overview of the stakeholder meeting held in April 2004 in Houston, Texas, USA. He sent a summary of the meeting out to participants; 4-5 of participants submitted comments on the summary. The team reviewed and discussed these comments and determined which of five categories they fit into. The five categories included the following: 1) plan revision process, 2) recovery criteria, 3) threats analysis, 4) recovery actions, 5) miscellaneous/funding. The team was in agreement that the issue of reproductive equivalents that greatly concerned several stakeholders would not be used or be used in a modified way to avoid the concerns raised by the stakeholders. The team also agreed that another U.S. stakeholder meeting would be held after recovery criteria have been developed and the plan is further advanced. A meeting during the summer was discussed but a final decision will be made at the next team meeting in April. Ms. Conant volunteered to draft a two paragraph summary of the U.S. Stakeholder Meeting that will be translated into Spanish and put up on the website.

Mexico Stakeholder Meeting Summary

Approximately 8 recovery team members attended the stakeholder's meeting in Mexico. Participants included - federal agencies (4), state agency (1), city governments (2), academia (6), non-governmental organizations (3), etc. One comment received from fishermen of Tepejuajes was to recover turtles to levels that their grandfather's told them about in the 1930s and 1940s.

Participants at the Stakeholder meeting discussed "Paraiso Tortuga" a planned development in Barra del Torro. Ms. Ortiz wrote to the government to ask if an impact statement was prepared, and what actions were to be taken to mitigate effects on the adjacent nesting beach. Dr. Luevano checked to see if SEDUE or SEMARNAT had received and reviewed an EIS, but neither had. Since this is the beach is in a federal zone it would be the responsibility of SEMARNAT to make recommendations about this. The SEMARNAT representative in Tamaulipas turned it over to PROFEPA to investigate further. Dr. Luevano also wrote PROFEPA to alert them of the issue

and inquire if everything was in order. A copy of the letter was also sent to the PROFEPA director for all of Mexico. No permits were issued to change the use of land from a ranch to beachfront homes.

Both Ms. Ortiz, as a private citizen, and Dr. Luevano, as a government official, submitted 'denounces' under the law, thereby disagreeing with the current process. These denounces must be addressed by PROFEPA. If PROFEPA finds the changes are not authorized, they can take action against the development. Team members stressed the need for regulations identifying critical lands for turtles. PROFEPA relies on these types of decrees to take action. Team members also recognized that PROFEPA, CONAP, and SEMARNAT must work together on this issue.

Dr. Ruiz discussed CONAP's short-term goal to develop a management action plan for the sanctuary and to increase the sanctuary area. PROFEPA is beginning to enforce laws more holistically; therefore, after Ms. Ortiz's denounce, they checked compliance with all relevant regulations. If this was a natural protected area, the sanction would increase for any irregularities. Team members noted the need to include all remaining turtle beaches in sanctuaries. The Team discussed having separate sanctuaries for individual beaches or including all beaches in one sanctuary. Dr. Ruiz suggested getting a sanctuary in place for Kemp's ridleys as soon as possible and then subsequently adding sanctuaries for additional species, e.g., a leatherback sanctuary on Pacific coast.

Shark Norma Update

In July 2002, long lines up to 5000 m long with 2000 hooks and tangle nets up to 2000 m were authorized. However, the Norma was cancelled to allow more time for analysis. The Norma prohibits shark finning and mandates complete utilization of a specimen. It prohibits capture or retention of whale sharks, basking sharks, white sharks, and several ray species. The Norma mandates that the authorized total fishing effort will not be increased (no new permissions or concessions given).

With respect to sea turtles, the Norma prohibits fishing in front of nesting beaches during the nesting seasons from March to June in a 5km swath of 11 beaches (6 beaches in Tamaulipas and 5 in Vera Cruz). Team members noted that Mexico may need to expand the time frame of the nesting season to July. Additionally, green turtle nesting along the Gulf of Mexico is not included in the Norma currently. Under the Norma, fishers cannot retain or transport alive or dead whole/parts of marine turtles or marine mammals caught as bycatch. Fishers must participate in an observer program and support the activities of an observer while they are releasing turtles from hooks. Bycatch of non-target species, including endangered species, must be recorded in logbooks. Boats >10m must use specific tools to remove hooks from turtles, seabirds, and marine mammals.

Originally, only 16 beaches were protected under the Shark Norma; in the newest version, 96 beaches are protected. The Shark Norma is in review currently. It is very controversial and was rejected the first time. A group was formed to work out several aspects, including technical issues, which have already been dealt with. In the process of being published as a proposal in the

Official Diary (similar to the Federal Register in the U.S.), the public has 60 days to comment. The Mexican government responds to all comments, making changes as necessary. SAGARPA actually writes regulations for the Official Diary with involvement from the National Commission for Fishing and Agriculture. The shark fishery is operating currently without regulations, but is restricted and permitted. Version 6.2 of the Shark Norma will go out for public comment.

Website Update

Mr. Shearer gave an update on the website. The Team discussed adding a buttons on the home page for the stakeholders meeting, current research, and links. Team members suggested including a recovery action to develop a webpage for all available information on Kemp's ridleys, though they realized this would be a large task. Mr. Possardt volunteered to compile all the Team's suggested links.

Subgroup on Trawl Info for Threats Analysis

Dr. Shaver, Mr. Hodgson, Ms. Epperly, Dr. Owens, and Mr. Ray will meet via conference call to examine current information on the level of fishing effort and the relationship between fishing and strandings. Ms. Conant volunteered to provide NMFS enforcement data.

Threats Analysis

The Team discussed how best to represent the threats analysis in the plan, considering the lack of quantifiable data currently available. They discussed including only qualitative information in the threats tables. The Team generally agreed that numbers will be included in the threats tables where available, but ranking of individual threats will be solely qualitative. Further, reproductive equivalents will not be used because there are too few data to get useful output from the model. The Team agreed to not losing the concept behind reproductive equivalents and does want to include some sort of weighting scheme such that it is obvious that sexually mature animals are more valuable than hatchlings or eggs. The Team noted that it is essential to rank threats by relative importance such that the rank drives priorities. One Team member suggested a dual ranking system (e.g., 1-3 and A-C) to incorporate life stages and threats. Therese Conant volunteered to streamline the threats analysis table in time for a review by the team at the next meeting.

Funding

The Team discussed the relationship of the funding of the nesting beach work and the Marine Turtle Conservation Act.

Status

Mr. Possardt listed the items still underway that must be completed before the December 2005 completion goal. These items included the following: threats analysis; recovery criteria; recovery actions/narrative/ priorities; implementation schedule; and holding additional stakeholder meetings. The Team discussed having 2 more team meetings, one that may occur in conjunction to the stakeholders meeting. Next meeting will be planned in Tampico, MX for around mid-April 2005.