

Conservation advocacy increases protections for Critically Endangered Pacific Leatherback sea turtles

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ABSTRACT

Leatherback sea turtles, the most unique of the seven species of sea turtles, are critically endangered and being pushed toward extinction in the Pacific Ocean. The crash of the Pacific leatherback population is the result of human exploitation and incidental take by commercial fisheries compounded by ongoing loss and degradation of nesting habitats. The Sea Turtle Restoration Project (STRP) is a nonprofit project with over twenty years of actions focused on saving sea turtles and protecting marine biodiversity. STRP advocacy work combines public outreach and engagement for local and international issues with strategic litigation to establish protections for Pacific leatherbacks and their essential habitat. Successes include the closure and implementation of new restrictions on the Hawaiian longline fishery, the creation of the Leatherback Conservation Area which closes the drift gillnet fishery over 210,000 square miles during leatherback foraging season, and the establishment of the largest area of marine critical habitat ever designated for a sea turtle. STRP will continue to support cooperation among fishermen, local community members, national organizations and law enforcement officers around the globe to protect leatherbacks. Global cooperation is required to reduce the many threats to sea turtles and to ensure the survival and recovery of their populations.

Key words: Conservation, Leatherback sea turtles, Restoration Project