

Calendar No. 118

119TH CONGRESS }
1st Session

SENATE

{ REPORT
119-41

SEA TURTLE RESCUE ASSISTANCE AND
REHABILITATION ACT OF 2025

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 843



JULY, 16 2025.—Ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

59-010

WASHINGTON : 2025

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

TED CRUZ, Texas, *Chairman*

JOHN THUNE, South Dakota	MARIA CANTWELL, Washington
ROGER F. WICKER, Mississippi	AMY KLOBUCHAR, Minnesota
DEB FISCHER, Nebraska	BRIAN SCHATZ, Hawaii
JERRY MORAN, Kansas	EDWARD J. MARKEY, Massachusetts
DAN SULLIVAN, Alaska	GARY C. PETERS, Michigan
MARSHA BLACKBURN, Tennessee	TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin
TODD YOUNG, Indiana	TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois
TED BUDD, North Carolina	JACKY ROSEN, Nevada
ERIC SCHMITT, Missouri	BEN RAY LUJAN, New Mexico
JOHN CURTIS, Utah	JOHN W. HICKENLOOPER, Colorado
BERNIE MORENO, Ohio	JOHN FETTERMAN, Pennsylvania
TIM SHEEHY, Montana	ANDY KIM, New Jersey
SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, West Virginia	LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER, Delaware
CYNTHIA M. LUMMIS, Wyoming	

BRAD GRANTZ, *Majority Staff Director*

LILA HARPER HELMS, *Democratic Staff Director*

Calendar No. 118

119TH CONGRESS } 1st Session }	SENATE	{ REPORT 119–41
-----------------------------------	--------	-----------------------

SEA TURTLE RESCUE ASSISTANCE AND REHABILITATION ACT OF 2025

JULY 16, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. CRUZ, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 843]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 843) to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.¹

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of S. 843, Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2025, is to integrate sea turtle rescue and response into an existing stranding program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

There are six species of sea turtles found in U.S. waters, all of which are listed and protected under the Endangered Species Act.² Sea turtles play an important role in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems and their protection is critical for the preservation of marine biodiversity. Specifically, sea turtles help control populations of jellyfish, maintain healthy seagrass beds, and contribute

¹At the markup, S. 843 was ordered to be reported without amendment, but post-markup, a technical amendment required the bill to be reported favorably with an amendment.

²“Sea Turtles,” NOAA Fisheries (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/sea-turtles>); Public Law 93–205.

to nutrient cycling in both ocean floor and beach ecosystems.³ Because they are a migratory species with a lifespan across decades, sea turtles are also considered an indicator of the overall health of the ocean and the impact of human activities.⁴ In addition to their ecological importance, sea turtles are a part of coastal communities' culture and traditions, and their presence can draw in tourists, generating both economic benefits and occasional safety issues for both humans and turtles.⁵

While most of their lives are spent at sea, sea turtles return to land to lay eggs and nest every year. Sea turtles face threats both on and off the land and are often harmed by bycatch,⁶ loss of nesting and foraging habitats, marine debris entanglement, and vessel strikes. In addition to bycatch, other factors such as red tide, viral disease, and cold stunning during the winter can lead to turtle strandings,⁷ both on land or in water when a sea turtle cannot function properly due to injury, illness, or some other problem.⁸ Six of the world's seven sea turtle species are found in U.S. waters: Kemp's ridley, green turtle, loggerhead, hawksbill, olive ridley, and leatherback. Three of these turtle species are found in Mississippi, including Kemp's ridley turtle, the world's most critically endangered sea turtle.⁹ In 2024, there were 916 sea turtle strandings in Massachusetts and 799 sea turtle strandings in Texas.¹⁰

NOAA established the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network in 1980 to respond to and document all stranding incidents in the United States.¹¹ This network includes other Federal and State agencies, academic institutions, and private organizations that respond to and document stranded sea turtles, transport them to rehabilitation facilities for care, perform necropsies of dead turtles, and collect other information to identify causes of stranding.

NOAA has an existing stranding grant program, the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Stranding Grant program, which for more than 20 years has provided funding response to stranded whales, dolphins, seals, and other marine mammals.¹²

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS

S. 843 would do the following:

- Require the Secretary of Commerce to work with the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop separate grant application criteria for the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant

³James R. Spotila, *Sea Turtles: A Complete Guide to Their Biology, Behavior, and Conservation*, JHU Press, 2004.

⁴"Why Sea Turtles Matter," National Park Service (<https://www.nps.gov/guis/learn/nature/sea-turtles-matter.htm>).

⁵"Turtles, Tourism, and Traffic—Keeping Hawai'i Honu Safe," NOAA Fisheries (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/turtles-tourism-and-traffic-keeping-hawaii-honu-safe>).

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷"Frequent Questions: Northern Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtle Strandings," NOAA Fisheries (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/marine-life-distress/frequent-questions-northern-gulf-mexico-sea-turtle-strandings>).

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹"Sea Turtle Strandings and Rehabilitation," Institute for Marine Mammal Studies (<https://imms.org/sea-turtle-rehabilitation/>).

¹⁰Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network Database," NOAA Fisheries (<https://connect.fisheries.noaa.gov/content/cb3f4647-9e4f-4f3d-9edf-e7a87a1feef6>).

¹¹"Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network," NOAA Fisheries (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/sea-turtle-stranding-and-salvage-network>).

¹²"John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program," NOAA (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/john-h-prescott-marine-mammal-rescue-assistance-grant-program>).

Program under the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue and Response Grant Program.

- Require the grant application to be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce and that all applicants must comply with existing law, standard conditions for sea turtle care, and the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network data collection requirements.
- Establish a new interest-bearing fund in the Treasury, the Sea Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Rapid Response Fund, for emergency assistance for sea turtles.
- Authorize appropriations with respect to Sea Turtle Rescue for the existing Joseph R. Geraci Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund and the new Sea Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Rapid Response Fund.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 843, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2025, was introduced on March 4, 2025, by Senator Markey (for himself and Senators Cornyn, Tillis, Graham, Van Hollen, and Booker) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On March 12, 2025, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 843 reported favorably without amendment. After the markup, the bill needed a technical fix, which required S. 843 to be reported favorably with an amendment.

H.R. 347, the House companion bill to S. 843, was introduced on January 13, 2025, by Representative Keating and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives. Fifteen Representatives were later added as cosponsors.

118th Congress

S. 2086, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2023, was introduced on June 21, 2023, by Senator Markey (for himself and Senators Cornyn, Van Hollen, Graham, Wicker, and Carper) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. Senator Tillis was later added as a cosponsor. On July 31, 2024, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 2086 reported favorably with an amendment (in the nature of a substitute).

H.R. 2560, the House companion bill to S. 2086, was introduced on April 10, 2023, by Representative Keating and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives. Twelve Representatives and one Resident Commissioner were later added as cosponsors. On October 26, 2023, that Committee met in open Executive Session and ordered H.R. 2560 reported, as amended, by unanimous consent. On April 11, 2024, the House passed H.R. 2560 under suspension of the rules by a vote of 332–80.

117th Congress

S. 4432, the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act of 2022, was introduced on June 16, 2022, by Senator Markey (for himself and Senator Cornyn) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. Senators Graham, Van Hollen, Booker, and Inhofe were later added as cosponsors.

H.R. 7918, a House companion bill to S. 4432, was introduced on May 31, 2022, by Representative Keating and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources of the House of Representatives. Representatives Jayapal, Lynch, DelBene, and Resident Commissioner González-Colón were later added as cosponsors. On December 8, 2022, that Committee met in open Executive Session and ordered H.R. 7918 reported, as amended, by unanimous consent.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

S. 843, Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2025			
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on March 12, 2025			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2025	2025-2030	2025-2035
Direct Spending (Outlays)	*	*	*
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	*	*	*
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	1	31	34
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	Yes
		Mandate Effects	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No
* = between zero and \$500,000.			

S. 843 would authorize the appropriation of \$5 million annually for fiscal years 2025 through 2030 for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for grants to rescue and rehabilitate stranded marine turtles. Those grants would support marine turtle rescue and recovery, data collection, research, and the operating costs for research and rehabilitation facilities. In 2024, NOAA allocated \$3 million for those activities.

S. 843 also would authorize the appropriation of \$500,000 annually for fiscal years 2025 through 2030 for each of two trust funds that are credited with interest on unspent balances. Under current law, the Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund is authorized to be appropriated \$500,000 annually through 2028. Therefore, CBO estimates the bill would authorize the appropriation of a total of \$4 million over the 2025–2030 period for the two funds.

The costs of the legislation, detailed in Table 1, fall within budget function 300 (natural resources and environment).

TABLE 1.—ESTIMATED BUDGETARY EFFECTS UNDER S. 843

	By fiscal year, millions of dollars—						
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2025– 2030
Sea Turtle Rescue Grants:							
Authorization	5	5	5	5	5	5	30
Estimated Outlays	2	5	6	5	5	5	28
Trust Funds ^a :							
Authorization	*	1	*	1	1	1	4
Estimated Outlays	*	*	1	*	1	1	3
Total Changes:							
Authorization	5	6	5	6	6	6	34
Estimated Outlays	2	5	7	5	6	6	31

* = between zero and \$500,000.

Enacting the bill also would increase direct spending by less than \$500,000 in every year and over the 2025–2035 period for the spending of interest credited to the trust funds.

^a S. 843 would authorize the appropriation of \$500,000 annually for fiscal years 2025 through 2030 for each of the two trust funds. Under current law, one fund is authorized to be appropriated \$500,000 annually through 2028.

CBO assumes that S. 843 will be enacted in fiscal year 2025 and that the authorized amounts will be available in each year. Using historical spending patterns, CBO estimates that implementing S. 843 would cost \$31 million over the 2025–2030 period and \$3 million after 2030, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts.

Enacting the bill would increase direct spending because any interest credited to the trust funds would be available without further appropriation. Based on the projection of interest rates that underlie CBO’s baseline, CBO estimates that the amount of interest credited to the funds and subsequently spent would be less than \$500,000 in every year and over the 2025–2035 period.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Johnny Willing and Aurora Swanson. The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

Because S. 843 does not create any new programs, the legislation will have no additional regulatory impact, and will result in no additional reporting requirements. The legislation will have no further effect on the number or types of individuals and businesses regulated, the economic impact of such regulation, the personal privacy of affected individuals, or the paperwork required from such individuals and businesses.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

In compliance with paragraph 4(b) of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides that no provisions contained in the bill, as reported, meet the definition of congressionally directed spending items under the rule.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

This section would provide that the bill may be cited as the “Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2025”.

Section 2. Sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response

This section would add an additional eligibility to the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue and Response Grant Program to fund the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program for sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response. Eligible entities and grant conditions would be consistent with equivalent criteria and requirements as under the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue and Response Grant Program. Grant participants would be required to comply with standard conditions for care of sea turtles and the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network data collection requirements.

This section would establish a parallel fund to the Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund, only for use to provide emergency assistance. It would authorize appropriations of \$5 million for each fiscal year from 2025 through 2030 for the purpose of sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response, within the Prescott Program. This section would also authorize appropriations of \$500,000 for the Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund and \$500,000 for the Sea Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Rapid Response Fund for each fiscal year from 2025 through 2030.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new material is printed in *italic*, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT OF 1972

* * * * *

[16 U.S.C. 1421f-1]

SEC. 408. MARINE MAMMAL RESCUE AND RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM AND RAPID RESPONSE FUND.

(a) * * *

(b) JOHN H. PRESCOTT MARINE MAMMAL RESCUE AND RESPONSE GRANT PROGRAM.—

(1) * * *

* * * * *

(9) * * *

(10) *SEA TURTLE RESCUE, REHABILITATION, AND RESPONSE.*—

(A) *IN GENERAL.*—*Subject to the availability of appropriations specific to address sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response, the Secretary of Commerce and the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service shall include separate eligibility for grants under this subsection to address the purposes described in paragraph (2) with respect to sea turtles.*

(B) *CONDITIONS OF GRANT.*—A grant awarded under this subsection to address sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response shall—

(i) include the equivalent grant criteria and administration authorities and requirements described under paragraph (3), subparagraphs (A) and (B) of paragraph (4), and paragraphs (5) through (9), developed, as appropriate, and awarded separately for sea turtles and in consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in lieu of the Marine Mammal Commission; and

(ii) in addition to the considerations under paragraph (4)(B), also consider rehabilitation of stranded sea turtles.

(C) *ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.*—In order to apply for a grant awarded under this subsection to address sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response, an entity shall—

(i) submit an application described in paragraph (5) to the Secretary of Commerce with respect to sea turtles;

(ii) be authorized by and in compliance with—

(I) an authorization issued under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1539(a)(1)(A)) with respect to sea turtles; or

(II) a cooperative agreement entered into under section 6 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1535) with respect to sea turtles;

(iii) comply with the standard conditions for care and maintenance of captive sea turtles prescribed by the Secretary of the Interior when relevant facilities will be utilized for such purposes; and

(iv) comply with all relevant data reporting, requirements, such as the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network data collection requirements.

* * * * *

[(c) Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue And Rapid Response Fund.—

[(1) *IN GENERAL.*—There is established in the Treasury of the United States an interest-bearing fund, to be known as the “Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund” (referred to in this section as the “Rapid Response Fund”).

[(2) *USE OF FUNDS.*—Amounts in the Rapid Response Fund shall be available only for use by the Secretary to provide emergency assistance.]

(c) *RESCUE AND RAPID RESPONSE FUNDS.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—There is established in the Treasury of the United States—

(A) an interest-bearing fund to be known as the “Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund”; and

(B) an interest-bearing fund to be known as the “Sea Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Rapid Response Fund”.

(2) *USE OF FUNDS.*—Amounts in the funds established under paragraph (1) shall be available only for use by the Secretary to provide emergency assistance.

(d) *AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—

(A) *AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.*—There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out the *marine mammal rescue and response* grant program \$7,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2023 through 2028, to remain available until expended, of which for each fiscal year—

(i) \$6,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of Commerce; and

(ii) \$1,000,000 shall be made available to the Secretary of the Interior.

(B) *AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS WITH RESPECT TO SEA TURTLE RESCUE, REHABILITATION, AND RESPONSE.*—There is authorized to be appropriated for the Secretary of Commerce to carry out the sea turtle rescue, rehabilitation, and response grant program under subsection (b)(10), \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2030, to remain available until expended.

[(B)] (C) *DERIVATION OF FUNDS.*—Funds to carry out the activities under this section shall be derived from amounts authorized to be appropriated pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (B) that are enacted after the date of enactment of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023.

[(2) *JOSEPH R. GERACI MARINE MAMMAL RESCUE AND RAPID RESPONSE FUND.*—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Rapid Response Fund \$500,000 for each of fiscal years 2023 through 2028.]

(2) *RESCUE AND RAPID RESPONSE FUNDS.*—There is authorized to be appropriated—

(A) to the Joseph R. Geraci Marine Mammal Rescue and Rapid Response Fund \$500,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2030; and

(B) to the Sea Turtle Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Rapid Response Fund \$500,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2030.

(e) * * *

(f) * * *

* * * * *