

# Bush Whacked!

## A Critical Look at Governor Bush's Recent PR Letter on Why He Won't Create the Kemp's Ridley Marine Reserve

In the letter below, George W. Bush continues to show that he has no interest in saving Texas sea turtles. Here's the real scoop on how he twists science to excuse his appalling record on protecting endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles and to sidestep international calls to create a marine reserve along Padre Island.



STATE OF TEXAS  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
August 16, 1999

GEORGE W. BUSH  
GOVERNOR

Mr. Todd Steiner  
Sea Turtle Restoration Project  
Post Office Box 400  
Forest Knolls, CA 94933

Dear Mr. Steiner:

Thank you for your letter about protecting Kemp's Ridley sea turtles in Texas. I appreciate your concern for these endangered animals and am proud of our efforts to protect them.

Nesting populations for the sea turtles have increased 50 percent since 1997 and are expected to continue growing by 14 percent each year, thanks to local, state, federal and international efforts. Because of these positive indications of the turtles' renewed health in the Gulf Coast, I will not call for the creation of a marine reserve off Padre Island at this time but will continue to monitor the sea turtles' recovery.

Since the 1980s, Texas and the United States have closed waters (up to 200 miles off Padre Island) to shrimping from mid-May to Mid-July, which is the sea turtles' peak nesting period, and nesting on Padre Island is increasing. But although Padre Island is home to more and more sea turtles' nests, more than 99 percent of all nesting still occurs in Mexico, near the Kemp's Ridleys' historic nesting beaches in Rancho Nuevo.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is working with federal officials to enforce the requirements that all shrimp nets be equipped with turtle excluder devices (TEDs), and Texas' game wardens have joined federal officials in patrolling federal waters and enforcing the TED requirement. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department also has created "Operation Game Thief," which offers a \$2,500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person who illegally takes or mutilates a sea turtle.

Our parks and wildlife are treasures that must be conserved for everyone to enjoy. I appreciate your letting me know your views on this issue.

Sincerely,

  
GEORGE W. BUSH

GWB/smg Post Office Box 12428 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711 (512) 463-2000 (Voice)/(512) 475-3165 (TDD)

Wrong number. Endangered Kemp's ridley populations have not increased by 50%. Bush is counting NESTS, not sea turtle population. Each female lays up to three nests per year, and not every year! Less than 2,000 annual nesters remain of a population that once numbered at least 40,000 nesters in a single day; and must reach 10,000 nesters in one year (or about 25,000 nests per year) before the species is considered for downlisting from Endangered to Threatened.

In 1999, a record number of Kemp's ridley nests were laid in South Texas—laid by first-time nesters, tagged sea turtles from Mexico and returnees from the headstarting program at Padre Island. The nesting sea turtles of Mexico routinely migrate and forage along Padre Island. Is Bush saying it doesn't matter if these Mexican sea turtles die in U. S. waters? And that headstarted sea turtles should not be protected as they return home?

Last year, after a Kemp's ridley washed up dead with a gear chain wrapped around its flipper, a \$35,000 reward was offered. And no one stepped forward with information. These rewards do not protect sea turtles, but a marine reserve will.

Kemp's ridleys number are slowly increasing, but future growth is unpredictable. Kemp's ridleys remain highly vulnerable to extinction in Mexico and the U. S. and need the protection of a marine reserve to enhance recovery.

Wrong again. This year 71% of Kemp's ridley nests in Texas were laid BEFORE the shrimp closure. There would have been more nests if so many adult turtles had not drowned in shrimp nets during March and April.

Though we applaud this effort, why has Gov. Bush taken 5 years to take this action? More importantly, increased enforcement has not stopped strandings and is a temporary effort. A permanent solution is needed to end the crisis in Texas... A Kemp's Ridley Marine Reserve.

National "treasures" need protection, not neglect and buck-passing. Don't let the words of a "compassionate conservative" get in the way of the truth.