

Organizations Nationwide Support the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act

The undersigned 46 institutions from 24 states and territories encourage Congress to strengthen investment in sea turtle stranding response and rehabilitation and urge support of the bipartisan Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act of 2022. (H.R. 7918/S. 4432).

The Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act will create a grant program administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to provide direct support to institutions and organizations around the country that rescue and rehabilitate threatened and endangered sea turtles. Grant funding will also support additional data collection necessary for ongoing sea turtle conservation research.

Organizations that make up the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network are facing increasing demands to respond to and care for federally protected sea turtles as a result of a variety of anthropogenic threats including fishing gear and other plastic debris entanglements, boat strikes, and climate driven cold-stun events. Although maintaining the stranding network is part of every sea turtle recovery plan, there is woefully inadequate funding to support this work. Most institutions voluntarily help fulfill federal mandates, and currently operate with little to no direct federal support. In contrast, many of the same institutions also participate in marine mammal stranding networks and are eligible for direct support via NOAA's Prescott Grant Program, which provides funds that help support eligible stranding network participants to respond to and care for federally protected marine mammal species.

The level of voluntary contribution to federal efforts to protect animals covered by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is not sustainable. Sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation facilities are committed to continuing to provide expert care to save sea turtles, but these organizations need to be able to access public support for the important role they play. It is time to invest in a solution that helps maintain the stranding network and data its institutions contribute to sea turtle recovery and conservation.

This new grant program will result in a clearer understanding of the impact of stranding response and rehabilitation on species survivability, and enhance data being collected by institutions, while ensuring support for the institutions that voluntarily commit significant financial resources in support of NOAA's stewardship responsibilities.

We urge Congress to act and pass the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act.

Sincerely,

ABQ BioPark
Allied Whale, College of the Atlantic
Association of Zoos and Aquariums
Atlantic Marine Conservation Society
Audubon Nature Institute

Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island
Conservation Council For Hawaii
Georgia Aquarium
Georgia Sea Turtle Center / Jekyll Island Authority
Georgia Wildlife Federation
Houston Zoo
Jenkinson's Aquarium
Kansas City Zoo
Louisiana Wildlife Federation
Marine Education, Research & Rehabilitation Institute, Inc. (MERR)
Marine Mammal Alliance Nantucket
Mass Audubon
Maui Ocean Center Marine Institute
Monterey Bay Aquarium
Mystic Aquarium
National Aquarium
National Marine Life Center
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
New England Aquarium
New York Marine Rescue Center
North Carolina Aquariums
North Carolina Wildlife Federation
Sea Turtle Recovery, Inc.
Seattle Aquarium
Seatuck Environmental Association
SeaWorld Parks
Shedd Aquarium
Sociedad Ornitologica Puertorriquena Inc
South Carolina Aquarium
South Carolina Wildlife Federation
Sunset Zoo
Surfrider Foundation
Texas Conservation Alliance
Texas State Aquarium
The Florida Aquarium
Virgin Islands Conservation Society
Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center
Whitney Lab for Marine Bioscience, University of Florida
Wildlife Restoration Foundation