

VELADOR

Using Science-Based Conservation to Protect Sea Turtles and Their Habitats Since 1959

Issue 3, 2008

The Bush Administration has launched a major attack on the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the cornerstone of environmental protection for America's wildlife and natural heritage since its passage in 1973 by large bi-partisan Congressional majorities. Recently, the Department of Interior proposed a series of sweeping regulatory changes ("Amending the Formats of the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants") which, if adopted, would undermine 35 years of established practice and significantly weaken the ESA. Despite Administration efforts to limit response to the proposed rule, the public and public-interest groups such as the Caribbean Conservation Corporation have expressed widespread opposition. When the rule was quietly published on August 5, 2008, while Congress and many Americans were on vacation, the comment period was abbreviated to a mere 30 days. Additionally, no public hearings were scheduled, and email and fax comments were not accepted. In response to public indignation, the comment period was extended until October 15th, but email comments were still excluded. (Take action through CCC's website at www.cccturtle.org.)

The proposed rule has been dubbed the "Bush Extinction Plan" by the Endangered Species Coalition, a national network of hundreds of conservation, scientific, religious, sporting, business and community organizations. The rule proposes to do away with protection for our public lands and wildlife without public or Congressional input. CCC is a member of the coalition and serves on its Steering Committee. Our

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Assault on the U.S. Endangered Species Act



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Check out the Tour de Turtles
sea turtle tracking marathon!
www.tourdeturtles.org



...from cover

specific interest in sea turtle conservation is coupled with our support for science-based environmental protection benefiting all of America's natural heritage, wildlife and habitat.

Rather than enhancing the lists of Endangered and Threatened species as stated, the proposed rule would 1) weaken listing of endangered species and habitat protection; 2) remove scientific consultation by qualified Agency biologists; and 3) eliminate government responsibilities to protect species from the effects of global warming.

ESA requires that decisions involving endangered species must be based on the best available science. For 35 years the system has worked well as federal biologists have made decisions on federal and private actions and their effects on endangered species. However, under the proposed Bush administration changes, federal decision-making would be put in the hands of the agencies themselves, creating a conflict of interest. By removing the current system of checks and balances, this change would exclude thousands of federal activities from scientific review. The recent scandal at the Department of Interior involving political appointees who overturned the findings of government scientists on endangered species reveals the importance of independent scientific review.

Habitat protection is key to endangered species protection. The proposed rule would limit protection to habitat currently occupied by a listed species, excluding protections for historical habitat. This would cre-

ate significant obstacles to species recovery and put small populations at greater risk.

Climate change already is a threat to many species and their habitats, and this situation will become worse in the years ahead. As America's

premier legislation for endangered wildlife and plants, the ESA is an important tool for addressing these threats. Nevertheless, the proposed rule would remove the government's responsibilities to protect species from the effects of climate change. Earlier this year the Congress considered but did not pass climate change legislation, that included significant support for endangered species. This issue will remain a major interest for many members of Congress and at some point the United States will enact legislation to address the effects of climate change. We need a strong ESA to ensure endangered species can be protected when that legislation is passed.

Less than six months ago, the Bush Administration announced it would not undertake any significant rule-making during its last months in office, so many individuals and organizations have been surprised by this turn of events. The explanation may lie in what Leda Huta, the Executive Director of the Endangered Species Coalition, describes as "a last minute give away to [Administration] friends in the oil, mining, logging and development industries." CCC and other groups want the rule to be withdrawn.

Your continuing support ensures that CCC's experienced biologists and policy experts are doing everything possible to defend the ESA and defeat dangerous proposals such as this. We will keep our readers apprised of developments in future issues of the *Velador* and on our website at www.cccturtle.org.

By Marydele Donnelly
Director of International Policy

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, *Velador* translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now CCC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the Caribbean, CCC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new *veladors*.

The *Velador* is published for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Caribbean Conservation Corporation** and its **Sea Turtle Survival League** program.

CCC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and the protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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Barrier Island Center Update

Barrier Island Center's Eco-Explorer Summer Program

The Barrier Island Sanctuary Management and Education Center (BIC) is an educational center located in the heart of the Archie Carr Refuge in Florida, a major nesting site for sea turtles. Through a partnership with the Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Lands Program, Caribbean Conservation Corporation manages and conducts educational programs offered at the BIC.

This summer, the BIC was abuzz with 40 "Eco-Explorers" from Georgia, Tennessee and Florida. Each week during July, 10 Eco-Explorers, ranging from grades 3 to 8, learned all about sea turtles, beach and dune ecosystems, the Indian River Lagoon and the native plants and animals that utilize the barrier island and surrounding waters.



Eco-Explorers pull seine nets in the Indian River Lagoon in search of fish, crabs, and other marinelife.

Seeing loggerhead and green turtle tracks in the morning was the highlight of each day. The students would venture onto the observation platform each morning to look for signs that turtles had nested the previous night. When tracks were spotted, the students would walk down to the beach and learn how to identify which species of sea turtle made the track and whether or not the turtle actually nested. By the end of each week, the Eco-Explorers were "expert" turtle trackers and could identify the species and whether or not she had nested.

The Eco-Explorers learned about native and non-native barrier island plants and what they each contributed to the ecosystem. The students also kept a Field Guide



CCC's Leslie Sprague leads the Eco-Explorers in identifying sea turtle tracks in front of the Barrier Island Center.

throughout the week where they recorded their daily observations along with photos of their journey. The students pulled seine nets through the Indian River Lagoon and found many species of juvenile fish and invertebrates, including hermit crabs, seahorses, puffer fish, pipe fish, pin fish, even a barracuda! On one seine netting trip, students saw a dolphin that was fishing about 20 feet away.

Each day the students collected data on their lunches too – what was reusable, recyclable, compostable, and how much trash was produced. This data was compiled and the students' improvement was recorded throughout the week. The kids learned that they can reduce their contribution to the landfill by paying closer attention to what they pack – reusable plastic containers instead of disposable zip-top bags is an easy one. If each of these students implements this one change and tells their family and friends to do the same, imagine how many plastic bags we can keep out of the environment!

Eco-Explorer Katie Nicholson loved the program so much she returned the following week to volunteer with the camp. "It was the best educational camp I've been to," said Katie.



The Eco-Explorers watch as "Belle o' Brevard" is released as part of CCC's Tour de Turtles.

Many of the students want to pursue careers in marine biology and it is our hope that this program gave them a sense of the many plants, animals and ecosystems that need their help, as well as the various careers that can encompass these areas. We look forward to holding another Eco-Explorer program next summer!

For more information about the BIC and its programs, visit www.ccturtle.org/bic.

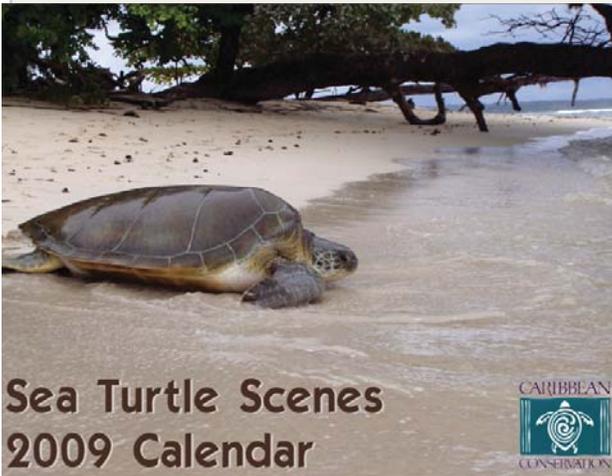
By Leslie Sprague
BIC Manager of Education

Starting to think about Holiday Gifts?

The Caribbean Conservation Corporation is offering a collection of sea turtle gifts and educational products perfect for the holidays! Please keep in mind that all proceeds from your purchases are used to support CCC's research, education, advocacy and conservation initiatives. The next issue of the *Velador* will feature our Holiday Catalog, including the new Tour de Turtles t-shirt, the 2008 edition of our sea turtle ornament, and the 2009 sea turtle calendar!

To start your holiday shopping early, check out gift ideas on our secure Online Gift Shop at <http://giftshop.cccturtle.org>. You can order online or call (800) 678-7853 to place an order.

If you are visiting or live near Melbourne Beach, Florida, you can visit the Mermaid's Purse Gift Shop in the Barrier Island Sanctuary Management and Education Center (call 321-723-3556 for hours or directions). The Mermaid's Purse Gift Shop offers a wide-array of sustainable gifts, many created to support indigenous and local artists.



Sea Turtle Scenes
2009 Calendar



Give a Holiday Gift that Travels the World's Oceans: Adopt an Endangered Sea Turtle for Your Loved Ones.

Finding someone special a unique gift this holiday season just got easier. By adopting an endangered sea turtle as a gift, you and your loved ones will take pride in helping ensure the survival of some of the most amazing but endangered creatures on the planet. Plus, the beautiful adoption kit makes for an attractive holiday gift. To adopt a sea turtle for yourself, a friend, or a loved one, visit www.cccturtle.org, or call (800) 678-7853. 



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