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Loggerhead turtles might be deemed endangered

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North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles should be listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act, say two conservation groups.

The Center for Biological Diversity and Turtle Island Restoration Network filed a formal petition yesterday, seeking the designation and to have areas along the California coast and off Hawaii designated as "critical habitat" for the species.

North Pacific loggerhead turtles are currently listed as threatened.

Loggerhead sea turtles in the North Pacific nest in Japan and cross the Pacific to feed off the coasts of California and Baja California, Mexico. Their route crosses through some areas where Hawaii-based longline fishing boats fish for tuna

and swordfish, and some are caught and killed in the lines.

A paper published in Ecology Letters in 2004 by scientists Rebecca Lewison and Larry Crowder estimated that as many as 75,000 loggerheads were caught by fishing boats in the Pacific in 2000, said Todd Steiner, Turtle Island Restoration Network executive director.

Officials with the National Marine Fisheries Service, which is responsible for marine animal protection, did not respond to a request for comment yesterday.

More than 1,000 scientists and 300 organizations from more than 100 countries have called upon the United Nations for a moratorium on pelagic longline fishing in the Pacific, according to the Turtle Island Restoration Network.