

# The Four Components of Sea Turtle Early Restoration

## Phase IV Early Restoration Project

The Sea Turtle Early Restoration project consists of four complementary project components that will be implemented for 10 years: (1) Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Nest Detection and Enhancement; (2) Enhancement of the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN) and Development of an Emergency Response Program; (3) Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Trawl Bycatch Reduction; and (4) Texas Enhanced Fisheries Bycatch Enforcement, which will aid in the recovery of sea turtles. Below is a more detailed description of each component and the elements within those components.

- 1) **Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Nest Detection and Enhancement** – funding will provide needed support for additional staff, training, equipment, supplies and vehicles to maintain, improve, and/or enhance current nest detection, egg relocation, and nest protection efforts in both Texas and Mexico.



*Kemp's ridley sea turtle nesting at Padre Island National Seashore*

- a) **Texas Activities** – funding will help ensure that nest detection patrols occur across the Texas coast from the Bolivar Peninsula (north) to Boca Chica Beach at the Texas/Mexico border during the sea turtle nesting season (April through mid-July). The patrols to detect, document, and protect nesting Kemp's ridley sea turtles and their nests in Texas will be conducted in cooperation with several partners and coordinated by the National Park Service.

- b) **Mexico Activities** – funding will be provided through the Gladys Porter Zoo to support a joint U.S./Mexico conservation program in Tamaulipas, Mexico, where over 90% of the Kemp's ridley population nests. Activities will include nest detection patrols, additional efforts required during massive synchronous nesting events (i.e., arribadas), hatchling releases, and educational activities.

- 2) **Enhancement of the STSSN and Development of a Sea Turtle Emergency Response Program** – funding will improve response capabilities to quickly recover dead and injured sea turtles. Sea turtle strandings are defined as animals that either wash ashore or are found floating, dead or alive and in a weakened condition. Dead stranded sea turtles are necropsied in the field, buried on the beach, or transported to freezer storage for later evaluation. Live stranded turtles are transported to rehabilitation facilities.

- a) **Enhancement of the STSSN**
  - i) **NOAA's Enhancement of the Gulf-Wide STSSN** – funding will provide for positions in each of the five states, and three new positions at NOAA to focus on Gulf-wide STSSN coordination. These enhancements to the infrastructure of the Gulf of Mexico STSSN will enhance the capability for response, coordination, data handling and reporting. Dissemination of data will be streamlined for use in conservation management programs.



Chase A. Fountain, © Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Texas Trustees will provide funding to STSSN partners and rehabilitation providers to replace lost funding and expand the capacity of the network. The funding will go towards staffing, equipment, vehicles, and supplies with the intent to increase the number of live sea turtles being returned to the Gulf.



Earl Nottingham, © Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
*Green sea turtles on their way to a release site after being rescued and rehabilitated due to a cold stun event*



NOAA-NMFS, Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
*Loggerhead sea turtle escaping from a trawl net, through a TED*

- b) **Southeast Shrimp Trawl Fisheries Observer Program Enhancement** – will expand the capacity of NOAA’s Observer Program to place trained observers on shrimping vessels in the Gulf of Mexico to monitor sea turtle bycatch by adding 300 observer sea days annually.
- 4) **Texas Enhanced Fisheries Bycatch Enforcement** – funding will increase Texas enforcement efforts focused on TED compliance regulations during the Gulf shrimp fishery season (primarily February through mid-May). Increased patrols are necessary during this timeframe because it is the beginning of the sea turtle nesting season and an active time for shrimp fishing, raising the risk to nesting sea turtles.

- b) **Development of a Sea Turtle Emergency Response Program** – will focus on creating a formal plan and necessary infrastructure (i.e. supplies and equipment) as well as a robust training program to allow for rapid response to cold stun or other emergency events that may kill or injure large numbers of sea turtles.
- 3) **Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Trawl Bycatch Reduction** – will address bycatch, injury, and mortality that occur during fishing operations. Turtle excluder devices (TEDs) were developed to address interactions between sea turtles and trawl fishing gear. A TED is a grid of bars with an opening either at the top or the bottom of the trawl net. When larger animals, such as sea turtles and sharks, are captured in the trawl, they strike the grid bars and are ejected through the opening.
  - a) **Gulf of Mexico Gear Monitoring Team (GMT) Enhancement** – funding will add staff to create new teams, which will work with the fishing industry to improve their knowledge and understanding of how to effectively build, use, and maintain TEDs. NOAA GMTs will offer workshops and courtesy dock-side and at-sea TED inspections.



Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
*TPWD law enforcement game wardens taking a course on TED compliance inspections*

