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Leatherback sea turtle habitat protected

**By Elizabeth Weise,
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The ancient leatherback sea turtle, which is down to as few as 2,300 adult females, just got thrown a lifeline. On Friday the National Marine Fisheries Service finalized the protection of more than 40,000 square miles of leatherback ocean habitat off the shores of Washington, Oregon and California.

The western Pacific leatherback turtle dates from the time of the dinosaurs. The species has survived for 100 million years virtually unchanged. The turtles feed on jellyfish that live in the waters off the Pacific Northwest at the end of their 6,000 mile migration from their nesting sites in Indonesia.

The area becomes the largest area set aside to protect sea turtle habitat in the United States.

The protected area came about after a petition was submitted five years ago by the environmental groups Oceana, Turtle Island Restoration Network and the Center for Biological Diversity.

Leatherbacks are the largest sea turtles, reaching up to nine feet long and weighing up to 2,000 pounds