

Many man-made threats impact sea turtles and may risk the recovery of their populations.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is working to reduce these threats to help conserve and recover sea turtles, which are protected under the Endangered Species Act.*

To effectively address all threats to marine turtles, NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have developed recovery plans to direct research and management efforts for each sea turtle species.



Photo credit: Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries



Photo credit: Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation



Photo credit: Mark O'Connell / CA Dept of Fish and Game

The incidental capture or "bycatch" of sea turtles during fishing is one of the more significant threats to the recovery of these species.

Turtles can be captured in active gear such as trawls and dredges, entangled in fixed gear such as gillnets, pound nets, or traps/pots, or hooked by longline or rod and reel. Capture or entanglement can cause serious injury or drowning of sea turtles.

Vessels

Collisions between sea turtles and vessels are a significant problem that will likely continue to increase.

Vessel strikes may lead to significant, sometimes fatal, injury to sea turtles. Injuries can be caused by propellers (as in photo at right of a leatherback sea turtle with propeller wounds) or blunt force trauma from the vessel's hull.



Photo credit: Kara Dodge / NOAA-NMFS

Marine Debris



Photo credit: Karimbe

Sea turtles may ingest or become entangled in marine debris, including derelict or "ghost" fishing gear, plastic bags and packaging, balloons, and other trash.

Debris is either dumped at sea or enters the ocean from land run-off. Ingesting debris can lead to an obstruction in a sea turtle's stomach or intestines. Entanglement in debris may cause serious injury to a turtle's flippers, body, or head.

Contaminants and Oil Spills

Contaminants can build up in the tissues of sea turtles and cause health problems or reduced reproductive success.

Run-off from land brings many different contaminants, such as fire retardants, pesticides, and heavy metals, into the ocean. Oil spills along the coast or at sea may significantly impact sea turtle feeding or nesting habitats. Turtles may become coated in oil or ingest oil with their food, both of which may cause health problems or reduced mobility.



Photo credit: Kate Sampson / NOAA-NMFS

Hopper Dredges and Power Plants



Photo credit: East Coast Observers

Other human activities, such as dredging in the marine environment or the intakes of power plants, may incidentally capture sea turtles.

Hopper dredges use powerful suction to create deep water channels, allowing for the passage of large ships. Sea turtles may be sucked up with the sediment, which is usually fatal. Nuclear power plants often take in sea water to cool the reactors. Sea turtles may be trapped against intake grates or in intake pools/canals.

What You Can Do to Help Sea Turtles

When Boating:

- 🦘 Watch for sea turtles in the water; if you see turtles and/or jellyfish at the surface, slow down and maintain a dedicated lookout.
- 🦘 Wear polarized sunglasses to help you better see turtles in the water.
- 🦘 Retrieve your mooring system (anchor and ball) before returning to port.

When Fishing:

- 🦘 Do not cast your hooks/lines/nets where turtles are seen.
- 🦘 Never abandon fishing gear.
- 🦘 Do not tie off to commercial fishing gear.
- 🦘 Use reusable floats instead of balloons.
- 🦘 Collect and dispose of any discarded or abandoned fishing gear, such as hooks, line, or nets.
- 🦘 If possible, recycle monofilament line.

Other Tips:

- 🦘 Use less plastic, which may end up as trash in the marine environment.
- 🦘 Use a refillable water bottle instead of buying bottled water.
- 🦘 Use reusable instead of plastic bags.
- 🦘 Dispose of trash in proper receptacles.
- 🦘 Never release balloons into the air; they will eventually become litter.
- 🦘 Report any sightings of injured, stranded, captured, or entangled sea turtles in the water or on land.

To report an injured or stranded sea turtle call:

NMFS Northeast Region Hotline
866-755-NOAA (6622)

If possible, take photographs of the turtle.

When reporting a sea turtle in distress, it is extremely valuable for you to stay with it until a response team arrives. Turtles are very difficult to relocate if the reporting vessel does not stand by.

*To learn more about how NMFS is working to address threats to sea turtles, visit http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/seaturtles/.

SEA TURTLES

of the United States Atlantic Coast

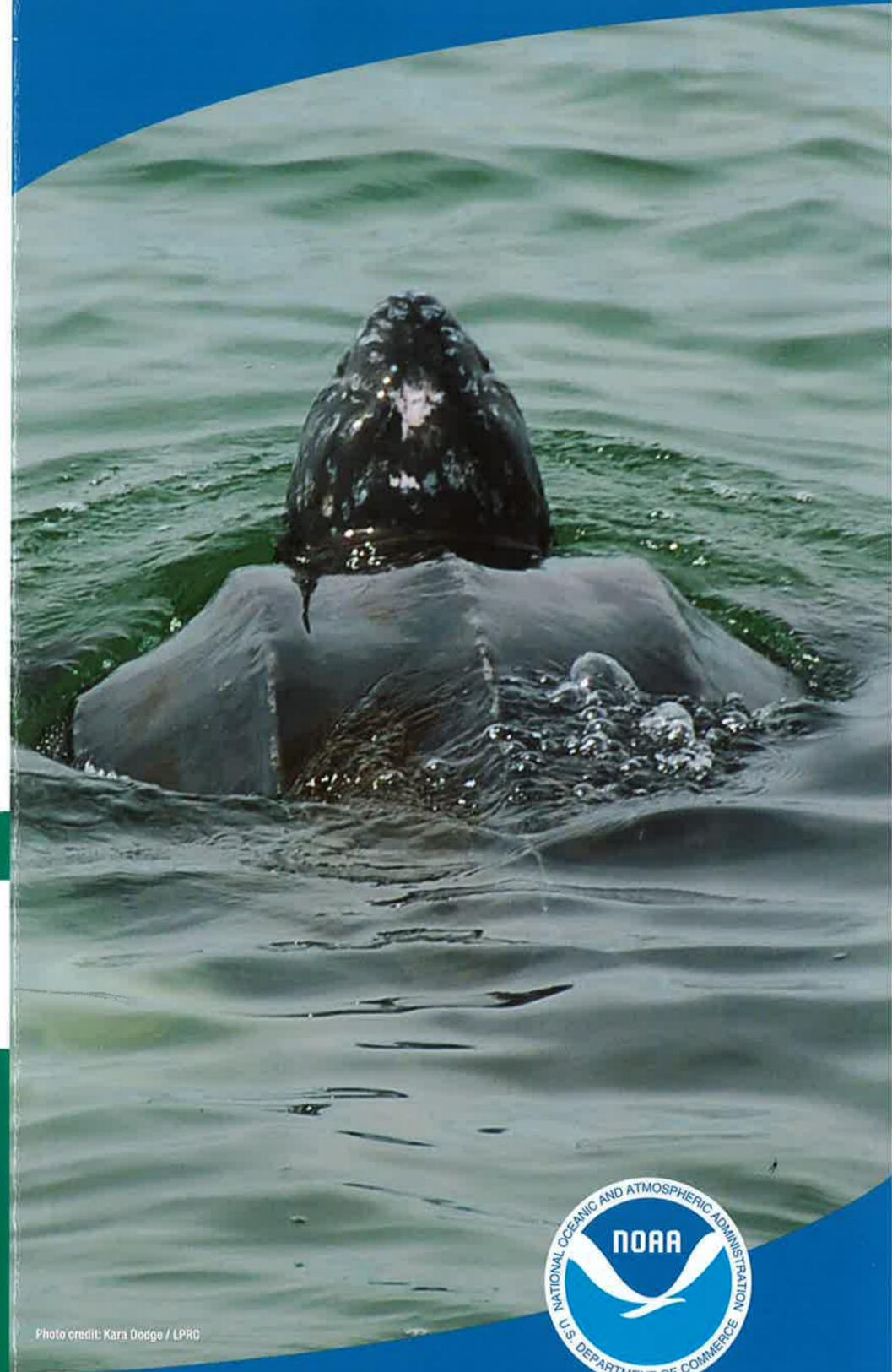
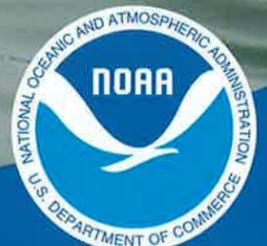


Photo credit: Kara Dodge / LPRC

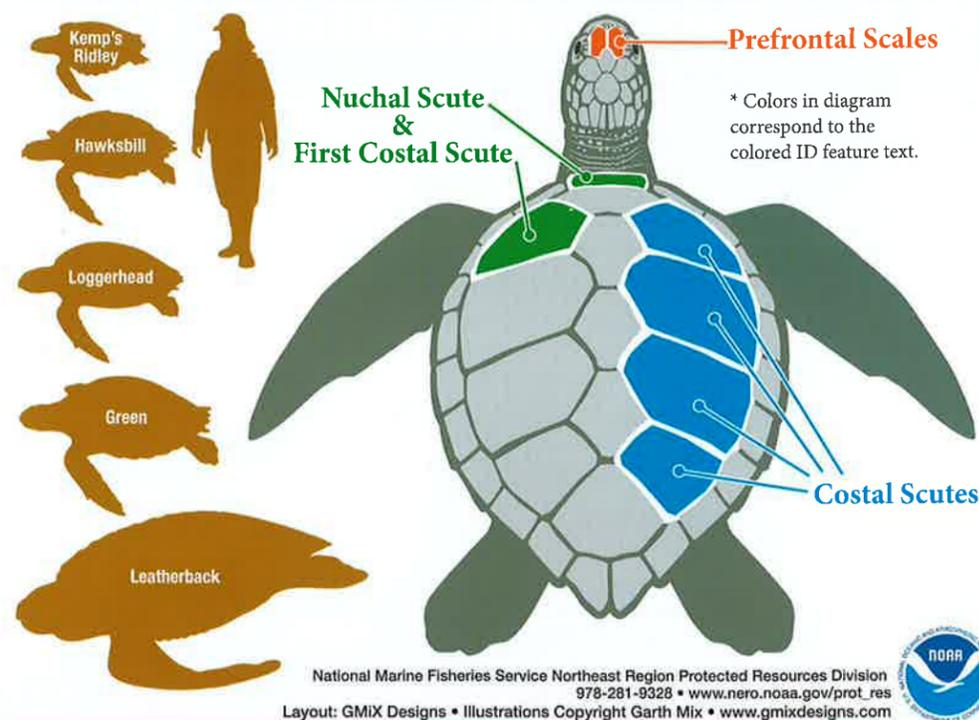


NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

NORTHEAST REGION

Sea turtles are reptiles (cold-blooded, air-breathing animals) with bodies that are well-adapted to the marine environment.

Sea turtles are found worldwide; typically nesting in tropical waters and feeding as far north as temperate waters, including the coast of New England. There are seven species of sea turtles in the world; six found in U.S. waters.



Green Sea Turtle

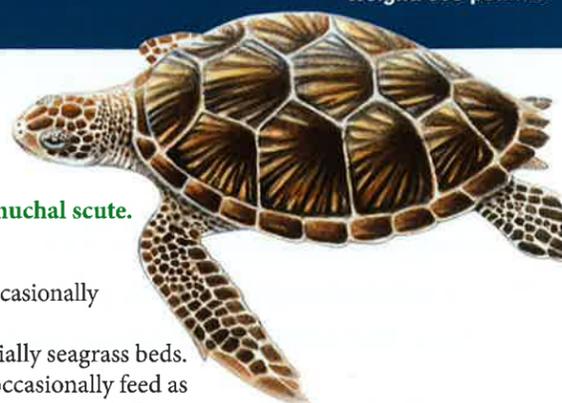
Chelonia mydas

Shell size: up to 39 inches.
Weight: 330 pounds.

ID Features: Oval shell, brown with radiating streaks. Small, rounded head. Beak (mouth) has serrated edges.

- Four costal scutes on each side.
- First costal scute does not touch the nuchal scute.
- One pair of prefrontal scales.

Diet: Primarily seagrass and algae, but occasionally invertebrates.
Habitat: Nearshore coastal waters, especially seagrass beds.
Range: Worldwide. In North Atlantic, occasionally feed as far north as New England, but seen more commonly from New York south; nest in the Caribbean and southeastern United States.
Presence in Northeast Region: Juveniles, and occasionally adults, present from May through November.



Loggerhead Sea Turtle

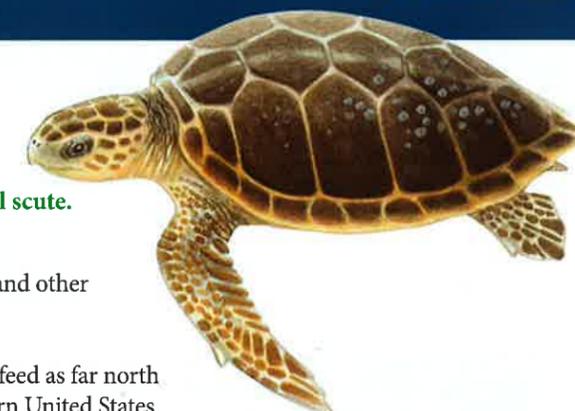
Caretta caretta

Shell size: up to 36 inches.
Weight: 255 pounds.

ID Features: Head, shell, and flippers reddish-brown. Oval shell. Large head.

- Five costal scutes on each side.
- First costal scute touches the nuchal scute.
- Two pairs of prefrontal scales.

Diet: Crabs, mollusks (such as whelk), and other invertebrates.
Habitat: Nearshore coastal waters.
Range: Worldwide. In North Atlantic, feed as far north as southern Canada; nest in southeastern United States and the Caribbean.
Presence in Northeast Region: Juveniles and, more rarely, adults present from May through November.



Leatherback Sea Turtle

Dermochelys coriacea

Shell size: up to 72 inches.
Weight: 1500 pounds.

ID Features: Shell of small, interlocking bones covered with black, rubbery skin. Seven ridges on back. White or pinkish blotches on body, flippers, and head.

Diet: Jellyfish
Habitat: Primarily open ocean, but also found along coast.
Range: Worldwide. In North Atlantic, commonly feed as far north as Canada; nest throughout the Caribbean and northern South America.
Presence in Northeast Region: Juveniles and adults present from May through November.



Hawksbill Sea Turtle

Eretmochelys imbricata

Shell size: up to 34 inches.
Weight: 175 pounds.

ID Features: Oval shell, mottled brown "tortoiseshell," with overlapping scutes.

- Four costal scutes on each side.
- First costal scute does not touch the nuchal scute.
- Two pairs of prefrontal scales.

Diet: Primarily sponges, but also other invertebrates.
Habitat: Nearshore coastal waters, especially coral reefs.
Range: Tropical. In North Atlantic, typically in tropical and subtropical areas, but occasional sightings as far north as New England; nests in the Caribbean.
Presence in Northeast Region: Rare visitor.



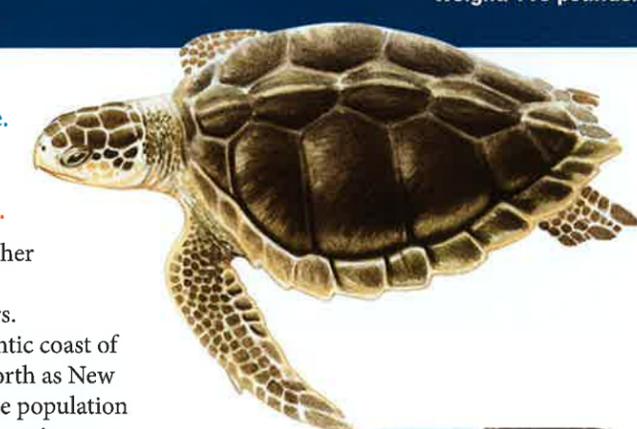
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

Lepidochelys kempii

Shell size: up to 26 inches.
Weight: 110 pounds.

ID Features: Round, gray shell.
• Five costal scutes on each side.
• First costal scute touches the nuchal scute.
• Two pairs of prefrontal scales.

Diet: Primarily crabs, but also other invertebrates.
Habitat: Nearshore coastal waters.
Range: Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic coast of the United States. Feed as far north as New England. The vast majority of the population nests on one beach, Rancho Nuevo, in Mexico.
Presence in Northeast Region: Juveniles present from May through November.



ALL SPECIES OF SEA TURTLES IN U.S. WATERS ARE PROTECTED UNDER THE U.S. ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT.