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Loggerhead sea turtle may get endangered status

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The National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Wednesday issued a proposed decision to lend additional federal protection to loggerhead turtle populations in areas of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The species, named for the size of its head, is listed under the Endangered Species Act as "threatened" throughout its range, in temperate and tropical zones around the globe. The proposed decision would elevate seven distinct population segments to "endangered."

"The proposed rule marks a turning point in our ability to protect loggerhead sea turtles," said Andrea Treece, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the environmental

groups that petitioned for the elevated protection status. “By recognizing and preventing impacts to regional populations and their habitats, we’ll have a much better chance of putting these magnificent, prehistoric animals on a path to recovery instead of extinction.”

Loggerhead populations have faced steep declines from threats on beaches, where they lay eggs, and at sea, where they are caught in commercial fishing nets.

Among other things, designating these population segments starts the process of naming crucial habitat that would merit greater regulation and oversight.

The decision stems from petitions filed by environmental groups Oceana, Turtle Island Restoration Network (part of Earthjustice) and the Center for Biological Diversity.

-- Geoff Mohan

Photo: Since the gains in the 1990s, the loggerhead sea turtle population has declined steadily.

Credit: Wilfredo Lee / Associated Press