

# Green sea turtle still at risk, say wildlife agencies

By Audrey McAvoy  
Associated Press

Hawaii's green sea turtle should continue to be classified as threatened because its population is small and nearly all of them nest at the same low-lying atoll, federal wildlife agencies said Friday.

The Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs petitioned the government in 2012 to study whether Hawaii's green sea turtles might have recovered to the point where they no longer need Endangered Species Act protections.

But Patrick Opay, the endangered species branch chief of NOAA's Fisheries Pacific Islands Regional Office, said Hawaii has fewer than 4,000 nesting green sea turtles, and 96 percent of them nest at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

This makes them vulnerable to outbreaks of disease, rising sea levels and other

threats, Opay said. "You have all of your eggs in one basket, so to speak," he said.

Green sea turtles nest on beaches and feed in the ocean, eating mostly sea grass and algae. Adult females return to the same beaches where they were born every two to four years to lay eggs, sometimes migrating hundreds or thousands of miles.

The Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs said delisting Hawaii's turtles would return management of the animals to the state and allow more people in the islands to take active roles in taking care of them.

The association cited 2007 data showing Hawaii's population of green sea turtles had been growing at an annual rate of 5.7 percent for three decades. The latest review showed a 4.8 percent annual growth rate.

Opay said the growth is positive but that the concern

## HAWAII'S GREEN SEA TURTLES REMAIN THREATENED, FEDS SAY

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Hawaii's green sea turtles remain at risk because their population is small and nearly all of them nest at the same low-lying atoll at French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, federal wildlife agencies say.

tration of the nesting area remains a problem.

Association representatives didn't immediately respond to email messages seeking comment.

NOAA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service studied green sea turtle populations around the world as part of the review. The research

suggested them to propose

designating 11 distinct populations of the animals, including one in Hawaii. They found separate populations of turtles in Florida and Mexico have recovered to the point that they proposed categorizing them as threatened instead of endangered.

The agencies will be accepting public comment on their proposals for the next three months. They are scheduled to host a public hearing in Honolulu on April 8.

But the agencies believe turtles in American Samoa

and the Northern Mariana Islands, which were considered threatened before, should now be classified as endangered.

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