



## MSRC Provides 210 ft Vessel to Transport 2,200+ Green Sea Turtles to Safety

February 22, 2021

On Saturday February 20<sup>th</sup>, MSRC, an oil spill response organization fully funded by the oil and gas and shipping industries, provided a 210 ft. oil spill response vessel and sixteen personnel to transport over 2200 green sea turtles to safety in warmer waters 30 miles off the coast of South Padre Island. In addition to providing the vessel and food for the operation, MSRC's personnel onboard, including responders and vessel crew, directly assisted with the 22-hour loading and release of the at-risk sea turtles that had been cold-stunned and paralyzed from the arctic storm that hit Texas several days earlier. The success of the rescue operation led to a second request for MSRC's assistance with another sea turtle release that will be conducted out of Ingleside, Texas near Corpus Christi on Tuesday February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.

MSRC offered its oil spill response vessel and people to the rescue operation after learning about the need from International Bird Rescue, where MSRC's CEO serves on the Board of Directors. NOAA and Texas Parks and Wildlife had requested assistance from the wildlife rescue community in finding a logistical solution to getting the turtles to warm waters as soon as possible. The sea turtles had been housed in the local convention center with donated generators providing power to heat the facility due to the power outage. Many of the sea turtles had been in the facility since Monday, February 15.



Jimmy Aguilar, Chief Mate, MSRC unloads a green sea turtle from a trailer onto Southern Responder vessel.



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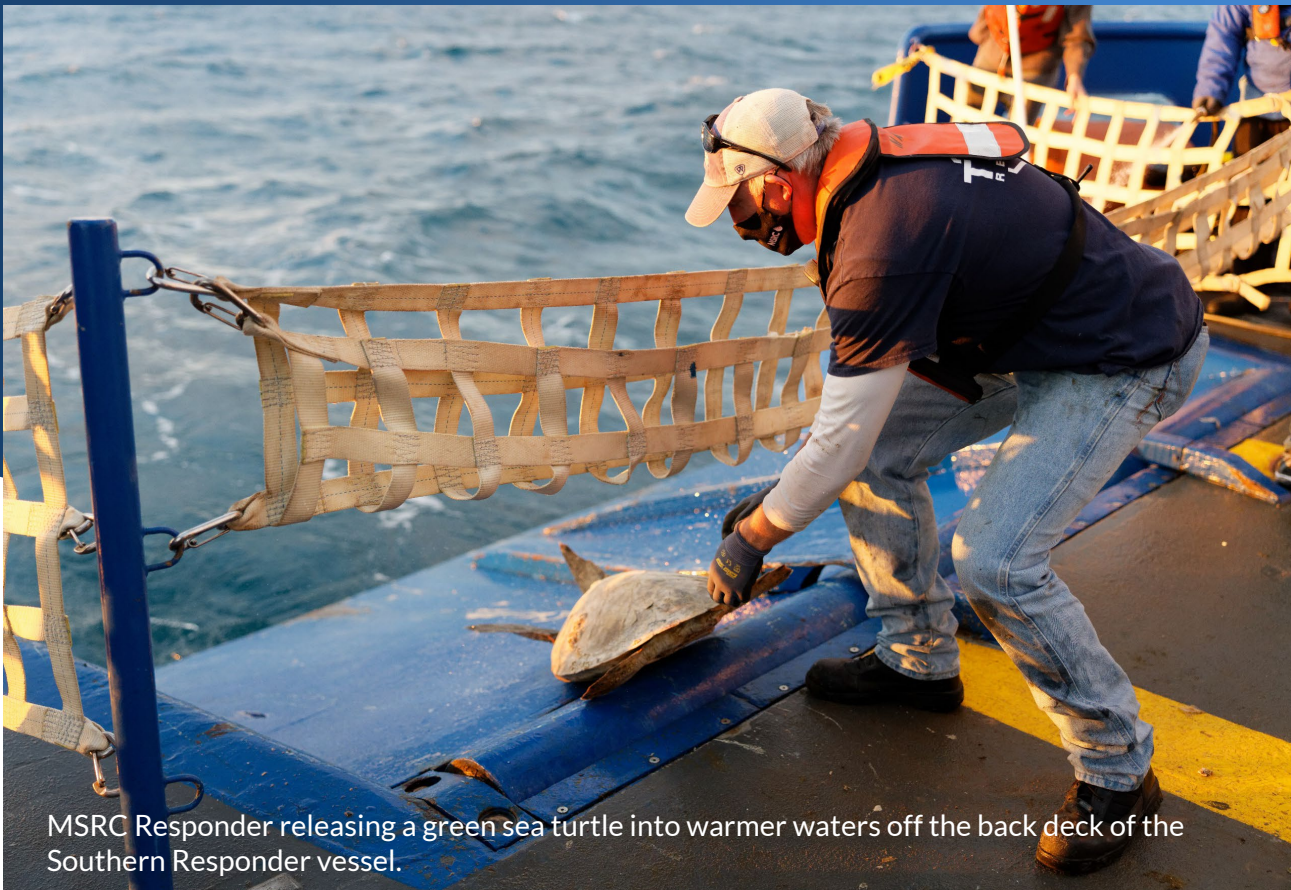
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MSRC's vessel that carried out the operation, the Southern Responder, was perfectly suited for the rescue operation. The ship is configured as a platform supply vessel with plenty of back deck space and a ramp that opens off the back deck into the water where responders could gently slide the sea turtles back into the ocean. The Southern Responder normally berths in Ingleside, Texas, and was able to arrive at the donated pier in Port Isabel at 10pm on Friday February 19<sup>th</sup>, within 12 hours of being activated for the operation.

The sea turtles began to arrive at the Port Isabel Logistical Offshore Terminal pier on Saturday morning at 9:30am in trailers and flat beds pulled by vehicles of rescue volunteers. MSRC crew and responders assisted Turtle Inc. and volunteers with laying out tarps, kiddie pools and blankets on every deck of the boat, and subsequently joined in to load the 2200+ turtles, one by one, down two ramps onto the back deck. We used every square foot of deck space that did not obstruct walkways, with over 300 turtles on the upper decks. The size of the sea turtles ranged from 25-400 pounds, with most of them under 70 lbs. They had warmed up and were awake and lively, flapping vigorously as we carried them onto the boat. While their enthusiasm made it a challenge to handle them, it was a reassuring sign that they would make it through the last few hours of their harrowing journey through the winter storm.

The load out concluded at 3pm and the Southern Responder got underway at 3:20pm following a safety briefing. It was a clear sunny day in South Padre, with calm 2-3 ft. seas, and the Captain was able to reach 63° F waters 30 miles offshore, running at 12.3 knots. The sea turtles were lively and flapping as they slid down the ramp and into the water, paddling eagerly as they entered the current. The release of the turtles was much faster than the onloading and we were able to conclude soon after sunset, feeling exhausted, exhilarated, and ready for the hot meal that the cook had prepared for everyone onboard. We are ready to do it again with Texas State Aquarium on Tuesday February 23<sup>rd</sup> in Ingleside, Texas.

*Photo credits to Sander Hunter*



MSRC Responder releasing a green sea turtle into warmer waters off the back deck of the Southern Responder vessel.



Arturo Sanchez, MSRC Responder assists Turtle, Inc. volunteers with loading green sea turtles one by one onto the back deck of the Southern Responder.



All three decks of the Southern Responder oil spill response vessel loaded with green sea turtles, heading offshore to warmer waters for their release.





The port side bow of the Southern Responder loaded with green sea turtles.



Handing off green sea turtles one by one in a human chain formation to load the turtles onto the upper decks of the Southern Responder.