



National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Region

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Marine Fisheries Service Offers Two \$5,000 Rewards For Information In Sea Turtle Mutilation Investigations

The National Marine Fisheries Service is continuing its enforcement efforts off Texas to help solve two incidents of apparent sea turtle mutilation. The agency is offering two separate \$5,000 rewards in hopes of gaining information that leads to solving the investigations with resulting prosecution.

On October 20, a sea turtle with a chain attached washed ashore and during the week of November second, 18 sea turtles washed ashore on Texas beaches. Thirteen of those turtles were endangered Kemp's ridleys, six of which were adults.

The Kemp's ridley that washed ashore on October 20 was found near the South Ferry Landing area in Galveston after apparently drowning because a chain was attached to one of its flippers. A necropsy conducted recently as part of the agency's investigation into that case confirmed that the animal was healthy and feeding when it died. The fisheries service is consulting with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's forensics laboratory in Washington, D.C. on these cases.

In the case of those animals that washed up the week of November second, nine had straight edge cuts. Agency officials believe the November strandings were isolated incidents because sea turtle strandings have abated since then.

"We are particularly concerned about the number of these apparent mutilations and that six of them were adult Kemp's ridleys," said Andrew Kemmerer, the administrator of the agency's Southeast Region. "Our agency is offering significant rewards to help solve these violations of federal laws and we've also activated a special investigative team to handle these cases on a full time basis."

One \$5,000 reward is being offered in the chained sea turtle case and another is in being offered in the apparent mutilations case. The rewards are available for information which leads

to an arrest, a criminal conviction, civil penalty assessment or forfeiture of property of anyone associated with these incidents. The agency has recently authorized and funded six new enforcement positions in the Southeast that will be dedicated to various protected species issues.

“Overall, stranding levels of all sea turtles in the western Gulf of Mexico have declined in recent years because of our commitment to aggressively identify and prosecute violators of the Endangered Species Act,” said Kemmerer.

Anyone with information about these cases and violations of the Endangered Species Act are encouraged to contact NMFS Special Agent in Charge Gene Proulx in St. Petersburg, FL 813-570-5344 or call the NMFS Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964.

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