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Comment Period Extended for the Draft Bi-National Recovery Plan for the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service [NOAA Fisheries] (collectively referred to as the Services) announced the availability for public review of the draft Bi-National Recovery Plan (Plan) for the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) on March 16, 2010, and began a 60 day public comment period.

After receiving numerous requests for extension of the public comment period, we are extending the comment period for the draft Plan an additional 45 days. The comment period will now close on July 1.

The Services will consider all substantive comments and information presented during the public comment period in the course of finalizing this Plan.

The Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) was listed as endangered throughout its range on December 2, 1970 and has received Federal protection under the ESA since that time.

This draft Recovery Plan is the result of several years of interagency and international coordination and will replace the original Plan published in 1992. The recovery team includes representatives from the US - FWS, National Park Service, NOAA Fisheries, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and National Fisheries Institute, and from Mexico - Comisión Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, and Departamento de Conservación para la Tortuga Lora de la Agencia Ambiental para el Desarrollo Sustentable del Gobierno del Estado de Tamaulipas.

This Plan discusses the natural history, current status, the known and potential threats to the Kemp's ridley, and lays out a recovery strategy to address the potential threats based on the best available science. The Plan includes recovery goals and criteria.

The Plan is not a regulatory action, but presents guidance for use by agencies and interested parties to assist in the recovery of Kemp's ridley sea turtles, and identifies substantive actions needed to achieve recovery by addressing the threats to the species.

Recovery of Kemp's ridleys has and will continue to be a long-term effort between the U.S. and Mexico and will require continued cooperation and coordination of federal, state, local government agencies and nongovernment organizations.

In 1947, an estimated 40,000 Kemp's ridley turtles nested on one stretch of beach near Rancho Nuevo, Mexico. However, the species suffered a devastating decline over the next four decades and the nesting population produced a low of 702 nests in 1985, making it the most endangered sea turtle species. In response, the Services, their partner agencies, and Mexico launched a cooperative international project aimed at nest protection efforts in the U.S. and Mexico, implemented regulations requiring the use of turtle excluder devices on commercial fishing trawls, and established a second nesting colony of Kemp's ridley sea turtles at Padre Island National Seashore.

By 2009, the total number of nests recorded at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico, exceeded 20,000, which represents about 8,000 females. In Texas, from 2002-2009, a total of 771 Kemp's ridley nests have been documented.

Interested persons may obtain the Plan for review and instructions on how to comment by visiting our web sites at:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/recovery/plans.htm> or <http://www.fws.gov/kempstridley/>.

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