UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

OCT 19 2010

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental review has been performed on the following action:

TITLE: Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the Marine Turtle Genetics Program and Marine Turtle Ecology & Assessment Program at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center

LOCATION: Various

SUMMARY:

The purpose of the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) is for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to consider the potential environmental impacts of routine marine turtle research activities conducted by the Marine Turtle Genetics Program and the Marine Turtle Ecology & Assessment Program at the Southwest Fisheries Science Center (SWFSC). The research programs and activities analyzed in the PEA represent the major sea turtle-related research components of the SWFSC. General program research activities outlined and analyzed for environmental impacts include:

- computer analysis and marine turtle population modeling;
- training and outreach programs;
- genetic and stable isotope analysis to define stock boundaries and population structures, and characterization of the trophic ecology of foraging marine turtles;
- support nesting beach monitoring efforts for marine turtle species;
- identification of critical marine turtle habitat use and migratory corridors using various research techniques such as satellite telemetry and aerial surveys to determine distribution and abundance.

In this PEA, NMFS evaluated two alternatives: the no action alternative, i.e., baseline sea turtle and sea turtle related research activities of the SWFSC that do not directly involve human interaction with turtles, and the preferred alternative, which is for the SWFSC to conduct scientific research activities and data gathering through the Marine Turtle Genetics Program and the Marine Turtle Ecology & Assessment Program in order to improve sea turtle conservation and management strategies pursuant to the U.S. Recovery Plans for sea turtles through the specifically outlined methods.

The PEA analysis presents information indicating that no adverse impacts to the human environment or other resources are expected to result from the research programs as outlined. The direct and indirect environmental consequences of the proposed research programs are

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expected to be minimal, as research design, methodologies, and standard operating procedures for working with endangered species in sensitive habitats are specifically formulated to minimize any negative impacts on the environment and sea turtles in particular. The proposed research activities are likely to have net cumulative effects that are positive in that they: a) support current sea turtle monitoring programs in various parts of the world; b) establish community outreach programs and positive partnerships with foreign governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations to encourage a sense of environmental stewardship; and c) are highly likely to develop into usable strategies to help reduce sea turtle interactions and incidental mortalities.

RESPONSIBLE
OFFICIAL: Usha Varanasi
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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment, is enclosed for your information.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI, we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

for Paul N. Doremus, Ph.D.
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure