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**NOAA FISHERIES PROTECTS SEA TURTLES IN THE CHESAPEAKE BY  
PROHIBITING POUND NET DEVICES THROUGH JUNE 30**

A new rule effective June 12 prohibits the use of certain types of leaders in the pound net fishery in the Virginia Chesapeake Bay, announced the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The prohibition is necessary to protect endangered and threatened sea turtles, which can become entangled in the leaders and drown. The new rule is effective through June 30, though NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) may extend the prohibition for as much as 30 days if necessary.

Under the new rule, leaders with mesh 12 inches or larger are prohibited in the Virginia waters of the mainstem Chesapeake Bay and portions of the Virginia tributaries through June 30, and from May 8 to June 30 in subsequent years. Leaders with stringers (vertical lines) also are prohibited. The rule will be published in the Federal Register on June 17 as an interim final rule, and NOAA Fisheries is accepting comments until 5 p.m. eastern time on July 17, 2002.

The rule also will require Virginia pound net fishermen to report any interactions with sea turtles and to allow observers to monitor fishing operations, if requested by NOAA Fisheries.

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The new rule affects approximately 11 fishermen who fish for bait fish, croaker, menhaden, mackerel and other fish species at 24 pound net sites. These fishermen may continue to use pound net leaders as long as the leaders have a mesh smaller than 12 inches and do not have stringers.

All sea turtles in U.S. waters are classified as either threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Several species migrate north along the mid-Atlantic coast and into the Chesapeake in the spring. Between 1995 and 2001, 958 loggerheads, 59 Kemp ridleys, 17 leatherbacks, one green turtle and 32 unidentified turtles were found dead on Virginia beaches in May and June.

This year, turtles have been observed entangled in leaders with stringers and in large mesh leaders. As of June first, approximately 87 turtles have been found dead either on Virginia beaches and about a dozen of these were entangled in pound net leaders.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement, and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

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