Species Status Assessment

Class: Reptilia
Family: Cheloniidae
Scientific Name: *Chelonia mydas*
Common Name: Green turtle

Species synopsis:

The green turtle is a marine turtle that was originally described by Linnaeus in 1758 as Testudo mydas. In 1868 Marie Firmin Bocourt named a new species of sea turtle Chelonia agassizii. It was later determined that these represented the same species, and the name became Chelonia mydas. In New York, the green turtle can be found from July – November, with individuals occasionally found cold-stunned in the winter months (Berry et al. 1997, Morreale and Standora 1998). Green turtles are sighted most frequently in association with sea grass beds off the eastern side of Long Island. They are observed with some regularity in the Peconic Estuary (Morreale and Standora 1998). Green turtles experienced a drastic decline throughout their range during the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of human exploitation and anthropogenic habitat degradation (NMFS and USFWS 1991). In recent years, some populations, including the Florida nesting population, have been experiencing some signs of increase (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Trends have not been analyzed in New York; a mark-recapture study performed in the state from 1987 – 1992 found that there seemed to be more green turtles at the end of the study period (Berry et al. 1997). However, changes in temperature have lead to an increase in the number of cold stunned green turtles in recent years (NMFS, Riverhead Foundation). Also, this year a record number of nests were observed at nesting beaches in Flordia (Mote Marine Laboratory 2013).

I. Status

a. Current and Legal Protected Status

i. **Federal** Breeding population in Florida – Endangered; All other populations - Threatened **Candidate?** N/A

ii. **New York** Threatened

b. Natural Heritage Program Rank

i. **Global** G3

ii. **New York** S1N **Tracked by NYNHP?** Yes

Other Rank:
CITES Appendix I
IUCN Red List: Endangered

Status Discussion:
Green turtles have been heavily exploited throughout the world, and the breeding populations of Bermuda and the Cayman Islands were wiped out. Because of declining populations, the green turtle was first listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1978. The Florida and Pacific coast of Mexico breeding populations were listed as endangered, while all other populations were considered threatened (NMFS and USFWS 1991). Green turtles seen in the mid-Atlantic and Northeast are typically treated as endangered, although it is uncertain whether they nest in Florida or another area (ENSP 2006). In the U.S., the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have joint jurisdiction of this species.

Because the green turtle is highly migratory, it is also protected under several international treaties including the Convention on Migratory Species, the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol of the Cartagena Convention, and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles.

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

a. North America

i. Abundance

____ declining __X__ increasing _____stable ____unknown

ii. Distribution:

____ declining ____increasing __X___stable ___ unknown

Time frame considered: There has been a long-term decline of green turtles over the past century; however, using data on annual nesting females or annual nests, all populations in North America are listed as increasing over the past ~20 years, with the exception of the breeding population on Aves Island, Venezuela and Revillagigedos Islands, Mexico, both of which are stable (NMFS and USFWS 2007, Mote Marine Laboratory 2013).

b. Regional

i. Abundance

____ declining __X__ increasing ____stable _____unknown

ii. Distribution:

____ declining ____increasing __X__stable ____ unknown

Regional Unit Considered: Atlantic Coast (Florida breeding population)
Time Frame Considered: Late 1970s - 2005

c. Adjacent States and Provinces

ONTARIO **Not Present** __X__ **No data** _______

PENNSYLVANIA **Not Present** __X__ **No data** _______

VERMONT **Not Present** __X__ **No data** _______

CONNECTICUT **Not Present** _______ **No data** _______

i. Abundance

___ declining ____ increasing ____ stable __X__unknown

ii. Distribution:

____ declining ____ increasing ____ stable __X__ unknown

Time frame considered: Unknown

Listing Status: Threatened SGCN? Yes

MASSACHUSETTS **Not Present** _______ **No data** _______

i. Abundance

____ declining ____ increasing ____ stable __X__ unknown

ii. Distribution:

____ declining ____ increasing ____ stable __X__ unknown

Time frame considered: Not tracked by state

Listing Status: Threatened SGCN? Yes

NEW JERSEY **Not Present** _______ **No data** _______

i. **Abundance**

____ **declining** ____ **increasing** ____ **stable** __X__ **unknown**

ii. **Distribution:**

____ **declining** ____ **increasing** ____ **stable** __X__ **unknown**

Time frame considered: Trends not analyzed.
Listing Status: Endangered SGCN? Yes

QUEBEC **Not Present** ________ **No data** _______

i. **Abundance**

____ **declining** ____**increasing** _____**stable** __X__ **unknown**

ii. **Distribution:**

____ **declining** ____**increasing** ______**stable** __X__ **unknown**

Time frame considered: Trends never analyzed.
Listing Status: Not listed.

d. NEW YORK **No data** _______

i. **Abundance**

____ **declining** ____ **increasing** ____ **stable** __X__ **unknown**

ii. **Distribution:**

____ **declining** ____ **increasing** ____ **stable** __X__ **unknown**

Time frame considered: Trends not analyzed.

Monitoring in New York.

The only regular monitoring that occurs for the species is entanglement and stranding response provided by Riverhead Foundation. Recently, the DEC was able to provide the Riverhead Foundation with 25 acoustic tags for tracking the movements of sea turtles. Several of these tags were placed on turtles that were released by the Foundation at the end of the summer.

Trends Discussion:

Trends of green turtles in New York are poorly understood. Sadove and Cardinale (1993) estimated that there were "at least 100 turtles" in the New York Bight area each year. Berry et al. (1997) performed a mark-recapture study from 1986 – 1997 and recapture rates indicated that the number of green turtles appeared to be increasing in state waters over the study period. Unfortunately, there are no recent numbers (1997 – present) to further analyze if the population has continued to increase. Stranding reports have been variable from year to year, with no significant trends being reported (DiGiovanni 2009; Figures 4 and 5). Whether the number of stranded individuals can be used as an estimator of population size is currently unknown.

Trend information that does exist indicates that green turtle populations are stable or increasing. NMFS and USFWS (2007) compiled information on nesting populations of green turtles from various nesting grounds in the western North Atlantic thought to be representative of their region. Nesting populations in Florida, the Yucatan Peninsula, Costa Rica, and Suriname are all listed as increasing, while the nesting populations in Venezuela and Brazil are stable (NMFS and USFWS 2007). It is largely unknown where green turtles seen in New York nest, though Florida and/or the Caribbean are likely options. Two satellite-tagged green turtles were tracked from New York to South Carolina before the transmitters died (DiGiovanni 2009, DiGiovanni et al. 2010). In Florida, the number of nests has increased to an abundance of over 5,000 annual nests from the late 1980s to 2005 (NMFS and USFWS 2007). With changes in temperature it is expected that more green and other sea turtles will be seen in the New York area, as evidenced in increases in cold stunned animals (NMFS, Riverhead Foundation).

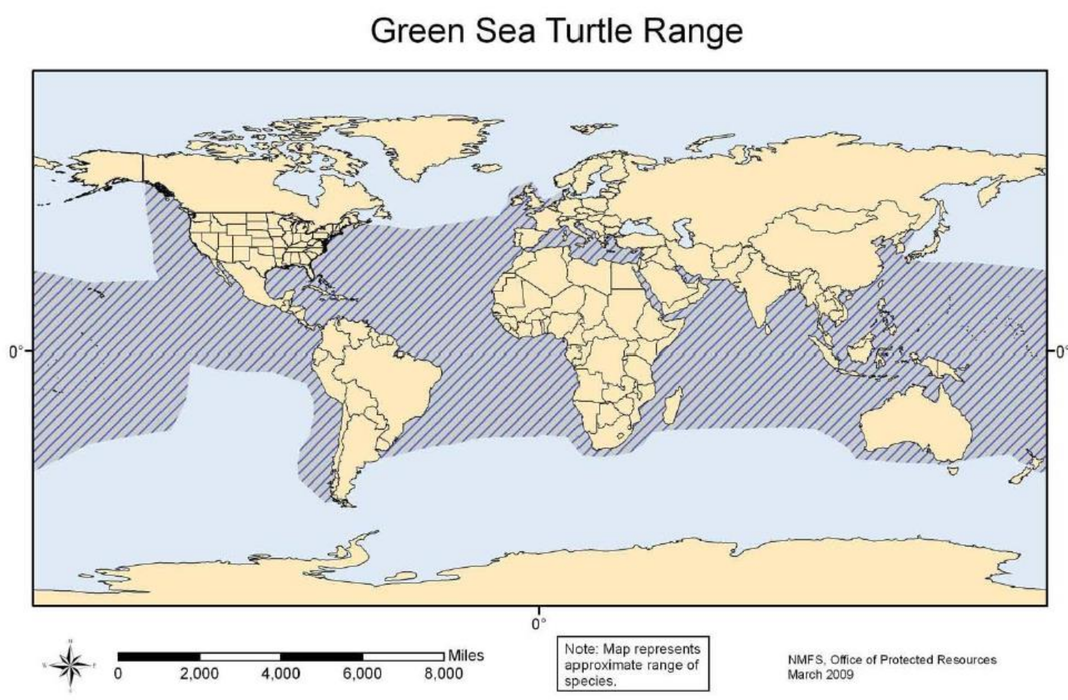

Figure 1. Worldwide range of green turtles (NMFS 2009).

Figure 2. U.S. Atlantic range of the green turtle (USFWS 2012).

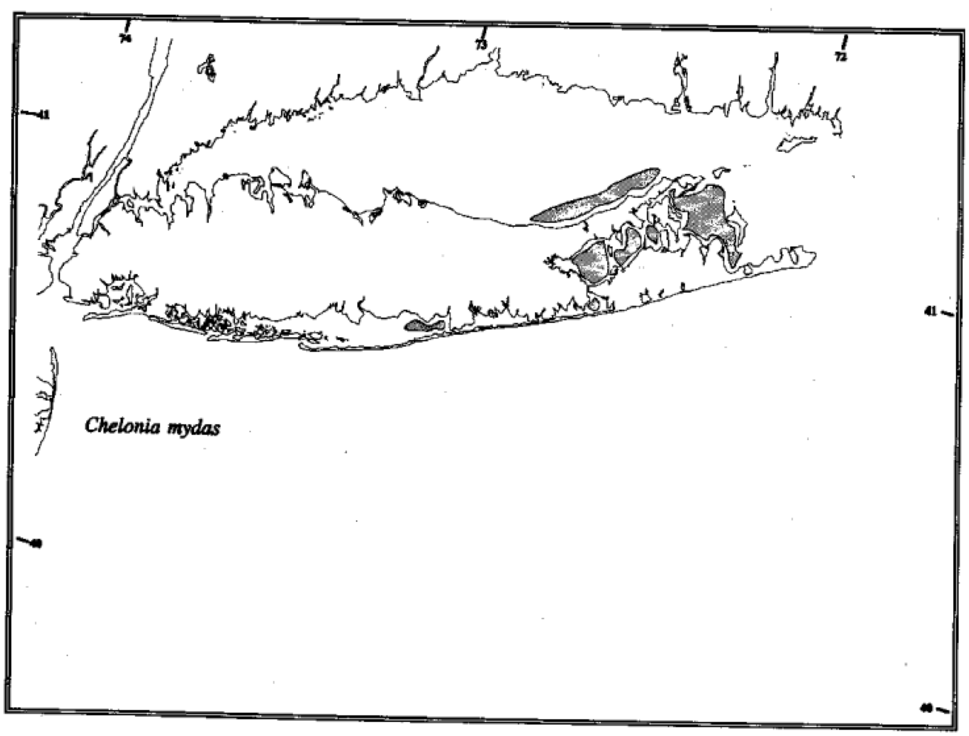

Figure 3. Areas where green turtles have been sighted in New York waters (Sadove and Cardinale 1993).

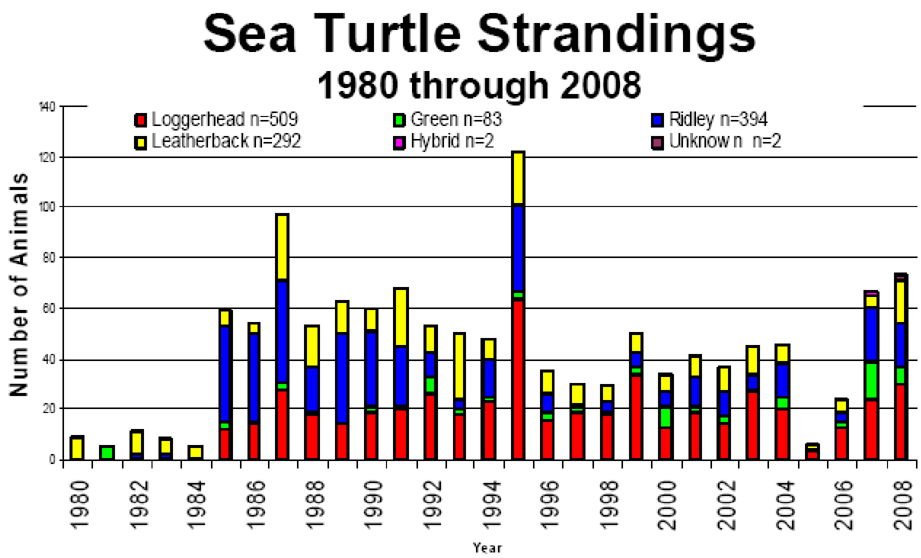

Figure 4. New York sea turtle strandings as documented by Riverhead Foundation (DiGiovanni 2009).

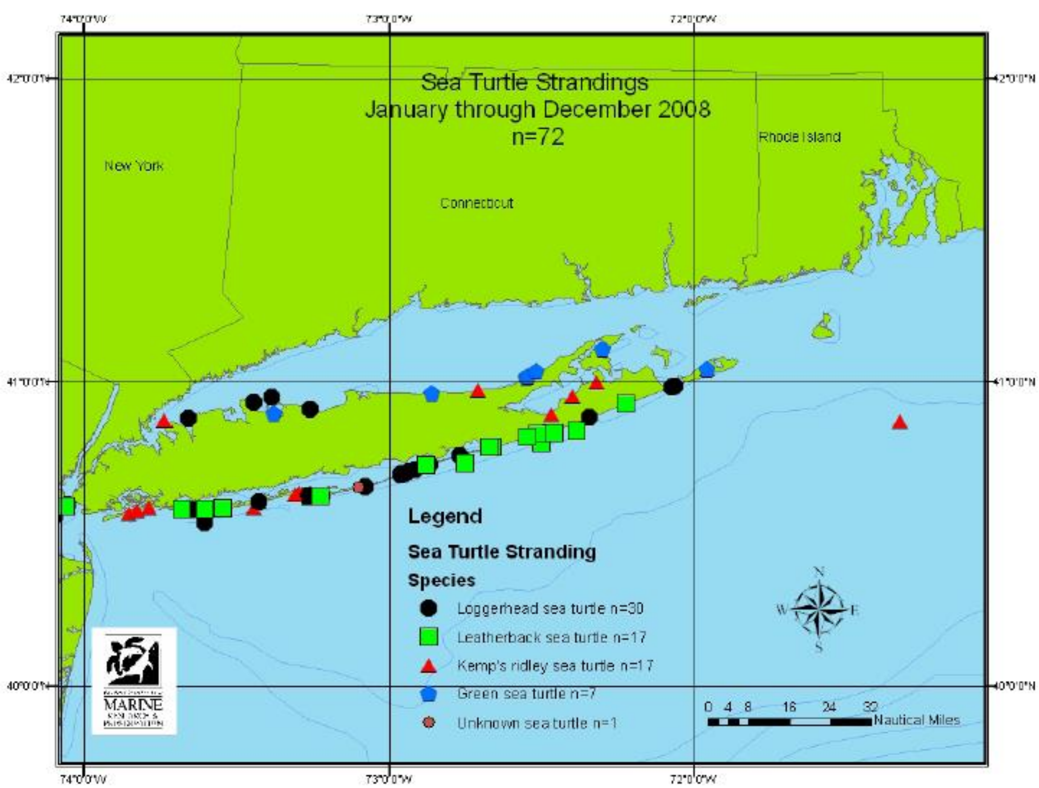

Figure 5. Distribution of sea turtle strandings for the period of January through December 2008 (DiGiovanni 2009).

III. New York Rarity, if known:

Historic	# of Animals	# of Locations	% of State
prior to 1970	________	________	________
prior to 1980	________	________	________
prior to 1990	________	________	________

Details of historic occurrence:

Unknown in New York. Sadove and Cardinale (1993) indicated that "at least 100" green turtles use the New York Bight region each year, based on surveys, reports and strandings from the 1970s to early 1990s. Mark-recapture data in a study from 1986 – 1997 indicated that the number of green turtles using state waters was increasing (Berry et al. 1997).

Current	# of Animals	# of Locations	% of State
	________	________	________

Details of current occurrence:

Unknown in New York.

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

% of NA Range in New York	Classification of New York Range
____ 100 (endemic)	____ Core
____ 76-99	__X__ Peripheral
____ 51-75	____ Disjunct
____ 26-50	Distance to core population:
__X__ 1-25	__________

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type:

1. Marine, Shallow Subtidal, Aquatic Bed

2. Pelagic

3. Marine Eelgrass Meadow

4. Estuarine, Brackish Shallow Subtidal, Aquatic Bed

5. Marine, Deep Subtidal

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York:

____ **Declining** ____ **Stable** ____ **Increasing** __X__ **Unknown**

Time frame of decline/increase: __Habitat trend not determined__

Habitat Specialist? __X__ **Yes** ______ **No**

Indicator Species? __X__ **Yes** ______ **No**

Habitat Discussion:

Green turtle hatchlings leave nesting beaches and move into convergence zones in the open ocean (Carr 1986). They spend an undetermined amount of time in these areas (Carr 1986). Once reaching a carapace length of ~20-25 cm, green turtles travel from the open ocean to benthic feeding grounds in relatively shallow, protected waters (NMFS and USFWS 1991). While on these feeding grounds, green turtles forage on algae, sea grasses, and invertebrates (NMFS and USFWS 2007).

Green turtles, the majority being juveniles (Morreale et al. 1992, Reynolds and Sadove 1997), are found in New York during the months of July through November (Sadove and Cardinale 1993, Berry et al. 1997). Green turtles are found in some abundance throughout the Peconic Estuary (Berry et al. 1997). While they are seen free-swimming in the pelagic environment, their distribution in New York (see Figure 3; Trends Discussion) has been found to correlate significantly with that of submerged aquatic vegetation (i.e., eelgrass beds), which they are likely feeding upon (Berry et al. 1997).

Eelgrass beds have declined drastically since the early 1900s. A wasting disease in the early 1930s led to the disappearance of ~90% of eelgrass beds along the U.S. Atlantic seaboard (Stephenson 2009). Brown tide blooms in the 1980s led to further declines in eelgrass beds throughout the Peconic Estuary (Stephenson 2009). It is believed that this area has lost over 80% of its historical (1930s) population of eelgrass (Figure 1; Stephenson 2009). The Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) estimated that the Peconic Estuary boasted approximately 8,720 acres of eelgrass in 1930. In 2003, only 1,552 acres were documented (Figure 1).

The Peconic Estuary Program heads a Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Long-Term Eelgrass Monitoring Program that closely monitors eight eelgrass sites in the Peconic Estuary. There has been an overall decline in shoot density and coverage at the majority of these sites, with three sites no longer supporting eelgrass (Figure 2).

Surveys of eastern Long Island Sound in 2002, 2006 and 2009 have documented trends in eelgrass extent on the northern section of Long Island (Figure 3). While the three areas surveyed have shown an increase in acreage and number of eelgrass beds (Tables 1 and 2), they represent a relatively small area of Long Island Sound (Figure 3).

There has not been a change in overall amount of pelagic and shallow subtidal ecosystem; however, the changes in eelgrass abundance and density could potentially represent a change in habitat suitability. It is known that eelgrass beds in the state have been in decline since the 1930s, but it is not known whether green turtle use of state waters also declined during this period as habitats potentially became less suitable because of reduced foraging areas. In addition, pollution (including noise pollution) may make a previously occupied area unsuitable for this species. Further research needs to be done to identify whether these factors are altering habitat availability in New York waters.

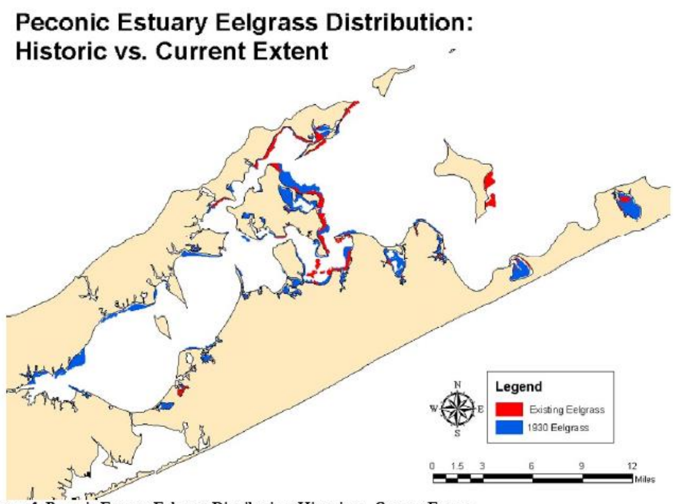

Figure 1: Peconic Estuary Eelgrass Distribution: Historic vs. Current Extent
Approximately 1,552 acres of existing eelgrass documented by Tiner, et al, 2003, using 2000 aerials, as compared to approximately 8,720 acres of 1930 eelgrass.
Source: CCE

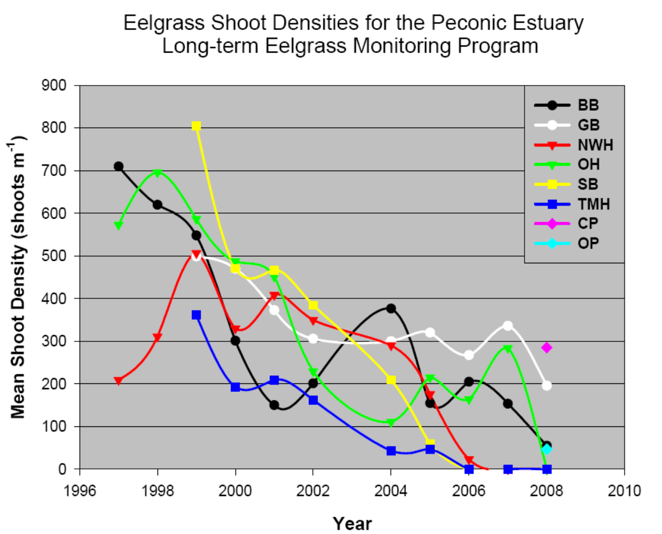

Figure 2: Eelgrass Shoot Densities for the Peconic Estuary Long-Term Eelgrass Monitoring Program
Density at the 8 monitored beds continue to decline; many reference sites and stations supporting little if any eelgrass. BB= Bullhead Bay, Southampton; GB= Gardiners Bay/Hay Beach, Shelter Island; NWH= Northwest Harbor, East Hampton; OH= Orient Harbor, Southold; SB= Southold Bay, Southold; and, TMH= Three Mile Harbor, East Hampton; CP= Cedar Point, East Hampton; OP= Orient Point, Southold.
Source: CCE

Figure 3. Location of eelgrass beds in eastern Long Island sound as surveyed by the USFWS in 2009. Darker blue area represents New York waters (Tiner et al. 2009).

Table 1. Acreage and number of three eelgrass beds on the northern tip of Long Island as documented on surveys of eastern Long Island Sound (see Figure 3 for approximate locations of beds). Data sources: Tiner et al. (2010) and Tiner et al. (2007).

Year	Sub-basin	Acres of high density (number)	Acres of medium density (number)	Acres of low density (number)	Total acres (number)
2006	Fishers Island	4.1 (12)	190.4 (25)	6.8 (5)	201.3 (42)
	North Shore	0	18.1	6.8	24.9
	Plum Island	0	9.5	0	9.5
2009	Fishers Island	149.0 (11)	191.3 (33)	5.6 (3)	345.9 (47)
	North Shore	5.0 (3)	5.5 (2)	0	10.5 (5)
	Plum Island	7.6 (1)	0	0	7.6 (1)

Table 2. Changes in acreage and number of eelgrass beds in New York from surveys of eastern Long Island Sound conducted in 2002, 2006, and 2009 (see Figure 3 for approximate location of beds). + represents a gain, while – represents a loss. Source: Tiner et al. (2010).

Sub-basin	2002 - 2006 Acreage Change	2002 - 2006 Change in # of Beds	2006 - 2009 Acreage Change	2002 - 2009 Change in # of Beds
Fishers Island	+7.8	+11	+22.5*	+5
North Shore	+9.2	+1	-14.4	+2
Plum Island	+9.5	+1	-1.9	-0-
Total	+26.5	+13	+6.2*	+7

*Two large beds totaling 122.1 acres on the south side of Fishers Island could be seen on the 2009 imagery while they were not visible on 2006 imagery due to environmental conditions. Field inspections in 2006 had located robust beds in this area and recorded their occurrence as points since the beds could not be accurately delineated on the imagery. Consequently, for the 2009 report, we did not treat this acreage as a gain because robust beds were noted in this area in 2006 and their boundaries could not be established.

V. New York Species Demographics and Life History

_____ Breeder in New York

____ Summer Resident

____ Winter Resident

____ Anadromous

__X__ Non-breeder in New York

__X__ Summer Resident

____ Winter Resident

____ Catadromous

____ Migratory only

____Unknown

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion:

The lifespan of green turtles is unknown, but thought to be 80 or more years (NMFS 2013). A green sea turtle in the New England Aquarium has been in captivity since 1970, and is believed to be around 80 years old (NEAQ 2013).

In the southeastern U.S., green sea turtles nest from June through September (Ehrhart and Witherington 1992). Females return to the same beaches year after year, although they may lay eggs at several different beaches within a season. Females lay eggs nocturnally at up to nine nests within a season. The average number of nests per female per season is about three; the nests are generally laid at intervals of about two weeks. Clutch size is around 75 – 200 eggs, which incubate for about 45 – 75 days before hatching (NatureServe 2013). Green turtle eggs exhibit temperature dependent sex determination, with eggs incubated below a critical temperature being males, and those incubated above a critical temperature being females (Spotila et al. 1987). Eggs often hatch at night.

It is believed that newly hatched green turtles travel to offshore areas, where they forage for several years (NMFS 2013). Once juveniles reach a certain length (carapace of ~20-25 cm), the majority move into nearshore foraging areas (NMFS and USFWS 2007). These foraging areas can be up to 3,000 km away from nesting beaches (NatureServe 2013). It is at this juvenile stage that green turtles are found in New York and other Northeastern waters (Morreale and Standora 1998).

Green turtles reach sexual maturity anywhere between 20 – 50 years of age (NMFS 2013). Females return to natal beaches to deposit eggs (Carr et al. 1978, Meylan et al. 1990). Females nest at 2,3 or 4 or more year intervals (NMFS and USFWS 2007, NatureServe 2013, NMFS 2013). Reproductive longevity is estimated to range from 17-23 years (Carr et al. 1978, Fitzsimmons et al. 1995, Chaloupka et al. 2004), and females may deposit between 900 – 3,300+ eggs in her lifetime (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Male reproductive behavior is largely unknown, although it is believed that they return to nesting grounds every year to mate (NMFS and USFWS 1991). It is now known that adult green turtles return to the same foraging grounds each year after nesting (Godley et al. 2002, Broderick et al. 2006, NMFS and USFWS 2007), and have specific home ranges that include feeding and resting areas within the major foraging grounds (Seminoff et al. 2002, Godley et al. 2003, Makowski et al. 2006, Seminoff and Jones 2006, Taquet et al. 2006). Some percentage of green turtles remain in pelagic habitats and rarely, if ever, enter nearshore foraging areas (Pelletier et al. 2004, NMFS and USFWS 2007).

Eggs and hatchlings are predated upon by a variety of species, including raccoons, feral hogs, foxes, crabs, and ants (NMFS and USFWS 1991). Raccoons may take up to 96% of all nests on certain beaches (NMFS and USFWS 1991). Severe storms and erosion also destroy some nests (NMFS and USFWS 1991).

Juveniles and subadults have been found to have lower survival rates than adults (NMFS and USFWS 2007). This may be partially accounted for by increased levels of predation on younger turtles. Sharks, killer whales, bass and grouper are all known to prey upon green turtles to some extent; tiger sharks appear to be the principal predator (Stancyk 1982).

Disease is known to have a relatively large effect on many green sea turtle populations. Fibropapillomatosis (FP) causes the growth of tumors that can block the vision in turtles and lead to decreased swimming and foraging capabilities (Herbst 1994, NMFS and USFWS 2007). As many as 62% of the green turtles in Florida are affected by FP (Schroeder et al. 1998).

Sea turtles are vulnerable to dramatic changes in temperature. While green turtles are believed to migrate out of New York waters in late summer, some may be feeding in shallow waters and still be in the area when water temperatures drop significantly (Morreale and Standora 1998). When this happens, sea turtles can fall victim to a process known as cold-stunning. This is a hypothermic state that can result in the turtle drifting at sea in a lethargic state. Cold-stunning often results in mortality, unless the turtles wash ashore and are rescued by stranding groups.

VI. Threats:

One of the major threats to sea turtle populations in New York is fisheries interactions. Sea turtles can become trapped in pound nets, longline fisheries, trap fisheries, trawl fisheries, purse seines and gill nets. Turtles trapped in gear can drown or suffer serious injuries as a result of constriction by lines (NMFS and USFWS 1991). Additionally, turtles can be hooked by longline gear, which can cause injury and reduced feeding capabilities. Trawlers that are not outfitted with Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) can entrap and drown sea turtles. Additionally, dredges can destroy habitat and crush or entrap sea turtles (NMFS and USFWS 1991). In New York, Morreale and Standora (1998) reported that commercial fisherman were responsible for 84% of all 317 live turtles captured in a mark-recapture study from 1987 – 1992. 93% of these captures were in pound nets; sea turtles were also caught in trawls and entangled in lobster pot lines and gill nets (Morreale and Standora 1998).

Climate change is believed to have major effects on sea turtles throughout their range. Extreme temperature changes could lead to increased numbers of cold-stunned sea turtles; it is also possible that changing temperatures could lead to conditions that are more favorable for sea turtles. There have been a record high number of cold-stunned sea turtles found this winter throughout the Northeast; it is believed that this could be a result of climate change (L. Bonacci, pers. communication). Of the approximately 18 cold-stunned sea turtles that Riverhead Foundation has responded to since November 2012, at least 9 were green turtles. Additionally, climate change is believed to be associated with rising water temperatures, as well as changes in ice cover, salinity, oxygen levels and circulation (IPCC 2007). These changes are likely to cause shifts in range and abundance of different species of algae, plankton and fish (IPCC 2007). These shifts could alter the suitability of New York habitat (as well as habitat in other parts of sea turtles' ranges) for occupancy by sea turtles. Conditions at nearshore foraging areas have been shown to impact the timing of green turtle reproduction (Limpus and Nicholls 1987, Solow et al. 2002), and thus could have large effects on green turtle population dynamics. Changing currents as a result of climate change could affect sea turtle migration and survival of oceanic-stage juveniles (NMFS and USFWS 2007).

Climate change could have significant effects on green turtles in other parts of their range as well. More nests could be destroyed as a result of the increasing abundance and severity of storms along the nesting range. Rising sea levels could cause major problems on low-lying nesting beaches. Additionally, there is concern that rising temperatures could skew hatchling sex ratios towards a strong female bias (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Higher sand temperatures have been documented at at least one nesting site (Hays et al. 2003).

Coastal development can lead to destruction or degradation of sea turtle habitat. Eelgrass beds used by green sea turtles may be destroyed as a result of such development and ecosystem alterations development can exacerbate. Green turtles can occasionally be taken into the cooling systems of coastal power plants, where they are submerged and drown (NMFS and USFWS 2007). The construction of seawalls, rock revetments, groins, jetties, and sand bags degrades sea turtle nesting habitat (NMFS and USFWS 1991). Additionally, bright lighting near beaches can disorient hatchlings, and cause them to move towards the light rather than the ocean (Ehrhart 1983; Mann

1977; McFarlane 1963; Philibosian 1976). This misorientation can lead to increased risk from predators, entrapment in vegetation, dessication, and being hit by vehicles (NMFS and USFWS 1991).

Sea turtles may occasionally be hit by vessels, which can cause mortality and severe injury. This has been documented to be a major problem in Florida (Singel et al. 2003), and it is likely to occur more often than reported throughout the range (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Seminoff et al. (2002) found that boat traffic excluded green turtles from preferred coastal foraging areas, which could have negative effects on the population.

PCBs, mercury, copper, and other heavy metals have been found in the tissues of green turtles (Al Rawahy et al. 2006; Lewis 2006; Miao et al. 2001; Presti et al. 1999). The effects of these contaminants on green turtles is currently unknown, but there is concern that elevated levels could lead to immunosuppression and hormonal imbalances (NMFS and USFWS 2007). Oil spills are known to directly affect marine turtles (Yender and Mearns 2003), and could also lead to immunosuppression and chronic health issues (Sindermann et al. 1982). Immunosuppression by contaminants and habitat degradation is believed to be a major cause of FP (George 1997), although there is evidence that it is not a requirement for the development of tumors associated with the disease (Work et al. 2001).

Sea turtles could ingest or become entangled in marine debris, which can reduce food intake and digestive capacity and cause injury or mortality (Bjorndal et al. 1994, Sako and Horikoshi 2002).

The effects of anthropogenic noise on sea turtles are poorly understood. Studies have shown that sea turtles exposed to certain levels of low frequency sound may spend more time at the surface and/or move out of the area (O'Hara and Wilcox 1990; Lenhardt et al. 1983). Samuel et al. (2005) found elevated noise levels, primarily from boat traffic, in the Peconic Bay Estuary system in New York during the sea turtle activity season. They suggest that continued exposure to these sound levels could potentially lead to behavioral effects on sea turtles using the area (Samuel et al. 2005). The authors also suggest that similar sound levels should be expected in other coastal foraging and nesting areas. Sea turtles have been found to change swimming patterns and orientation in response to air guns, which are frequently used in oil and gas exploration (O'Hara 1990).

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

_______ No   _____ Unknown

__X__ Yes

The green turtle is listed as a threatened species in New York and is protected by Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) section 11-0535 and the New York Code of Rules and Regulations (6 NYCRR Part 182). A permit is required for any proposed project that may result in a take of a species listed as Threatened or Endangered, including, but not limited to, actions that may kill or harm individual animals or result in the adverse modification, degradation or destruction of habitat occupied by the listed species. It is also protected as a federally-listed threatened species.

In addition, Article 17 of the ECL works to limit water pollution, and Article 14 presents the New York Ocean and Great Lakes Ecosystem Conservation Act. This act is responsible for the conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems “so that they are healthy, productive and resilient and able to deliver the resources people want and need.” Both of these help to protect the habitat of the green turtle. Whether they are adequate to protect the habitat is currently unknown.

The Peconic Estuary Program put together an Eelgrass Management Plan for the Peconic Estuary in 2009 (Stephenson 2009) in an effort to help conserve eelgrass beds, which are used by green turtles in New York (Berry et al. 1997).

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Riverhead Foundation should continue to carry out stranding and entanglement response for sea turtles. The Foundation rescues and rehabilitates injured and cold-stunned individuals. Before being released, rehabilitated sea turtles are sometimes given a satellite tag, which helps expand our knowledge on movements and habitat use. Placing PIT tags and/or satellite tags on as many individual turtles as possible will help to further our knowledge on green turtle life history, and this practice should be encouraged. It is critical to determine where New York green turtles travel to and nest to help reduce the threats to the population during other stages of its life.

Long-term surveys to monitor the population of green turtles in New York should be implemented. Sea turtle use of state waters was fairly well established by studies throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but not much work has been done in recent years. Monitoring would allow researchers to garner a better idea of population trends and habitat use of this species in the State, and see if shifts in use have occurred. Additionally, further research into the effects of the various threats listed above on the green turtle population in the State should be encouraged. Bycatch rates should be closely monitored, and research into reducing these rates would be beneficial.

Education on this species and the importance of reporting ship strikes and entanglements is encouraged. Conservation actions following IUCN taxonomy are categorized in the table below.

Conservation Actions	
Action Category	**Action**
Education & Awareness	Awareness & Communications
External Capacity Building	Alliance & Partnership Development

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (NYSDEC 2005) includes recommendations for the following actions for sea turtles.

Curriculum development:

____ To provide public outreach programs about local species and their environment within the Long Island Sound and the New York Bight. Partnering with agencies such as the New York State Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Rescue Program, NYSDEC, NOAA, U.S. Coast Guard and local law enforcement, will allow the Riverhead Foundation to adhere to the actions listed in the sea turtle recovery plans more efficiently and effectively.

Fact sheet:

____ To provide literature for local communities, as well as law enforcement agencies, regarding sea turtles and their environment within the Long Island Sound and the New York Bight. The information distributed by the Riverhead Foundation to these people will provide a more effective response to strandings and sightings of animals.

Population monitoring:

____ Mark recapture studies will provide data on the diet composition of these animals between bodies of water. These results can be compared to historical studies to identify any shifts in prey species.

____ Determine sex composition of NY sea turtle populations. As the New York region is a critical developmental habitat for sea turtles it is important to understand if there is a sexual bias for this area. Historical studies were unable to obtain the sex of many live animals.

____ Radio and satellite tags can be combined with aerial and shipboard survey work to study abundance, distribution, and movements associated with seasonal changes.

____ Genetic studies should be conducted to identify stock structure and possibly understand broad scale movements.

____ Mark recapture studies will provide data on size class, and population structure. With these data comparisons can be made within years, between years and between bodies of water (e.g. Long Island Sound, Peconic Bay, Great South Bay, offshore waters) and also compared to stranded animals to understand how and if stranded animals can be used as a representative of the current population or a proxy for ecosystem health.

VII. References

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