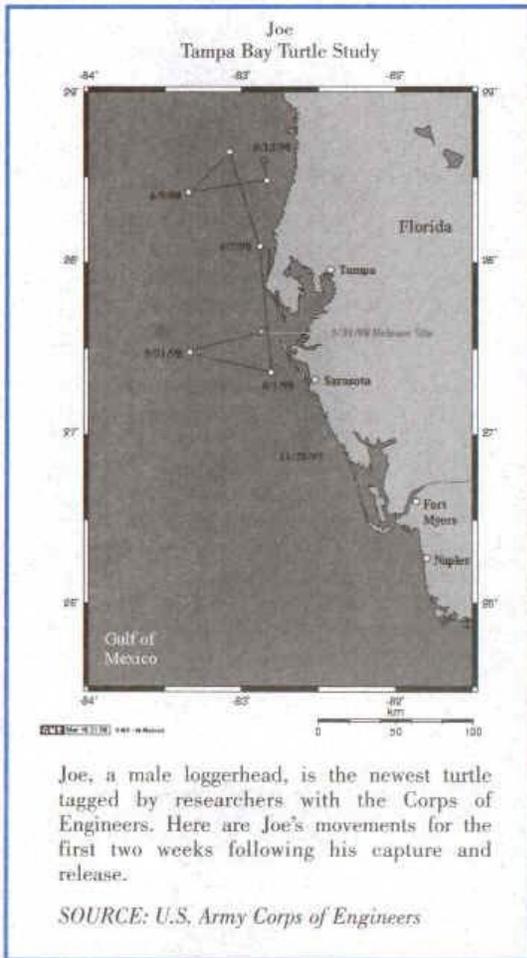


Tampa Bay National Estuary Program News Article - Sea Turtle Tracking Study

Tracking the Nomads of the Deep — Study Hopes to Shed Light on Turtle Travels



go — and why.

The study, initiated by the Corps' Waterways Experiment Station in Mississippi at the request of the National Marine Fisheries Service, uses special sensing devices and satellite tags to monitor the travels and behavior of the three sea turtle species found in Tampa Bay: loggerhead, green and Kemp's ridley. The sensing devices record how long a turtle stays underwater and how deep it swims, while the satellite tags monitor travel and migration patterns.

So far, six turtles have been captured and released back to the bay equipped with the tracking equipment. Maps showing their movements, along with general information about sea turtles, is available on the Internet at www.saj.usace.army.mil/pd/start.htm. This data also is being shared with students through a classroom program developed by the COE and the Caribbean Conservation

Corporation's Sea Turtle Survival League. Most of the turtles used in the project were captured near Egmont Key at the entrance to Tampa Bay. The first, Jason, a male loggerhead, spent a considerable amount of time in Tampa Bay before heading for deeper waters in the Gulf of Mexico and eventually south to the Fort Myers area, where scientists finally lost track of him when his satellite transmitter failed.

Another loggerhead, Debbie, also swam from Tampa Bay last fall toward Fort Myers and then on to Naples before meandering back toward Tampa Bay, where she was last spotted in April.

Ken and Meghann, two Kemp's ridleys, zigzagged north toward the Hernando County area before returning to Tampa Bay. In fact, all the tagged turtles eventually returned to Tampa Bay.

According to sea turtle researchers, predicting the movements of sea turtles is an imprecise undertaking, since they do not follow an easily identified pattern. Researchers know that sea turtles typically migrate to warmer waters during the winter, and migrate from offshore to nearshore or estuarine areas at certain stages of their lives. And, of course, mature adult females return to the same beaches where they were hatched to lay eggs. Other factors that influence their travels are poorly understood, although this study hopes to shed some light on their movements.

Knowing how much time turtles spend in one area, and how often they are in or near the bay's shipping channels could help save their lives by leading to modifications in future dredging projects to avoid

A year-long research project in Tampa Bay sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) seeks to reduce the risk posed to sea turtles from dredging projects by learning more about where these ancient mariners

go — and why.



inadvertently injuring the animals. This is important because all sea turtles are protected by federal law, and the Kemp's ridley is considered to be among the world's 10 most endangered species.

As one of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's partners in bay restoration, the Corps of Engineers earlier this year signed a joinder agreement formalizing its support for bay protection and improvement. Among the Corps' commitments is the development and implementation of a coordinated, long-term dredging and dredged material management plan for Tampa Bay. TBEP has pledged \$40,000 to assist that effort. The Corps of Engineers also has been actively involved in the Agency on Bay Management, an advisory coalition that monitors activities in Tampa Bay, for many years.

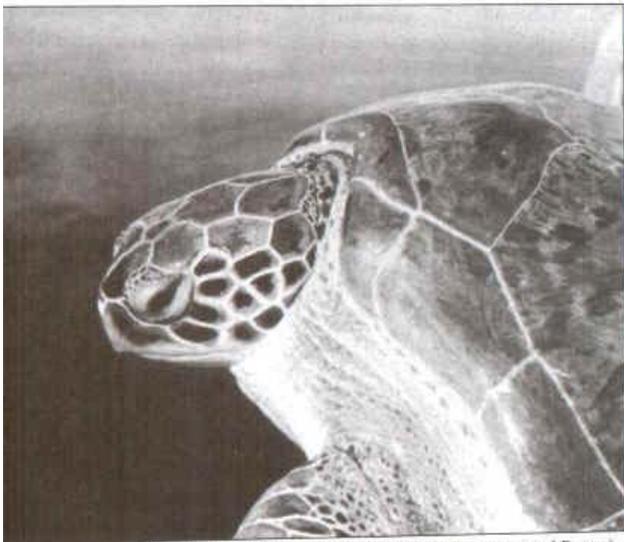


Photo by Anne Meylan, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

Did You Know?

Fast Facts About The National Estuary Program

15% of the population of the continental United States lives within the watersheds of the 28 National Estuary Programs.

45% percent of the nation's surface water area is contained within NEP study areas and 26% of the nation's watersheds drain into NEP estuaries.

More than 16,000 square miles of croplands lie within NEP coastal watersheds.

More than 1.5 million tons of fertilizer is sold within NEP watersheds for agricultural, commercial and residential uses.

Nearly 40% of the nation's classified shellfish beds are in NEP estuaries. More than half of those have harvest limitations because of pollution.

Through partnerships with local communities, agencies and private sector groups, the NEPs have leveraged at least \$45 million in federal funds.

17 of the nation's NEPs have completed their Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans, and 11 others are currently developing management plans.

SOURCE: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C.

