A few weeks ago, I mentioned that the Fish and Wildlife Service planned to collect eggs from sea turtle nests on the Gulf coast to move them to the east coast of Florida. Well, the plan is in process. All known sea turtle nests in Alabama and the panhandle of Florida are being marked, and when the eggs are sufficiently mature they are being removed, packed in replicas of the nests constructed in Styrofoam boxes, and transported by FedEx to incubation facilities at the Kennedy Space Center.

Some hatchlings have now emerged and been released into the Atlantic. But it remains unclear whether the moved hatchlings will know where to go. Scientists are concerned that turtles from different nesting sites may be genetically, rather than environmentally, programmed to follow specific migratory paths. Some have argued that the hatchlings should be released into the water in the Gulf Stream current, rather than on eastern Florida sand. But FWS responds that a water release would be at least as "unnatural" as release on a beach distant from the nest. And the agency strongly believes that emergency action is warranted. From an FWS FAQ on the relocation plan:

> The plan is not without risks. While these risks may not be supportable under normal conditions, the current situation in the Gulf of Mexico requires that we take extraordinary measures and associated risks to prevent the possible loss of the entire 2010 cohort of hatchlings produced on northern Gulf beaches.
>
> The protocols were developed with careful consideration and examination of all relevant scientific information, consultation with experts, and balanced with the logistical requirements of collecting and translocating some 700-800 nests from the northern Gulf to the Atlantic. They involve significant manipulation of eggs and hatchlings and are accompanied by definite, but unquantifiable risks.

And for you ESA afficionados, yes there was a (brief) emergency Section 7 consultation on the relocation, resulting in the regional FWS office concurring

> that this action is necessary to prevent the imminent loss of the

> approximately 700 nests laid annually in the Florida Panhandle and up to 80 nests laid annually in Alabama, or some 50,000 hatchlings.

Full Section 7 consultation is promised “following completion of the emergency,” although its hard to see how much good it could do the turtles at that point.