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

AUG 24 2012

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Environmental Assessment on the Effects of Issuing Permit No. 16134 for Scientific Research on Protected Sea Turtles in Mid-Atlantic Coastal Waters

LOCATION: U.S. Mid-Atlantic coastal waters

SUMMARY: The proposed action is issuance of a scientific research permit that would authorize sea turtles to be captured by tangle nets, trawl, by hand or by dip or hoop net. Sea turtles that are legally by-caught in Virginia pound net fisheries (per authority of ESA regulation 50 CFR 223.206(d)(10)) and dredge mitigating trawls (where the legal incidental take is authorized through an ESA Section 7 biological opinion for these activities) would also be obtained for sampling and research procedures. The following procedures would be conducted on sea turtles: epibiota removal, satellite tag, temporarily mark the carapace, flipper and passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag, measure, photograph, sample blood, feces, oral swab, scute (keratin) and tissue, weigh, and release. A subset of animals would be subject to transport to the laboratory, non-surgical muscle biopsy, lesion biopsy, ultrasound, and imaging. The purposes of the research are to: 1) update current knowledge of loggerhead and Kemp's ridley sea turtle abundance, distribution, health, and nutrition in Chesapeake Bay and nearshore Virginia waters, 2) compare the relative abundance, size distribution, sex ratio, health parameters and genetic diversity of loggerhead and Kemps ridley sea turtles in U.S. mid-Atlantic coastal waters, and 3) build baseline data on less common sea turtle species in the region. Impacts from these activities would be short-term and minimal to individual animals and negligible to the species. A biological opinion concluded that the proposed action would not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the species and would not likely destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The permit would be valid for five years.

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RESPONSIBLE
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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI) including the supporting environmental assessment (EA) 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 Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure