

# the SWOT team





# The Future of SWOT

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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The SWOT Program was created in 2004 with the goal of creating a dynamic, global, georeferenced database of the seven sea turtle species; a network of people who generate and use the data for conservation; and a targeted communications effort built around an annual *SWOT Report*. Seven years later, SWOT has received data from more than 550 providers, has given more than 25 small grants for field-based research and conservation, has published and distributed six annual reports (this is the seventh) in multiple languages, has developed a new approach to standardizing minimum data needs, and has done much more.

To help determine the next steps for the SWOT Program, SWOT is currently conducting a comprehensive program evaluation that is focused around an online survey among SWOT contributors and the broader sea turtle community. The goal of the survey, conducted in August–September 2011, was to assess the degree to which SWOT has been effective in advancing sea turtle research and conservation and to identify areas of expansion (or contraction) of the program to make it most useful as a conservation tool. The survey sought to identify specific ways in which SWOT’s tools are being used and to determine which aspects of SWOT are most (and least) valuable to the community.

More than 170 surveys were completed by respondents from 33 countries. Survey results show that more than 90 percent of respondents were aware of the SWOT Program and that 64 percent had used one or more of the SWOT tools. Such tools include *SWOT Report*, SWOT network, maps, database, website, TurtleVision, *Outreach Toolkit*, small grants program, and Minimum Data Standards. Respondents indicated that they used SWOT tools mainly to learn about global distribution and abundance of sea turtles and to assess the progress of conservation efforts.

Of those respondents who have used SWOT tools, 86 percent feel that SWOT has helped their organization, research, or project. Respondents reported that their increased awareness of sea turtle research and conservation projects and the information gained from data and maps are among the most beneficial ways in which SWOT has helped their organizations and projects.

Of the nine SWOT tools, *SWOT Report* is the most popular and is used to conduct outreach and education programs, to raise awareness, and to aid in assessing the conservation status of sea turtles. Similarly, *SWOT Report* ranked highest on a five-point scale assessing the usefulness of each tool.

Users are most familiar with the reports, maps, database, and website. In turn, they use those four tools most often and consider them the most helpful in contributing to the advancement of sea turtle research and conservation. Conversely, they reported that the least-used tools are TurtleVision and the *Outreach Toolkit* and—to a lesser degree—the small grants program and Minimum Data Standards. Generally, 84 percent of respondents agree that the SWOT Program has been successful in its mission to diffuse information on sea turtle conservation and science through a global network of researchers and conservationists and its database.

When asked to select potential new SWOT tools that they would be most likely to use, respondents most often listed information on foraging areas, reports on specific threats and regions, and updated SWOT maps. Respondents’ recommendations for future improvements of the SWOT Program included increasing awareness of SWOT resources; focusing on specific regions; improving access, consistency, and reliability of data; expanding the SWOT small grants program; and developing maps showing foraging areas and in-water sites.

A full analysis of the survey results and of the program is still under way and will provide ideas for how to enhance and develop tools that can help the SWOT Program better serve its members and their conservation efforts. ■

THIS PAGE: A boy swims with a newly hatched leatherback turtle in West Papua, Indonesia. © JÜRGEN FREUND / WWW.JURGENFREUND.COM AT LEFT: A staff member of Sabah Parks collects data on a green turtle nest on Selingan Island in Turtle Islands National Park, Sabah, Malaysia. © KEITH A. ELLENBOGEN