

WASHINGTON

POST 9/28/87

A-12

## Dynamiting Turtles—to Save Them

Those persons at the National Marine Fisheries Service who have recently concocted the deplorable and gruesome plan to "test" the effects of underwater dynamiting of oil rigs on marine life by subjecting caged turtles to an explosion should be fired for dereliction of duty. Apparently, the people supposed to protect our wildlife are instead dreaming up grisly schemes to slaughter it.

From the Sept. 18 news story, I gather that there is no question that most of the creatures will be killed or grievously injured. The agency proposes then to autopsy the blast victims to see what killed them. I telephoned the agency and was told by a spokesman that the purpose of the "research" was to determine the impact of a blast on sea turtles. Surely there exists scientific equipment that could monitor the force of the shock waves at given distances without the carnage that will result from the proposed plan. The spokesman mentioned that oil

companies are currently required to ensure that no sea turtles are within 1,000 feet of a blast. According to The Post, the proposed tests would subject turtles to blasts at one-fifth that distance.

If dynamiting an endangered species in order to save it is a representative example of the way this particular branch of the Department of Commerce sees fit to operate, I would like to suggest a way of cutting the federal budget: disband the entire agency. We and the turtles will be much better off without it.

DOROTHEA S. ORMOND  
Washington



WASH. D.C.

# Live sea turtles in blast test

## Plan to suspend animals in underwater cages draws protests

Washington Post

The National Marine Fisheries Service is seeking a permit to suspend 48 loggerhead sea turtles, a threatened species under federal law, in cages near an offshore oil platform that is to be blown up.

The object is to see how such underwater blasts affect sea turtles, according to a scientist involved in planning the experiment. The plan has drawn strong protests from conservation groups, who contend that the project makes a mockery of laws to protect endangered species.

"We feel this is a mistake," said Carol Allen, director of a Houston conservation group called HEART, which has spearheaded efforts to protect sea turtles along the Gulf Coast. "One loggerhead already has been killed (in an experiment) to establish the lethal zone, and we object to repeating it."

Ed Klima, director of the fisheries service laboratory in Galveston, Texas, said the experiment is aimed at improving protection for sea turtles by refining federal guidelines that oil companies must follow when removing offshore platforms.

"We have no intention of killing sea turtles at all," he said. "We will just see if there is any impact to their physiology and stamina for swimming."

Klima said the loggerheads would be placed in cages about 500 yards from the platform, well outside the 200-yard range that scientists believe is the lethal area. Red-ear turtles, a freshwater species that is not endangered, will be placed closer, some strapped in cages with their bellies toward the blast.

After the detonation, the turtles will be retrieved and the dead ones autopsied. Live animals will be checked for injury and tested to measure physiological changes, such as alterations in blood chemistry or navigational ability.

Klima said the experiment, financed by the Interior Department's Minerals Management Service, will provide useful data for the dismantling of offshore oil platforms.

The platforms typically are loosened by explosives, then lifted with cranes and taken ashore to be dismantled. In recent years, however, scientists have accumulated evidence that the explosions coincided with high rates of turtle and dolphin beachings.

Conservation groups contend that the government already has sufficient evidence that the explosions are affecting sea creatures, and should be researching alternative methods of dismantling the platforms or ways to shoo sea creatures away before setting off explosives.

"Once you start granting this kind of permit, it goes on forever," said Lynn Davidson of Greenpeace. "You have to test different kinds of explosives, at different depths, with different kinds of ocean floors. And then what? Do you start putting dolphins in cages, or manatees?"

Allen said that experiments in using low-frequency sound waves to repel sea creatures have proved promising in Florida, and Davidson said that laser technology could be explored as a way of removing drilling platforms without explosives.