CRUISE PLAN FOR RELEASE OF THE 1992 YEAR-CLASS OF HEAD STARTED KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLES

by

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April 1993

CRUISE PLAN APPROVAL

Approved:_____Date:_____
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Approved: Bradford E. Brown Date: 4/20/93
Bradford E. Brown, Ph.D., Director
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TURTLES TO BE RELEASED

As of 24 February 1993, 1,967 survivors (98.6%) of the 1992 year-class of Kemp's ridley sea turtles, Lepidochelys kempii, were being head started at the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Galveston Laboratory, out of 1,994 hatchlings received alive on 14 July 1992. It is estimated that about 1,950 (97.8%) multi-tagged individuals will be in good health and condition for the release tentatively scheduled for 18 May 1993.

~~Hatchlings of the 1992 year-class were "imprinted" to the nesting beach at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico. Consequently, the yearlings do not have to be released offshore of Mustang and North Padre Islands, Texas to reinforce imprinting to these islands as in years prior to 1989. Therefore,~~ The turtles will be released 20 - 25 nm offshore, between San Luis Pass and Freeport, TX. It is possible that additional turtles will be released (e.g., larger Kemp's ridleys held back from prior releases, rehabilitated turtles of various species, etc.). ARCO Oil and Gas Company, Inc. will be asked to supply a vessel for the release.

PERMITS AND LETTERS OF AUTHORIZATION

The release will proceed under permits issued by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild

Fauna and Flora (CITES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS, Permit No. PRT-676379), NMFS (Permit No. 585) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD, Permit SPR-0390-038). In addition, letter(s) of authorization for the transfer of these turtles within the State of Texas will be obtained from the Permitting Office, TPWD, Austin, Texas. Further, all persons actively engaged in the transport and release of these turtles will have copies of all required permits on their person at all times while engaged in these activities.

TAGGING

Each head started Kemp's ridley of the 1992 year-class in good condition and health at release will have been marked with four different tags: (1) an inconel flipper tag applied to the trailing edge of the right front flipper, (2) an internal, magnetized, coded-wire tag imbedded in the left front flipper, (3) a gouge-type, living-tag on right costal 3 (RC3), and (4) an internal passive integrated transponder (PIT) in the right axillary (armpit) muscle.

ABNORMAL TURTLES AND THOSE IN POOR HEALTH

Turtles with congenital abnormalities and those suffering from any diagnosed illness or injury will not be released. Determination of health and condition of the turtles will be made

by Dr. Richard Henderson, D.V.M., in consultation with Clark T. Fontaine and Theodore D. Williams, prior to their transfer and release.

SMALL TURTLES

Controlled feeding (Purina turtle chow at 1% of body weight per day) and projected growth of the 1992 year-class indicate that the average weight per turtle will be near 640 grams by 18 May 1993, the proposed release date. As in past years, no turtle weighing less that 454 grams will be released. It is expected that few, if any, of the surviving turtles of the 1992 year-class will be less than 454 grams on the proposed release date.

PROPOSED TIME SCHEDULE AND STAFF FOR THE RELEASE

RELEASE

Date: 18 May 1993

Release Site: Gulf of Mexico, 20-25 nm offshore between San Luis Pass and Freeport, Texas.

Release Schedule:

12:00 midnight	release crew begins packing turtles
2:00 a.m.	trucks depart laboratory for the dock
2:30 a.m.	turtles offloaded onto ARCO-provided release vessel docked at the Haliburton facility on Pelican Island, Texas
4:00 a.m.	release vessel departs dock
3:00 p.m.	release vessel returns to dock (actual time depends upon weather and sea conditions offshore)
3:00-3:30 p.m.	release crew unloads and cleans vessel
4:00 p.m.	release crew departs dock for laboratory

Packing Crew:

C. T. Fontaine, Field Party Chief
T. D. Williams
Billy Ross
Bob McElyea
John Boyd
Mark Adame
Will Vanoy
Chad Fallin
Dickie Revera
Joe Flanagan, D.V.M. - Houston Zoo

Richard Henderson, D.V.M. - Galveston

Release Crew:

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T. D. Williams

Billy Ross

Bob McElyea

John Boyd

Mark Adame

Will Vanoy

Chad Fallin

Joe Flanagan, D.V.M. - Houston Zoo

Others (TBA, see Appendices A & B):

HEART

NMFS Enforcement Division

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries

U. S. Coast Guard

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Park Service

Texas A&M University

University of Texas

Aquarium of the Americas

Pan American University

Texas Shrimp Association

Louisiana Shrimp Association

University of Houston

Concerned Shrimpers of America

The Pride of Texas Conservation Foundation

Environmental Protection Agency

Gulf Coast Conservation Association

Houston Audubon Society

Sierra Club

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

News media (newspapers, television, radio)

Others (TBA)

Method of Release:

Distance from shore and depth, speed, and direction used for the release will be discussed and coordinated by the Field Party Chief with the Captain of the release vessel prior to the release date. The Field Party Chief will request a release transect heading parallel to the shoreline about 20-25 nm from shore. Individual turtles will be released sporadically along this transect. Releasing turtles in groups will be avoided to spread the risk of loss due to predation over a wider area. LORAN readings will be recorded at the beginning and end of the release

transect, and all pertinent environmental conditions such as sea condition, sea surface temperature and salinity, and wind direction and speed likewise will be recorded.

BEACH MONITORING AFTER RELEASE

Beach monitoring for strandings of released turtles will be coordinated and carried out by participants in the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network (STSSN).

TRANSPORTATION

Ground: Government vehicles as needed.

Sea: ARCO-provided vessel (TBA)

CONTINGENCY PLANS

If unanticipated conditions develop with the ARCO-provided vessel at the time of the release, prior arrangements will have been made by the Field Party Chief with the U. S. Coast Guard to release the turtles from a cutter based at Fort Point, Galveston, TX. Since the release will be made from the Port of Galveston, inclement weather can easily be accommodated by rescheduling the release.

COORDINATION

Charles Caillouet will coordinate the release with Tim Fontaine's and Ted Williams' assistance. Clark Fontaine will be the NMFS Field Party Chief for the sea turtle release. Necessary contacts will be made by mail and by telephone during March-April, and telephone follow-up will take place in May.

CRUISE REPORT

A cruise report covering the release will be prepared by C. T. Fontaine, T. D. Williams and C. W. Caillouet, Jr. and distributed within 60 days following the release. It will contain a description of the release, tag code series for each type of tag, a summary of sizes and numbers of turtles released, by species, and details concerning time, location and environmental conditions of the release.

APPENDIX A

ADDRESSES OF PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE RELEASE OF THE 1992 YEAR-CLASS OF HEAD STARTED KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLES, *Lepidochelys kempii*

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APPENDIX B
COPY OF FORM LETTER TO BE SENT TO RELEASE INVITEES

April 19, 1993

_____
_____
_____
_____

Dear _____:

The release of the 1992 year-class of head started Kemp's ridley sea turtles is tentatively scheduled for 18 May 1993. It will take place in the Gulf of Mexico, 20-25 nm offshore between San Luis Pass and Freeport, TX. ARCO Oil and Gas Company will provide the M/V "_____" for the release and will supply snacks, drinks and sandwiches on the boat for all guests.

Due to U.S. Coast Guard regulations, the "_____" can only accommodate 36 visitors, in addition to the NMFS and ARCO crews, on the trip. Participation will be on a first come-first served basis until all vacancies are filled.

Should you have an interest in going on this release trip, please let me know as soon as possible. You may make reservations by mail or you may call me at (409)-766-3525 or 766-3500. Please make address corrections, if necessary, and provide telephone number(s) where you may be reached.

Tentatively, we plan to leave the dock at 4:00 a.m. on 18 May and should return no later than 5:00 p.m.; however, the return time will depend upon the weather and sea conditions. Those of you having reservations will be contacted by 30 April 1993 to confirm reservations and dock departure times.

All participants are advised to consider using motion sickness medication, and to wear appropriate clothing for an offshore boat trip.

Sincerely,

Clark T. Fontaine
Research Fishery Biologist
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle
Head Start Operations Manager
and NMFS Field Party Chief