

# Officials concerned about sea turtle deaths in Gulf of Mexico

HOUSTON (AP) — Turtle deaths go largely unnoticed in Louisiana, conservationists in the state say.

In waters just across the Texas line, endangered turtles are washing ashore on marshy and muddy beaches in unusually high numbers this year, particularly the rare Kemp's ridgesea turtles, The Houston Chronicle reported today.

Louisiana is certainly a concern because of their lax enforcement," said David Costa, a research associate at the Institute of Marine Life Sciences at Texas A&M University in Houston. "When you see the numbers we're seeing, it's definitely alarming."

The turtle death rates in

Louisiana have caught the eye of federal authorities.

Andy Kemmerer, regional director of the National Marine Fisheries Service, said authorities are beginning to respond with tougher enforcement in western Louisiana waters.

Officials say that some shrimpers from the upper Texas coastline, near Port Arthur, have started working along western Louisiana, in part to avoid the rigid government enforcement campaign in Texas.

Launched Sept. 1, the campaign is the second crackdown this year and resulted after 42 endangered turtles washed up on beaches since Aug. 21, according to the Texas Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network.

In all, 456 sea turtles have died along the Texas coast this year, 243 of which are Kemp's ridgeseas, said Donna Shaver, state coordinator for the network. The previous Texas high was 355 in 1990.

In Louisiana, accurate reporting is hampered by the many remote inlets that can easily hide carcasses, and the fact that few volunteers are out looking for turtle bodies.

At least 126 sea turtles have died in 1994, said Bruce Koike, coordinator of the Louisiana Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network.

Koike could not say what the Louisiana record is since this is his first year to track turtle deaths.

## Woman pleads guilty to running prostitution ring, blames husband

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (AP) — A woman accused of operating a prostitution ring employing bikini-clad maids has pleaded guilty, blaming the scheme on her estranged husband.

Linda Hernandez, 23, pleaded guilty Wednesday to a felony charge of engaging in organized criminal activity.

At the hearing, she testified that her husband, Mark Williams, masterminded the business, handling the money and training female employees how to avoid police detection.

The couple were co-owners of Bikini Maids, which Ms. Hernandez said employed about 20 women.

In exchange for Ms. Hernandez's guilty plea and testimony against her husband, she was placed on five years' probation, fined \$1,000 and ordered to perform 200 hours of community service.

Before the plea bargain, she had faced a maximum 20 years in prison.

Assistant District Attorney Gail Sadoskas said Williams, who is scheduled to stand trial Oct. 10, has been offered a plea agreement for a two-year jail sentence.

Williams' attorney, Virginia Koblizek, confirmed that the possible deal was being discussed. "It may not be the only offer made," she said.

Williams has said he was unaware that his employees were being paid for sex until he conducted his own investigation by secretly videotaping his wife and another Bikini Maid employee having sex with a man.

## Bill proposes cataloging sex offenders' fingerprints

Authorities to use DNA to match fingerprints, blood samples

HOUSTON (AP) — DNA fingerprints of convicted sex offenders would be catalogued in a statewide registry for law enforcement under legislation proposed Thursday.

The bill being authored by state Rep. Brice McCall, R-Plano, samples of blood would be taken from convicted sex offenders upon their release from prison.

The Department of Public Safety then would be authorized to process the blood samples and enter them into a database. Like regular fingerprinting, authorities use DNA technology to match the unique makeup of a person's blood to a sample collected at a crime scene.

McCall said the program would cost \$1.4 million to start and \$700,000 a year to maintain.

He said the necessary funds could come from grants provided in the recent crime bill.

The sexual aggressor ... does two things. It's probable that he will commit his crime again and he leaves behind evidence at the scene of a crime that can absolutely connect him to the

crime," McCall said.

"Law enforcement all over the state has said give us the tools and we will finish the job."

Critics of DNA testing question whether a registry would be cost effective and whether it would infringe on a person's privacy.

Since last year, data from DNA registries in 12 states have led to the arrests of five people in murder and rape cases, according to John R. Brown, manager of the FBI's DNA Identification Index Program in Washington, D.C.

When asked if such results were cost-effective, Brown said, "I think you would need to talk to a victim of a sexual assault or the family of a victim who died as the result of a murder to determine that."

Patsy Day, of Victims Outreach in Dallas, said, "This is a very early stage of this game and we have to look at this as an investment."

Dr. C. Thomas Caskey, a DNA expert at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, said the registries are a new technology that must be given time to work. "I think you have to look at the project as one that will build efficiency," Caskey said.

Ken Williams, deputy chief of the Austin Police Department, said the technology has the potential to save the costs of officers investigating a case.

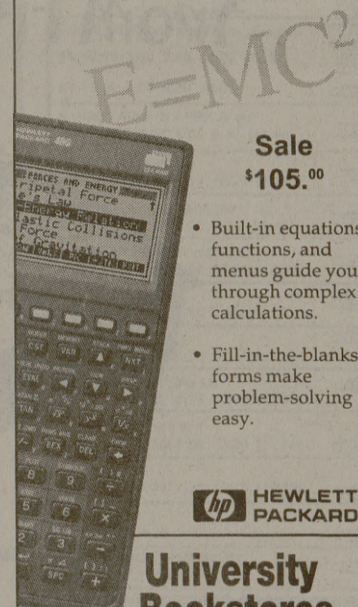
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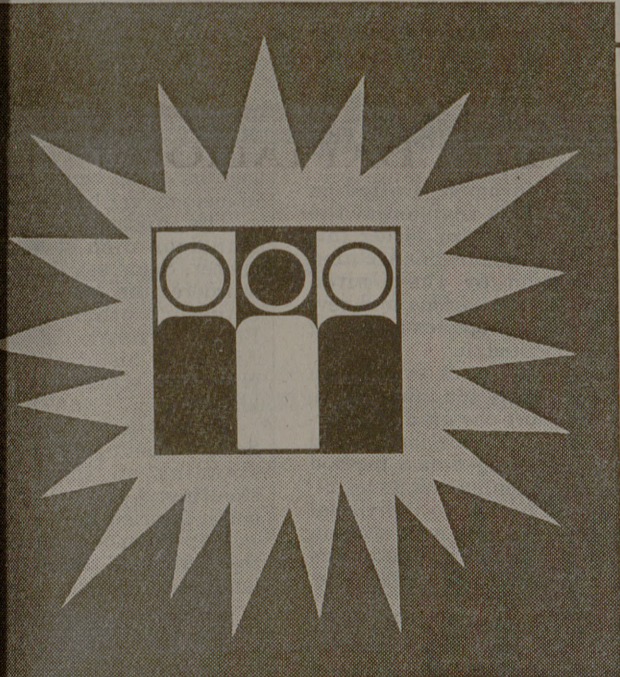
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