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To: PAIS_public_comments@nps.gov
cc:
Subject: Gas wells and sea turtles don't mix

12/21/2004 04:09 PM
CST
Please respond to
caimans

Dear Superintendent of the Padre Island National Seashore:

I hope you will do everything in your power to prevent the addition of five gas wells to the Padre Island National Seashore. While I have never visited, I know it is a special place: Kemp's ridley sea turtles nest there. And that is nearly a miracle.

About 20 years ago, I had a small windfall and was able to make a generous donation to a little grassroots conservation organization called HEART -- Help Endangered Animals / Ridley Turtles, founded by Carole Allen. At that time, for \$4 you could "adopt," that is pay for the support of, a ridley hatchling being headstarted by NMFS in "turtle houses" -- huge tents serving as a nursery for hundreds of baby ridleys. The eggs had been relocated from their natal beach in Mexico, artificially incubated and, when they hatched, the little turtles were raised to salad-plate size and released in the gulf or at Padre Island, where it was hoped they would imprint and return to nest. The effort was necessary to save this most endangered of sea turtle species. In Mexico, so many eggs had been taken for human consumption and so many nesting females had been slaughtered that where there once had been tens of thousands of turtles there were now only a few hundred. I sent in a check to HEART and said, "Take care of 100 of the little turtles for me." A year later, I had a chance to visit Galveston, meet Carole and tour the turtle houses. After that, I got more involved, long-distance from Chicago, and helped drum up interest and support for the ridley project here.

I think a lot of people, biologists and others, gave up on the headstarting program because it seemed like they were just pitching these little turtles into the sea or letting them scamper into the surf at Padre Island -- and then the turtles disappeared. But an amazing thing happened a few years ago. Female ridleys started coming ashore at Padre Island to nest. A pretty low-tech, volunteer-supported effort had paid off and a second ridley nesting beach was established -- in a place that was set aside and protected by the U.S. government. Thanks to tremendous efforts on both sides of the border, ridley numbers are increasing. They're still the most endangered species of sea turtles, but they've been pulled back from the edge of the abyss of extinction a little. That to me is nearly a miracle.

The proposed gas wells threaten all this. The trucks, noise and pollution of a major industrial development will be too much of a disturbance and the turtles will stay away. They don't know of another place to nest. The work of 20 years will be undone by the wells.

In addition, the wells will be a blight on a place set aside for people to enjoy wild nature and wildlife to find refuge. While I have never visited Padre Island, I am a frequent visitor to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, which is hemmed in by steel mills and other heavy industry. The dunes are beautiful, but you're almost always aware of the stacks of the mills not too far away.

Please do not allow five more wells to be built at the national seashore. This environment belongs to the sea turtles and other wildlife that use it -- and to every American citizen, thanks to the wisdom of Congress to set it aside for us.

Thank you,

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