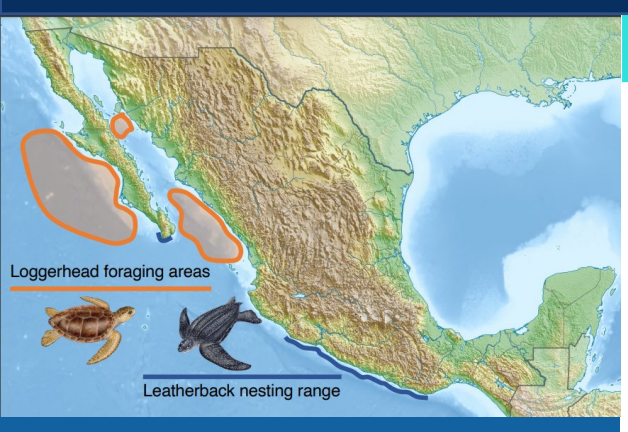
U.S. – MEXICO – CANADA AGREEMENT

SEA TURTLE BYCATCH REDUCTION AND PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES

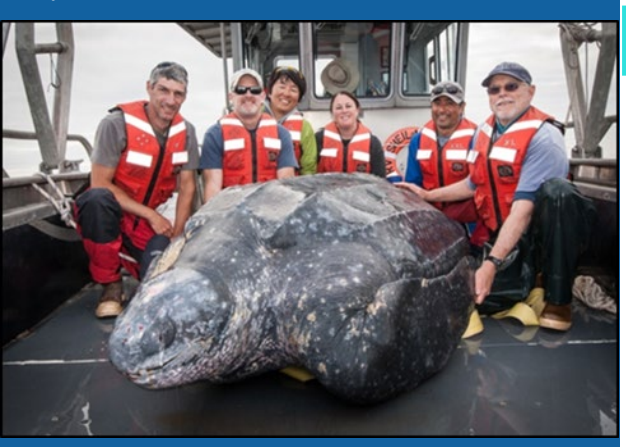


BACKGROUND

Mexico provides critically important marine and nesting beach habitat for six of the seven species of the world's sea turtles. Two of the most iconic of these species, the North Pacific loggerhead and the East Pacific leatherback turtle, are listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. In recent decades, both species have suffered major population declines in the annual number of nesting females at their respective nesting rookeries. Mortality from fisheries bycatch continues to be the greatest threat to these populations. Reducing bycatch mortality will involve numerous government, academic, and NGO stakeholders in the U.S. and Mexico, as well as communities and fishers that directly interact with turtles. The ultimate goal of this effort is to develop approaches that promote sustainable fishing practices and livelihood opportunities that result in healthier sea turtle populations and marine resources to support coastal communities throughout Pacific Mexico.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

The USMCA Sea Turtle Bycatch Reduction Project is a U.S.-Mexico collaborative effort to recover North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles and East Pacific leatherback sea turtles, and likely other sea turtle species, by reducing sea turtle bycatch in gillnet and longline fisheries through rapid bycatch assessments, information exchanges with fishers and fisheries management entities, development and expansion of alternative livelihoods that decrease unsustainable fishing pressures, and fostering the adoption of innovative bycatch mitigation technologies and turtle-friendly fishing practices by artisanal gillnet and longline fishers in Pacific Mexico. These efforts relate to USMCA Articles 24.18 (Sustainable Fisheries Management) and 24.19 (Conservation of Marine Species), and will promote healthy sea turtle populations and long-lasting, sustainable fisheries practices that do not harm non-target species.



LOOKING FORWARD

NOAA and USTR will continue to work with the Mexican Government and our project partners to promote sustainable fisheries practices and sea turtle conservation in Mexico. This will involve seeking technological fixes to fishing gear and adjustments in fishing methods to reduce fisheries-turtle bycatch interactions and increase sea turtle survival. Coupled with fostering alternative livelihoods that reduce fishing pressure, this project will continue to pursue holistic bycatch solutions that engage fishing communities, scientists, and management entities in efforts to recover loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles in the Pacific.

GOAL 1

Improve understanding of the location and causes of loggerhead and leatherback bycatch mortality through rapid bycatch assessments in coastal communities.

Actions for Years 1-3:

- Develop socially appropriate interview protocols and questionnaires to characterize the nature and frequency of fisheries interactions with loggerhead and leatherback turtles.
- Conduct rapid bycatch assessments in up to 25 coastal fishing communities along the Pacific coast of Mexico.
- Identify areas with the greatest bycatch impacts to loggerheads and leatherbacks.

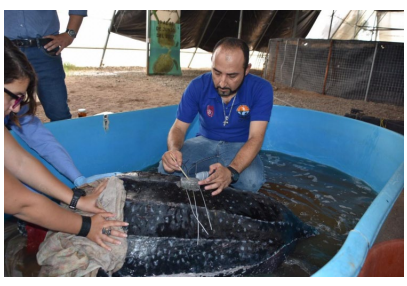
Goal 1 outcomes so far:

- Completed 465 rapid bycatch assessment surveys, with involvement from communities among eight Mexican states
- Surveyed 12 gear types for interaction with loggerheads and leatherbacks
- Identified longline and net fisheries as having greatest bycatch levels

GOAL 2

Engage with selected communities via Fisheries Learning Exchanges to foster dialogue about bycatch reduction strategies.

Actions for Years 1-3:



- Visit communities to cultivate trust and exchange ideas among fishers and across communities
- Introduce new bycatch reduction technologies and discuss alternative livelihoods that will reduce fishery-sea turtle interactions

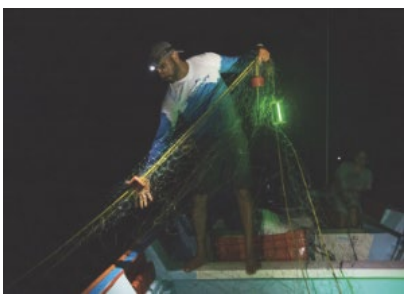
Goal 2 outcomes so far:

- Completed community engagement workshops in 5 communities across Baja and Mainland Mexico, Fishers show strong enthusiasm for contributing to development of sustainable fisheries
- Guided development of new gear configurations to reduce bycatch, all currently being tested under Goal 3

GOAL 3

Develop, test, and implement bycatch reduction technologies identified during community and fisher engagement.

Actions for Years 1-3:



- Work with fishers to conduct fishing trials using low-bycatch fishing gears developed during Fisheries Learning Exchanges
- Work with fishers to perfect and promote the use of gear types shown to minimize sea turtle bycatch
- Maximize value of new gear types by training fishers on sea turtle disentanglement and resuscitation techniques

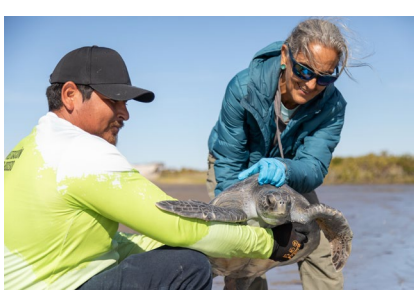
Goal 3 outcomes so far:

- Initiated trials in three communities across Baja and mainland Mexico
- Trials involve bottom-set gillnet fisheries targeting halibut and other fin-fish
- Testing net mesh size, net profile, and top-line buoy configuration

GOAL 4

Promote a community-based sea turtle strategy, by describing sustainable fishing practices, such as permanent adoption of bycatch reduction technologies, and advocating for alternative livelihoods that reduce unsustainable fishing pressure on sea turtles, and other valuable marine resources.

Actions for Years 1-3:



- Community ambassadors will work with fishers to create local capacity to troubleshoot any issues with the continued use of the bycatch reduction technologies
- Coordinate with communities to ensure that project findings and recommendations are shared to promote adoption of the most effective sea turtle bycatch reduction measures for each fishery and each community
- Identify locally relevant incentives to promote the medium to long-term adoption of bycatch reduction practices
- Assess the success of each locally implemented strategy, as well as the perceptions of community members

Goal 4 outcomes so far:

- Ongoing visits across multiple communities throughout Pacific Mexico. Efforts intended to cultivate trust with, and promote adoption of bycatch reduction strategies, by local communities.

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