



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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Ms. Judy L. Jamison
Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc.
5401 West Kennedy Blvd Suite 740
Tampa, FL 33609

Judy
Dear Ms. Jamison:

This letter addresses Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation's (GSAFF) projects that may involve observation of incidental capture of threatened and endangered sea turtle species and specifically outlines allowable data collection activities and handling of these species. Currently, GSAFF has two ongoing and two new projects where GSAFF personnel may observe incidental captures in the course of the associated commercial fishing activities. The ongoing projects are *Development and Assessment of Bycatch Reduction Devices within the Southeastern Shrimp Trawl Fishery* and *Continuation of a Project to Augment the Data Collection of an Electronic Logbook System Used Within the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery*, and the new projects are *Continuation of Catch Characterization and Discards Within the Snapper Grouper Vertical Hook-and-Line Fishery of the South Atlantic United States* and *Continued Development and Assessment of Bycatch Reduction Devices within the Southeastern Shrimp Trawl Fishery*. While conducting work related to these National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) research grants, GSAFF personnel are considered NMFS-designated agents.

In regard to work related to the aforementioned NMFS research grants, and as outlined in the regulations for endangered and threatened sea turtles at 50 CFR 222.310 and 50 CFR 223.206, an agent may aid and collect data from endangered or threatened sea turtles. These regulations have been previously provided to your staff. Live turtles must be handled, and resuscitation measures must be implemented, according to the enclosed procedures. Whenever possible, live sea turtles shall be returned to their aquatic environment as soon as possible. The regulations specify reporting requirements and the allowable data collection activities for live, incidentally captured turtles. All GSAFF observer personnel have received sea turtle handling and data recording training from the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). With the exception of skin biopsy sampling, which is not authorized through these regulations and should not be undertaken without a separate permit, following the SEFSC protocols for turtle handling and subsequent turtle data reporting will ensure compliance with the applicable requirements.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Michael Barnette, fishery biologist, at the number listed above, or by e-mail at michael.barnette@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator

Enclosure



SEA TURTLE HANDLING AND RESUSCITATION GUIDELINES

Any sea turtles taken incidentally during the course of fishing or scientific research activities must be handled with due care to prevent injury to live specimens, observed for activity, and returned to the water according to the following procedures:

- A) Sea turtles that are actively moving or determined to be dead (as described in paragraph (B)(4) below) must be released over the stern of the boat. In addition, they must be released only when fishing or scientific collection gear is not in use, when the engine gears are in neutral position, and in areas where they are unlikely to be recaptured or injured by vessels.
- B) Resuscitation must be attempted on sea turtles that are comatose or inactive by:
 - 1) Placing the turtle on its bottom shell (plastron) so that the turtle is right side up and elevating its hindquarters at least 6 inches (15.2 cm) for a period of 4 to 24 hours. The amount of elevation depends on the size of the turtle; greater elevations are needed for larger turtles. Periodically, rock the turtle gently left to right and right to left by holding the outer edge of the shell (carapace) and lifting one side about 3 inches (7.6 cm) then alternate to the other side. Gently touch the eye and pinch the tail (reflex test) periodically to see if there is a response.
 - 2) Sea turtles being resuscitated must be shaded and kept damp or moist but under no circumstance be placed into a container holding water. A water-soaked towel placed over the head, carapace, and flippers is the most effective method in keeping a turtle moist.
 - 3) Sea turtles that revive and become active must be released over the stern of the boat only when fishing or scientific collection gear is not in use, when the engine gears are in neutral position, and in areas where they are unlikely to be recaptured or injured by vessels. Sea turtles that fail to respond to the reflex test or fail to move within 4 hours (up to 24, if possible) must be returned to the water in the same manner as that for actively moving turtles.
 - 4) A turtle is determined to be dead if the muscles are stiff (rigor mortis) and/or the flesh has begun to rot; otherwise, the turtle is determined to be comatose or inactive and resuscitation attempts are necessary.

Any sea turtle so taken must not be consumed, sold, landed, offloaded, transshipped, or kept below deck.

These requirements are excerpted from 50 CFR 223.206(d)(1). Failure to follow these procedures is therefore a punishable offense under the Endangered Species Act.