



## **ENDANGERED SPECIES: Groups seek listing of North Pacific loggerhead turtle (07/12/2007)**

**Katherine Boyle, *E&ENews PM* reporter**

Environmentalists filed a formal petition today to have the North Pacific loggerhead sea turtle listed as an endangered species and to designate areas off the California coast and off Hawaii as its "critical habitat."

The petitioners, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Turtle Island Restoration Network, say the turtle population has dropped more than 80 percent over the past 25 years and claim pelagic longline fishing is the primary reason for its decline.

"Sea turtles survived the asteroid that killed off the dinosaurs, but are unlikely to survive longline fishing," Miyoko Sakashita, the center's attorney, said in a statement. "This barbaric fishing gear should be banned from our nation's and international waters."

Longline fishing vessels extend lines with thousands of baited hooks over dozens of miles. The groups say the practice snares not only swordfish and tuna that commercial fishers target but also sea turtles, seabirds, marine mammals and sharks.

Although longline fishing was prohibited along the West Coast in 2004, the National Marine Fisheries Service recently proposed issuing permits for an "experimental" longline fishery for swordfish less than 200 miles off the California and Oregon coasts this fall.

Todd Steiner, the executive director of the restoration network, said he is concerned about the proposal, noting that even before 2004 fisheries were not allowed within 200 miles of the California coast. He also described the permit as a step toward establishing a full-scale industrial longline fishery on the West Coast.

Steiner does not think listing the turtle as endangered will necessarily prevent NMFS from issuing the permit. But he said the move is "part of our broader approach to getting better protection for the sea turtle from fisheries interaction."

Overall, he is optimistic about the groups' chances, although he describes the Bush administration's reluctance to list species as a "hurdle to jump."