

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Padre Island National Seashore Sea Turtle Hatchling Releases

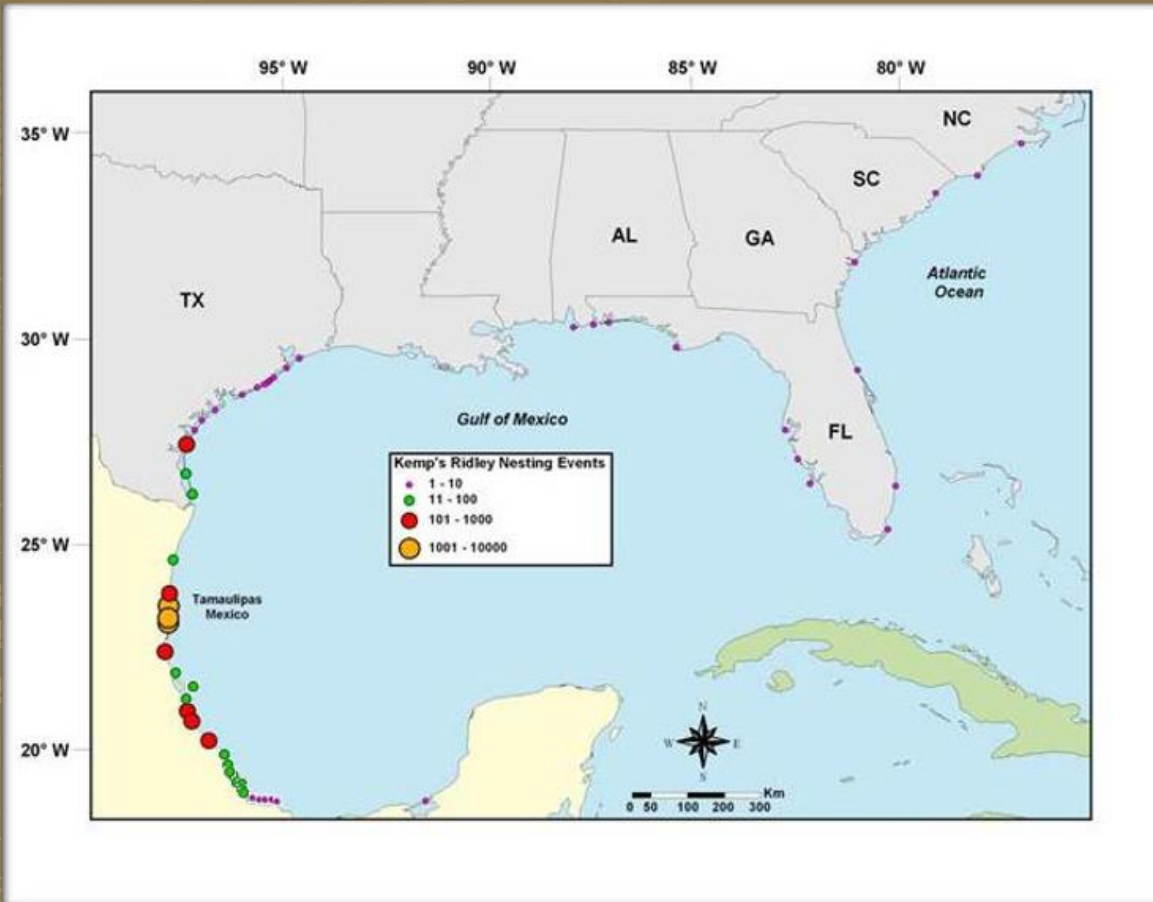
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Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS)



- Enabling Legislation 1962
- Protects longest undeveloped barrier island in US
- 5 ESA – listed sea turtles
 - Kemp's Ridley
 - Green
 - Hawksbill
 - Leatherback
 - Loggerhead

Kemp's ridley Sea Turtle Nesting Sites



- Primary nesting beach = Rancho Nuevo, Tamaulipas
 - 98.7% of nesting occurs in Mexico
- PAIS nesting was established as a secondary colony
 - Safeguard against political or environmental disaster
 - Test hatchling

Kemp's ridley Sea Turtles – Eggs

- Beach patrols identify nesting turtles
- After turtle lays eggs:
 - data about turtle is collected
 - eggs are excavated from the nest
 - transported to hatching facility or nesting corral



Kemp's ridley Sea Turtles - Eggs

- At hatching facility, eggs are incubated for 45-58 days
- Eggs from the hatching facility are what people see during public releases.
 - Thousands of hatchlings released without public events



Hatchling Releases

- Releases are free to attend
- Park entrance fee must be paid in accordance with Federal law:
 - Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (16 USC Ch.87)
 - Prior to 2021, not collecting fees was out of policy
 - Fee program audit in 2021 identified this deficiency and the park was mandated to correct it

Hatchling Releases

- Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act:
 - 80% of all fees collected stay in the park
 - 20% goes to parks that do not collect fees
 - PAIS funds generated by fees are used to accomplish maintenance projects that the park is unable to fund through annual Congressional allocations
 - Funds must be used to support projects to improve visitor experience
 - E.g., Trail and boardwalk maintenance, restroom improvements, campground improvements, boat ramp, utilities, buildings, etc.
- Fees cannot directly support specific programs

Hatchling Releases

- Prior to 2020, anywhere from 22 – 30 public hatchling releases were held between June and August.
 - One after another after another...
- After 2020, 7 or fewer releases were held between June and August.
 - Issue is repetition.
 - Staffing and volunteers cannot maintain the volume of public releases day-after-day.

Hatchling Releases

- Why the reduced number of releases?
 - Staffing limitations – every division in the park participates in hatchling release events
 - Some staff have to arrive as early as 4:00 am to prepare for hatchling releases
 - Park operations must continue for the remainder of the day after the event is over
 - Because most staff arrived early for the event, there are not enough staff to cover operations for the remainder of the day
 - Staff can not be forced to take overtime or comp time

Hatchling Releases

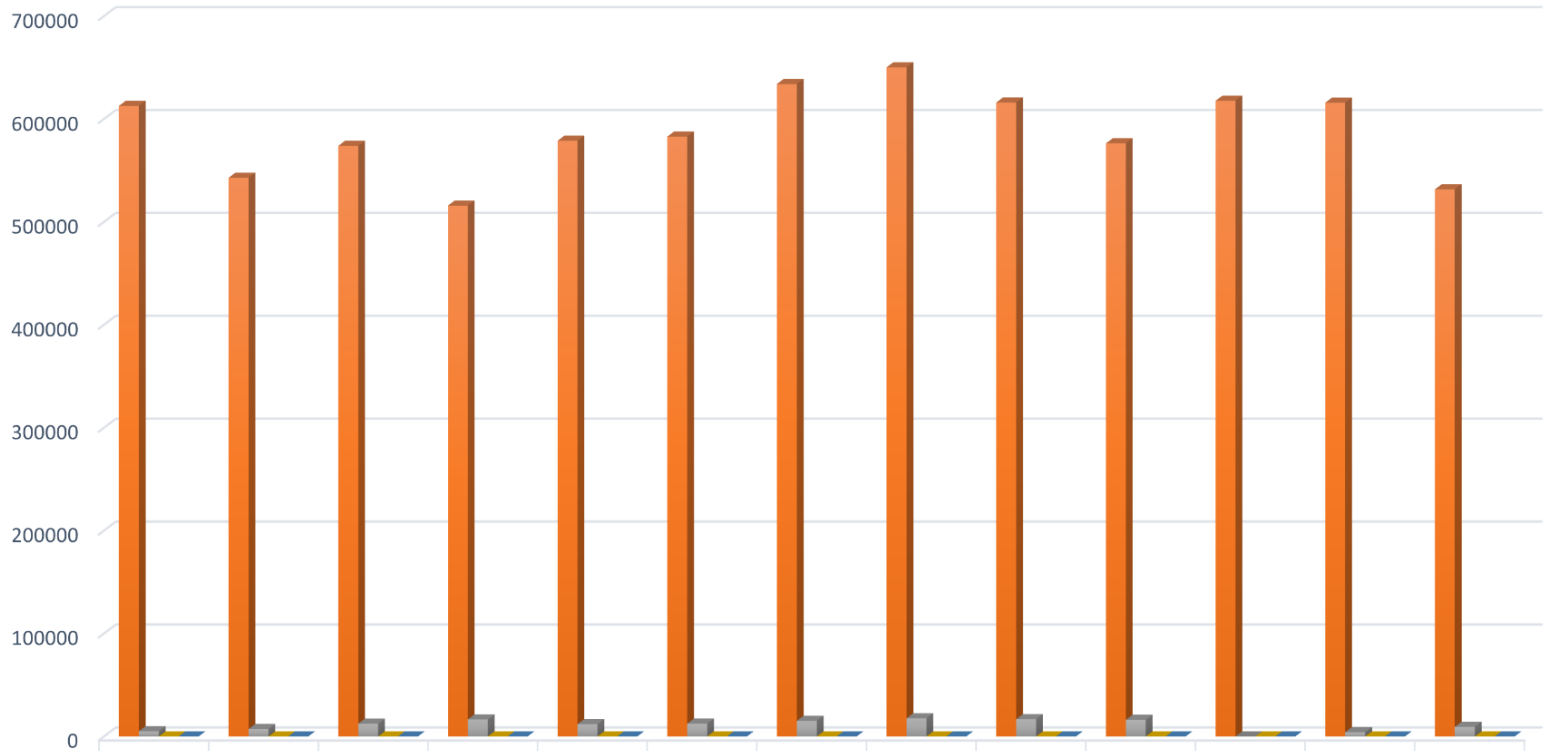
- Why the reduced number of releases?
 - **Morale** – it is a hardship on staff when they work a set schedule and then work repeatedly outside their normal schedule– 12 to 16 hours.
 - Staff who are caregivers to children or vulnerable adults have to find someone to take over their responsibilities so that they can be at work as early as 4 hours before their normally scheduled shifts
 - Special events place life, health, safety for the public on NPS.

Hatchling Releases

- Prior to 2020, anywhere from 22 – 30 public hatchling releases were held between June and August.
 - Anywhere from 5,100 to 17,600 attended each season.
- After 2020, 7 or fewer releases were held between June and August.
 - Anywhere from 4,100 to 9,200 attended each season
- Hatchling release visitation between 2010 and 2022 constitutes less than 3% of visitors to the national seashore.

Hatchling Releases

Overall National Seashore Visitation
and
Public Sea Turtle Hatchling Release Attendance



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Visitation	612716	542873	573855	515830	578815	582839	634012	650197	616033	576299	617704	615826	531624
# Attending Release	5103	7171	12375	16563	11912	12425	15163	17603	16760	16082	0	4132	9276
% Attending Release	0.83%	1.32%	2.16%	3.21%	2.06%	2.13%	2.39%	2.71%	2.72%	2.79%	0%	0.67%	1.74%
# Public Releases	23	30	29	25	24	23	22	27	21	25	0	4	7

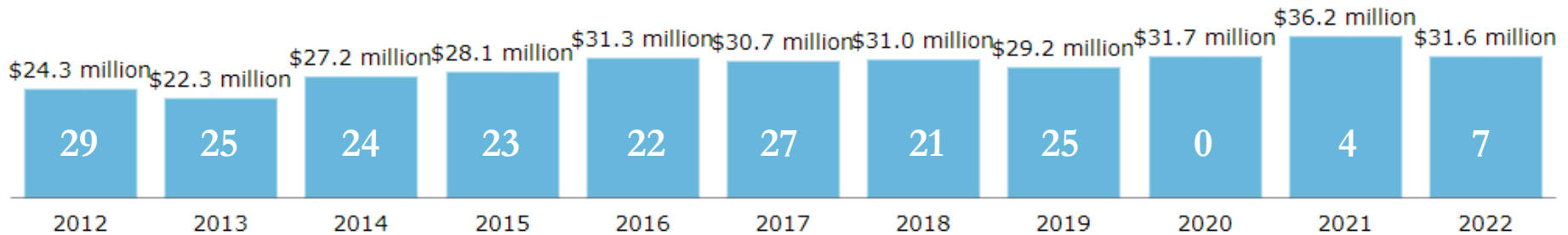
Hatchling Releases

- The National Park Service (NPS) monitors the economic contributions that each NPS site makes to their gateway communities.
- The data collected for these reports do not consider specific events.
- The NPS is not aware of any studies that have been conducted to look specifically at the economic contribution of hatchling releases

Hatchling Releases

No Correlation Between Public Hatchling Releases and Revenue to the Community

Total Economic Output Contributed to Padre Island National Seashore Gateway Economies

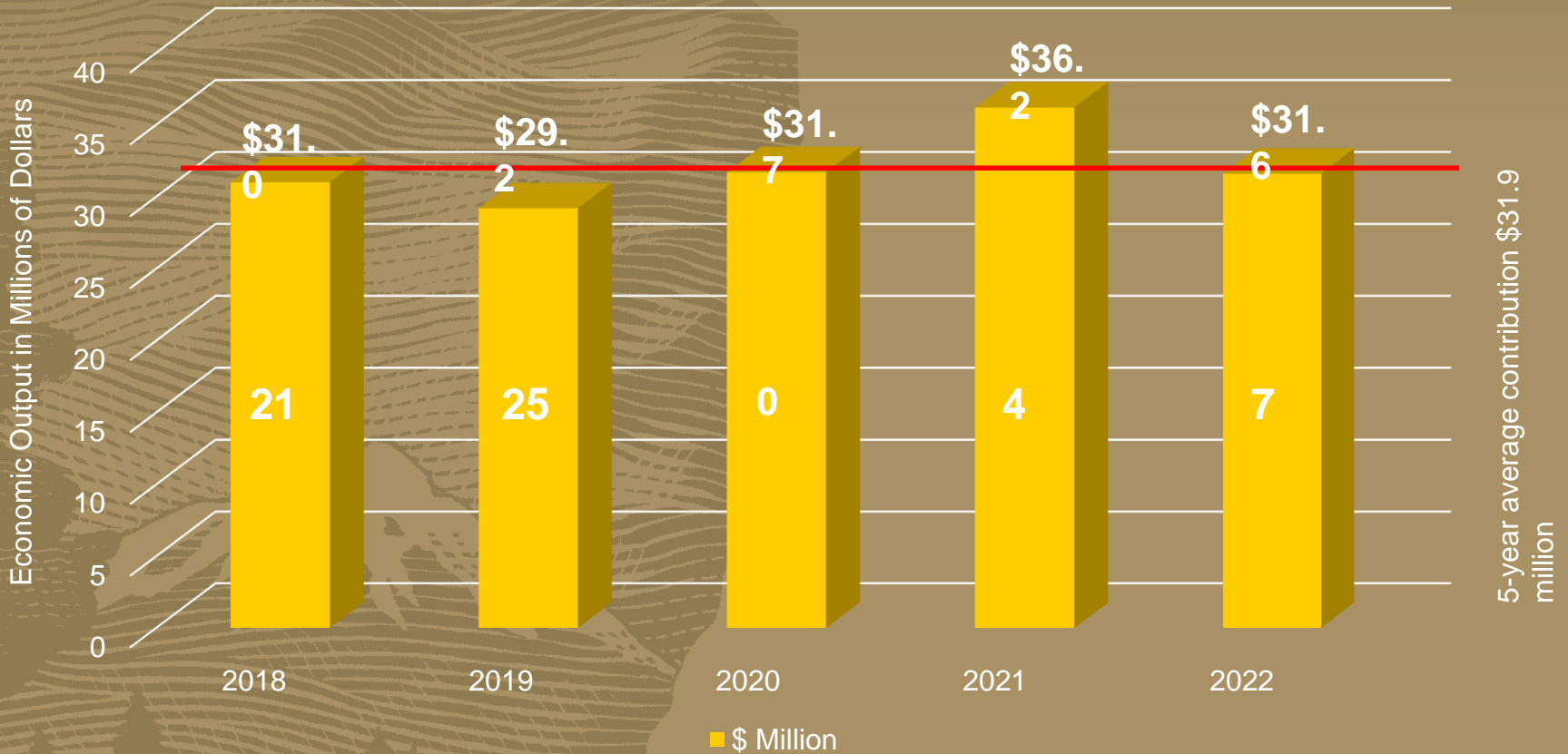


Source: Visitor Spending Effects - Economic Contributions of National Park Visitor Spending - Social Science (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)

Hatchling Releases

5-year average economic contribution: \$31.9m

5-year Economic Output and Number of Hatchling Releases



Hatchling Releases

- Summary
 - PAIS 5-year (2018-2022) economic contribution is \$31.9 million, even with a reduced number of public hatchling releases



Hatchling Releases

- Summary
 - PAIS can no longer support an unlimited number of hatchling releases
 - A limited number of releases will continue to be offered into the future as long as staffing can sustain them





Areas

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Interpretation At Visitor Center

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Padre Island National Seashore



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