

NOAA FISHERIES

About

To help reduce inadvertent interactions between the longline fishing vessels and loggerhead sea turtles, the NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center developed TurtleWatch. This online map provides up-to-date information about the thermal habitat, or areas where loggerhead sea turtles are likely to be found based on water temperature, in the Pacific Ocean north of the Hawaiian Islands.

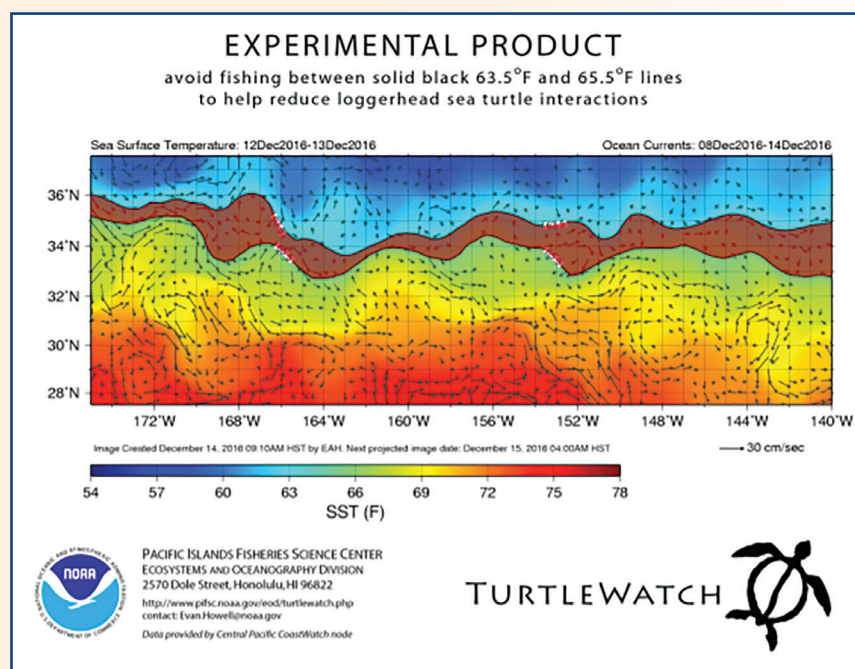
Maps are regularly updated as new temperature data becomes available and shared on the OceanWatch Central Pacific website and also emailed to vessel owners and resource managers (Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, Pacific Islands Regional Office, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, Fish Auction) who have requested it.

With this information, fishermen are able to make decisions on where to deploy their fishing gear to reduce their risk of interacting with sea turtles.



Sea turtle hatchlings. NOAA Fisheries.

Reducing Sea Turtle Interactions through TurtleWatch



What Worked

- Having 100 percent of the Hawai'i shallow set longline fishery observed has ensured accurate documentation of interactions.
- Collaborative management led to improved uses of TurtleWatch (e.g., it has been incorporated into the Pacific Islands Regional Office protected species workshops).

What Didn't Work

- TurtleWatch is an informational product that is not mandated; this has resulted in fishermen rarely using the tool.
- The fleet did see a shift in behavior to try to catch as many fish as possible prior to the cap being reached. Vessels are still unlikely to use the tool unless they are close to hitting the individual vessel cap.

Benefits

TurtleWatch is a visual tool that can:

- be used by commercial longliners to reduce their risk of interacting with loggerhead sea turtles;
- minimize bycatch and the potential for fishery closures; and
- be easily replicated in other regions.