



**Southwest Program Office**

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[www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org)

July 6, 2021

Shawn Bengé, Acting Director,  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW,  
Washington, DC 20240  
(via email: [shawn.benge@nps.gov](mailto:shawn.benge@nps.gov))

Re: Funding the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program at Padre Island National Seashore

Dear Acting Director Bengé,

In the fall of 2020, several non-profit conservation groups formally expressed concern about the Department of the Interior's (DOI) "Review of the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program, Padre Island National Seashore" approved by Michael T. Reynolds, June 8, 2020. Likewise, Defenders of Wildlife delivered a letter and petition on August 31, 2020 to Secretary David Bernhardt calling on him to continue fully funding and strengthen the Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program (see attached).

The Biden Administration is continuing to implement the misguided program changes suggested under the previous Administration for the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program. Among several actions that weaken the sea turtle program, the National Park Service under the Trump administration cut the Sea Turtle Recovery and Protection Program at PAIS by 30%. The changes also weaken the incredible advances in sea turtle protection, science, and outreach achieved by the Division director, Dr. Donna Shaver.

Five of the six federally listed endangered sea turtles nest along the Texas coast. Kemp's ridley sea turtles, one of the most endangered sea turtle species in the world, nest on Padre Island's beaches. Endangered green and loggerhead sea turtles also nest on the state's coast. For decades, Dr. Donna Shaver, head of the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Division, has led extraordinary work to protect these species. Nightly patrols, nest management, public outreach and research have made a powerful difference in advancing sea turtle recovery. As threats to sea turtles continue, sea turtle protection activities should be supported rather than cut back.

The Program promotes community science through its volunteer program and collaborates with numerous organizations to protect nesting female sea turtles and their nests and ensure the hatchlings make it to sea each season. PAIS also collaborates with sea turtle protection programs in Mexico. In addition, the Program provides vital research findings that foster greater international understanding and management of the species.

Many of the recommendations included in the 2020 review do not take into consideration the specific needs a sea turtle protection program has on the Texas coast, especially regarding nest

monitoring, incubation, and relocation. For example, Texas law allows vehicles on beaches throughout the year, and Dr. Shaver has been successful in adapting sea turtle protection to this reality.

We renew our request that the DOI halt dismantling and fully fund the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program at the Padre Island National Seashore. We also request an open revision of the 2020 review recommendations before any further implementation. For decades, Texas citizens have depended on the remarkable work carried out to protect endangered sea turtles and expect it to continue for years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Sanchez-Navarro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Sanchez-Navarro  
Senior Representative, Texas  
[Psanchez-navarro@defenders.org](mailto:Psanchez-navarro@defenders.org)

Attachments:

2020 Petition supporting the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program