

Recent Loss of Green Turtle Grant Funding at Padre Island National Seashore

In June 2020, the National Park Service cancelled two NPS grants that the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery program (STSR) at Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) had been awarded through funding competitions. STSR had been scheduled to receive starting in FY 21. This included a 3-year study (FY21-23, total \$241K), that had been ranked #1 in the Region. This included plans to purchase satellite transmitters as part of a required in-kind contribution (also cancelled 15 June 2020). Also cancelled was a 1-year project (FY 21, \$49K) supporting critical work with collaborating with PAIS' Sister Park in Veracruz, Mexico (cancelled 22 June 2020).

- The rationale for cancellation was because the grants involved nesting green turtles, not Kemp's ridley turtles. This action was taken despite the fact that STSR's authorized work with this threatened species dates back to the beginning of the program, its permits and Foundation Document authorize such work, and these grants were needed to fund work to collect data needed to help develop management for this species as nesting increases at PAIS.
- Along with those actions, PAIS Superintendent Eric Brunnemann stated that "PAIS withdraw funding for non-Kemp's ridley sea turtle projects until proper justification relevant to park managed property be given".
- Shaver et al. (2020) documents that PAIS is the most important green turtle nesting beach in the U.S. northwestern Gulf of Mexico. Green turtle nesting is increasing in Texas, and indeed a record number of green turtle nests was recorded in Texas this year, marking the second consecutive, anticipated jump, indicative of a trend likely to continue and greatly escalate based on numbers from nearby nesting beaches in Mexico and Florida. STSR's work aimed to gather early information needed to develop future management actions necessary if nesting continues to increase as forecast.
- In addition, Mr. Brunnemann took steps to induce the NPS Regional Office to reject any STSR applications for Deep Water Horizon (DWH) Restoration proposals for Texas that the U.S. Department of Interior had requested STSR prepare and submit. As a result, the NPS Regional Office has barred STSR from submitting DWH Restoration proposals.
- Finally, Mr. Brunnemann sent an email (14 July 2020) to DWH Trustee Representatives to remove the STSR from participating in the four proposals that the NPS Regional Office had previously approved October 2019.