

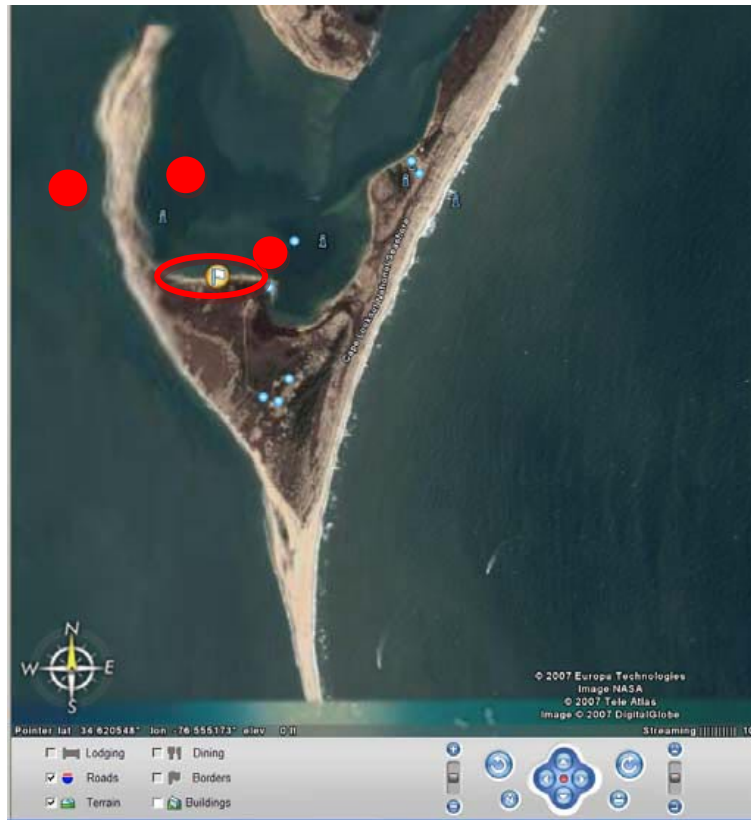
Green turtle mass stranding event on 07 January 2008, Cape Lookout Bight, North Carolina

NCWRC biologists received 2 reports from members of the public via phone and email late on 7 January, 2008 of multiple dead sea turtles washing up on Cape Lookout National Seashore. The email report specified that 33 turtles had been counted near the Coast Guard dock on the soundside shoreline of South Core Banks, in Cape Lookout Bight. On the morning of 8 January, Wendy Cluse (NCWRC) and Jon Altman (NPS) patrolled the area and recorded 36 green sea turtles and 2 loggerhead turtles between N34.61336 W76.53911 and N34.61431 W76.54955 (approx. 0.6 miles, see map). The green turtles ranged in size from 21.3-33.6 cm straight carapace length. The majority were classified as fresh dead and some were moderately/severely decomposed (see table below). One green turtle was still alive and was transported to the mainland to be treated for lethargy and dehydration. The loggerheads measured 55.2 cm SCL and 53.9 cm SCL; both were fresh dead. The majority of the turtles appeared to have no wounds, and their overall body condition appeared healthy. Seven of the turtles (all greens) had cuts and/or entanglement marks to the flippers and neck (see photos below). Due to time constraints, only 2 turtles (one green and one loggerhead) were necropsied on 8 January. Wendy Cluse (NCWRC), Matthew Godfrey (NCWRC) and Lisa Goshe (NOAA Fisheries) returned on 10 January to conduct further necropsies. All appeared to be healthy with good fat and muscle loads, and most were female (see table below). The green turtles had vegetative matter in their stomachs and/or GI tracts. All carcasses were painted red and left on the beach. It was also noted that some of the carcasses had been dragged up the beach and into the vegetation by foxes or raccoons between 8 and 10 January.

The last patrol of this area conducted by the Park Service prior to this event was mid-December 2007. However, Keith Rittmaster of the NC Maritime Museum visited the area in the late morning of 06 January, which is the day before the strandings reports were submitted by the public. He described seeing gillnets in the water both off the western beach of Cape Lookout (ocean side) and on the south side of Cape Lookout Bight (inshore side), just off the beach where the strandings were later observed. However, on 06 January he observed no stranded turtles during his visual inspection (using binoculars) of the offshore and inshore beaches. Of the gillnets, he suggested that some boats appeared to be recreational and some appeared to be commercial. At the time of his visit to the Bight, he did not see any boats attending gillnets within the Bight, while there were boats attending gillnets off of the western beach. He was able to photograph some of the boats and nets off the western beach of Cape Lookout (see below). He also reported some pink and some yellow buoys associated with the nets, but he was unsure which buoys were attached to specific nets.

Given this information, and given the marks and cuts on some of the carcasses, it seems likely that some of the stranded turtles had interacted with gillnets in the Bight on 06 January.

Species	Conditions	Size (cm)	Sex	Injuries
2 loggerheads	2 fresh dead	55.2, 53.9	2 female	None noted
36 greens	28 fresh dead 5 moderately decomposed 1 severely decomposed 1 dried carcass 1 live	Range: 21.3 - 33.6	13 female 4 male	7 had cuts and/or signs of entanglement



Above: Map of Cape Lookout and Cape Lookout Bight. Red oval indicates where stranded turtles were observed. Red dots indicate locations of gillnets.

Below: Four photos from Keith Rittmaster, NC Maritime Museum, of fishing boats (some gillnets, some hook and line) near the rock jetty off the western beach of Cape Lookout:





Photos of cuts/entanglement marks on green turtles:

CM-JMA-080107-06 gash on neck:



CM-JMA-080107-07 entanglement marks to right flippers:



CM-JMA-080107-13 entanglement marks to neck:



CM-JMA-080107-17 possible net mark on neck:



CM-JMA-080107-18 wound on right rear flipper:



CM-JMA-080107-29 marks on neck and front flippers:

