

SMALLTOOTH SAWFISH

Scientific Name: *Pristis pectinata*

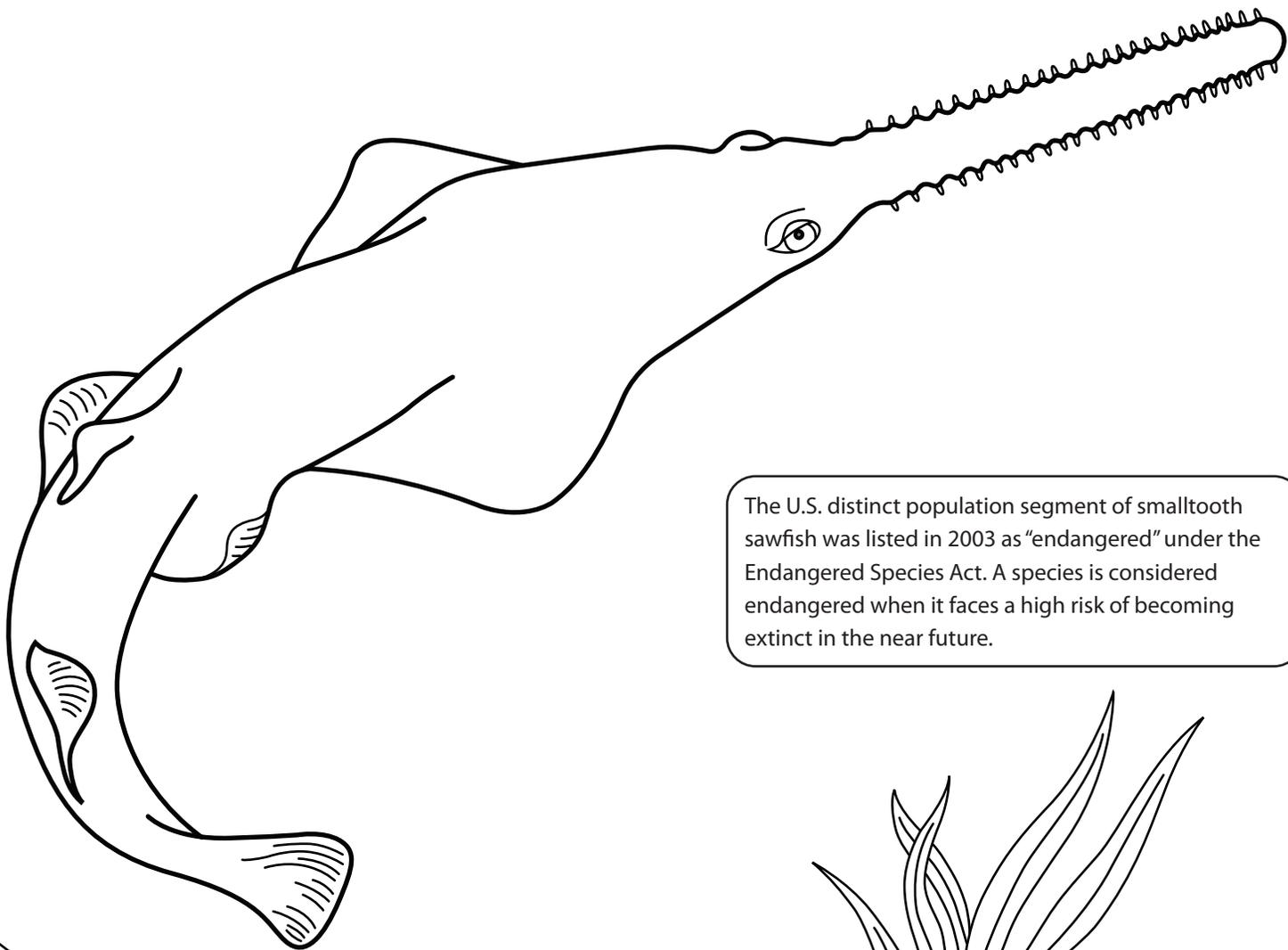


Why Are They Called Sawfish?

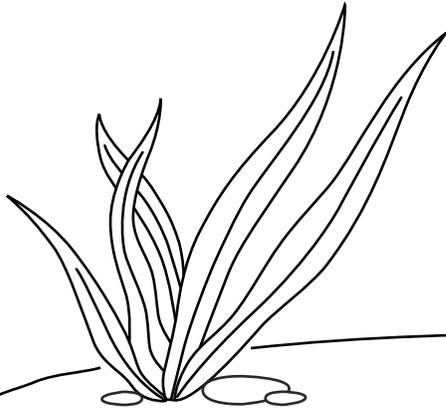
They got their name from their long flat snout or “rostrum” which is edged with sharp teeth, giving it a “saw” like appearance. Sawfish use this saw like rostrum to slash fish. They swing it from side to side to impale and stun fish and they also use it to stir up the sand and search for smaller marine animals like crabs, lobsters, and shrimp to eat.

What Makes Them Even More Unique?

Sawfish, like sharks, skates, and rays, belong to a group of fish called elasmobranches, which means that their skeletons are made of cartilage (Humans have cartilage too. The flexible part of your nose and ears is cartilage). Although sawfish have shark like bodies, they are actually part of a family of marine animals related to rays.



The U.S. distinct population segment of smalltooth sawfish was listed in 2003 as “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act. A species is considered endangered when it faces a high risk of becoming extinct in the near future.



Smalltooth Sawfish Habitat

What Type of Habitat Do They Live In?

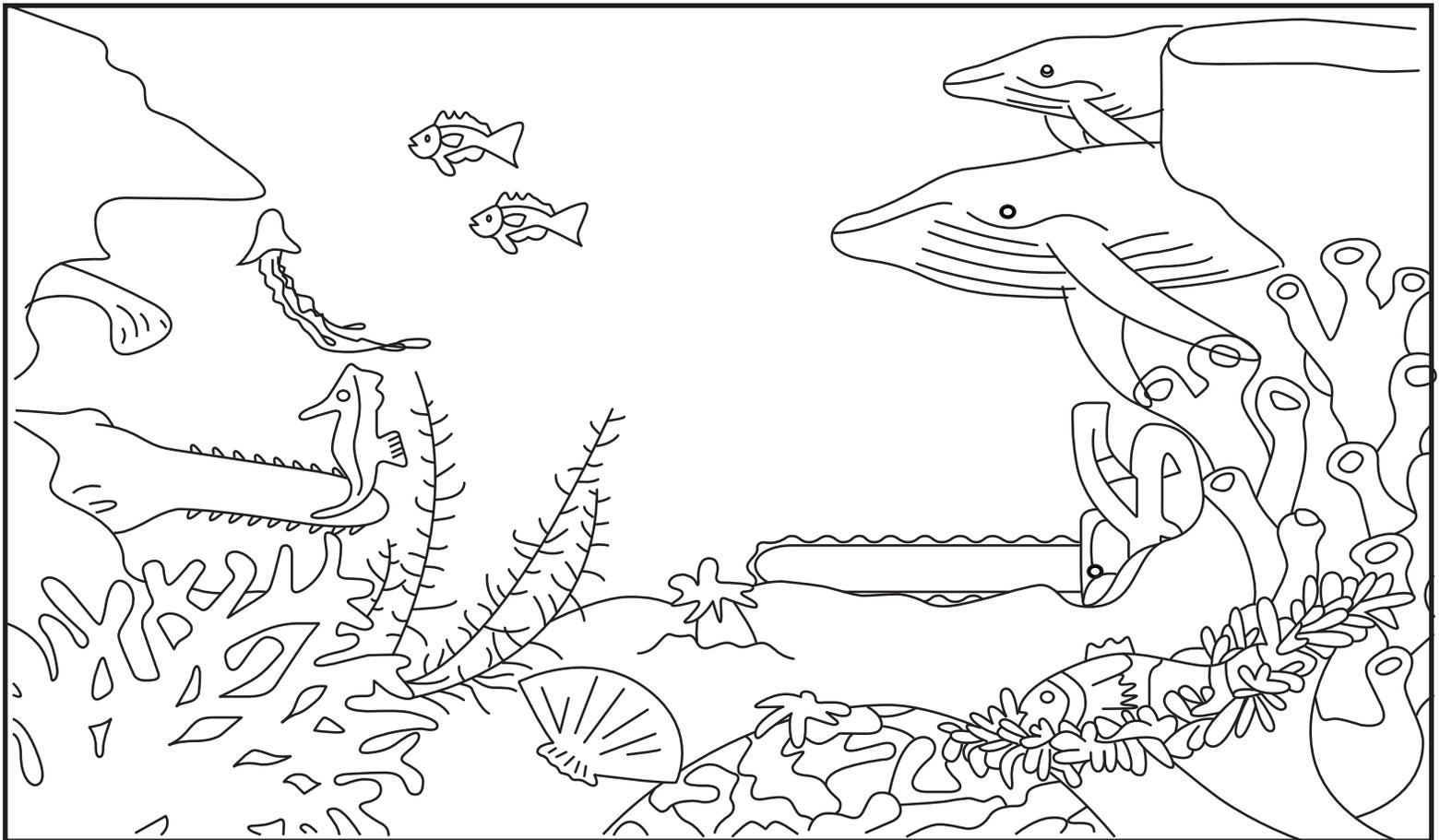
The U.S. population of smalltooth sawfish use to be found throughout the Atlantic ocean and Gulf of Mexico (New York to Texas), but now smalltooth sawfish can only be found in Southwest Florida.

Female smalltooth sawfish do not lay eggs ,but instead give live birth to fully-developed newborn sawfish called "pups." A mother sawfish can hav eup to 20 pups per litter. Newborn sawfish are very small when compared to thier larger mothers.

Adult smalltooth sawfish primarily live in estuaries (estuaries are the areas where rivers meet the ocean environment) and other coastal areas like bays, lagoons, and rivers, but they can also be found in deep waters and coral reefs.

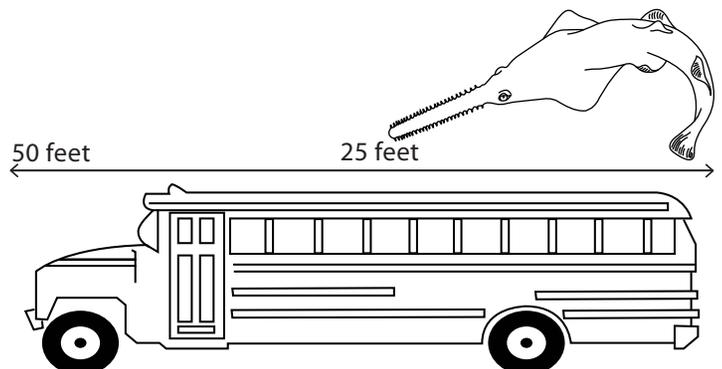
Estuaries are very important to sawfish because they act as nursery habitat for young sawfish. Young sawfish use shallow waters and red mangrove prop roots within estuaries to hide from predators, like bull sharks. Estuaries are also home to many small fish and invertebrates for sawfish to eat.

Find the Sawfish



How big do they get?

Adult smalltooth sawfish can grow up to 25 feet long; which is about half the size of a yellow school bus.



Crossword Puzzle

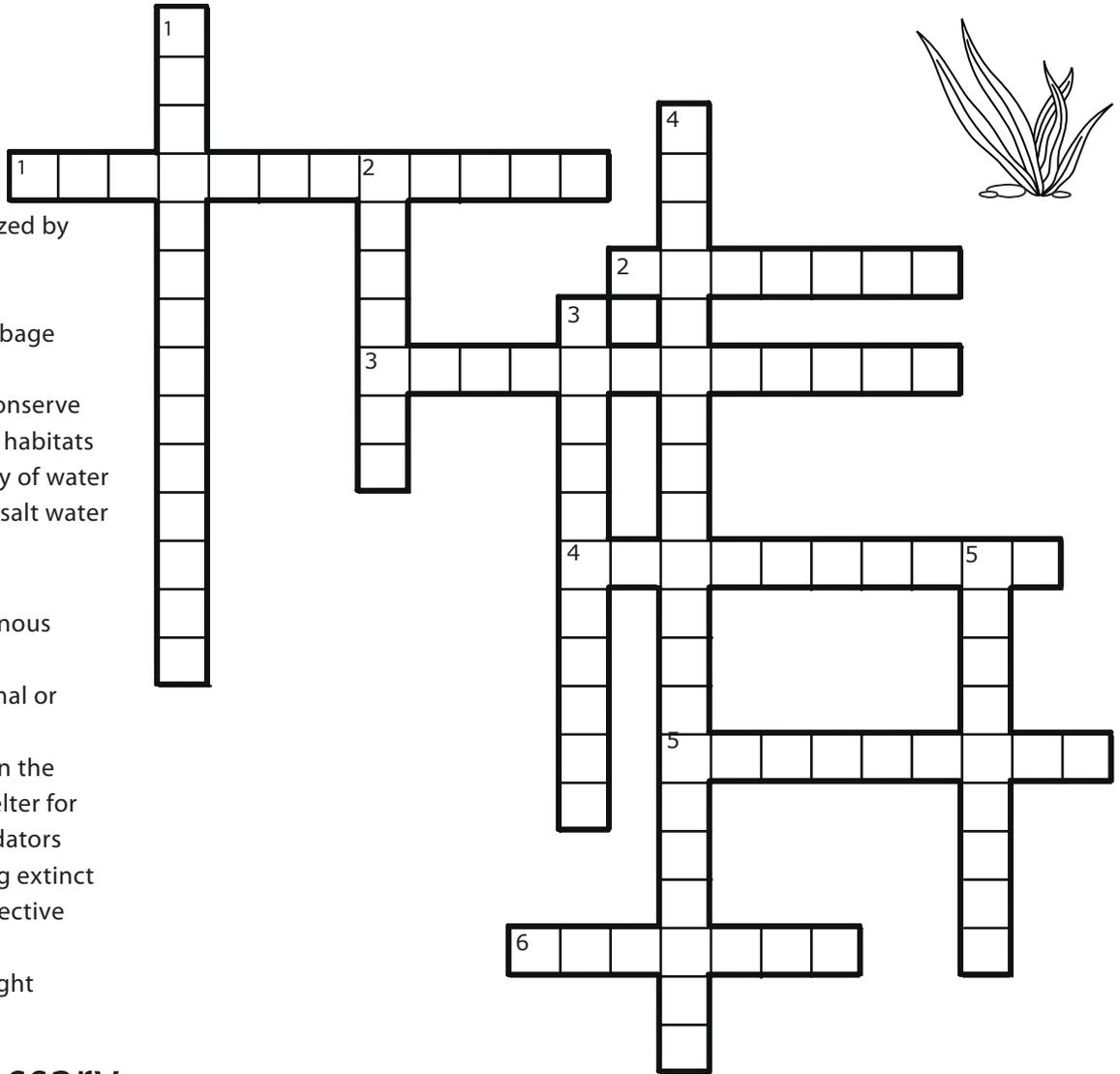


Down

1. Portions of the estuary utilized by young sawfish
2. Blade-like snout
3. Human created trash or garbage afloat in a lake, sea, or ocean
4. Federal law that's aims to conserve and protect animals and their habitats
5. Partly enclosed coastal body of water where fresh water mixes with salt water

Across

1. Characterized by a cartilaginous skeleton and placoid scales
2. Environment where an animal or ecological community lives
3. A tropical tree that grows on the shoreline. It also provides shelter for young sawfish pups from predators
4. A animal at risk of becoming extinct
5. Tough, elastic, fibrous connective tissue
6. A marine animal that is caught accidentally



Crossword Glossary

Red Mangroves: Are tropical trees of the genus *Rhizophora*, that have stiltlike roots that form dense thickets along tidal shores.

Estuaries: Partly enclosed coastal body of water in which river water is mixed with seawater.

Endangered: An "endangered" species can be a plant or animal that exists in such small numbers that it is in danger of becoming extinct, especially such species that are in jeopardy as a result of human activity.

Endangered Species Act: The U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) is a Federal law that aims to conserve the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend.

Rostrum: All sawfish are highly modified and elongated rays having a shark-like body and a blade-like snout, called a rostrum.

Cartilage: A tough, elastic, fibrous connective tissue found in various parts of the body, such as the joints and the outer ear. Unlike people who have very little cartilage sawfish skeletons are made entirely of cartilage.

Habitat: The area or environment where an organism or ecological community normally lives.

Bycatch: Bycatch is a word that is used for a marine animal that is caught accidentally while fishing for something else.

Marine Trash (also called marine debris): Is human-created waste (i.e., trash and garbage) that has deliberately or accidentally become afloat in a lake, sea, ocean, or waterway.

Elasmobranch: Are fish of the class Chondrichthyes, characterized by a cartilaginous skeleton and placoid scales, includes sharks, rays, skates, and sawfish.

Nursery Habitat: Portions of the estuary utilized by young marine species, including young sawfish. Nursery Habitat fulfills the early life requirements of young marine species by providing food, shelter, and protection from predators.

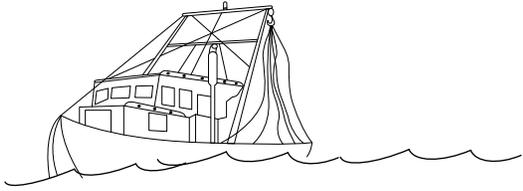
Threats

Entanglement in fishing nets

Smalltooth sawfish are often caught as bycatch (What is bycatch? Bycatch is a word that is used for a marine animal that are caught accidentally while fishing for something else).



When sawfish get entangled in fishing nets they can be injured or even killed.



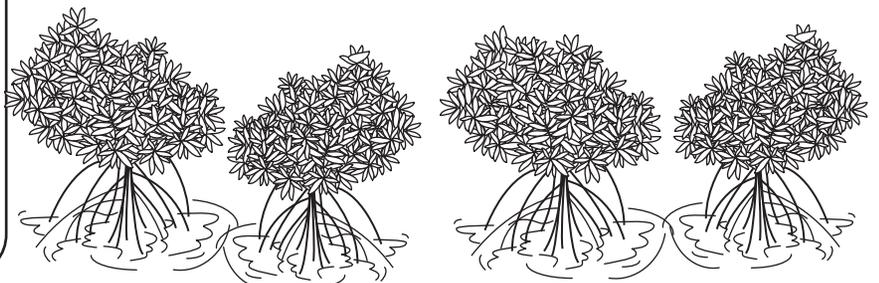
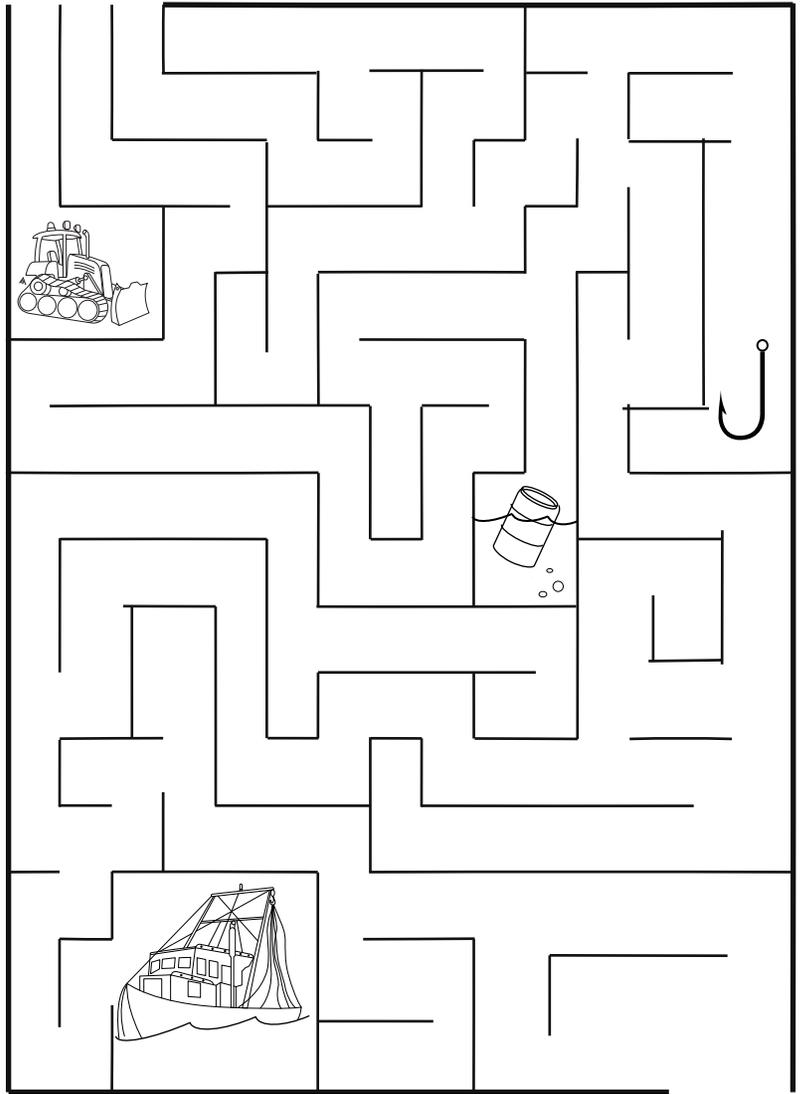
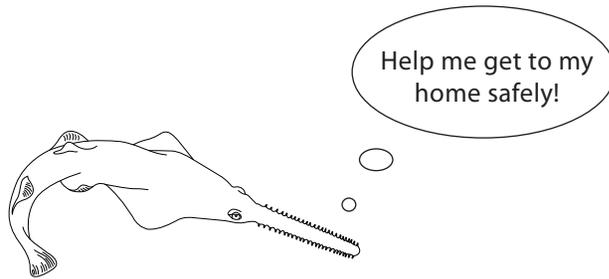
Loss of Habitat

Young sawfish use shallow habitats and red mangroves as nursery areas. These types of areas are being lost due to waterfront development in Florida and other southeastern coastal states. Many people like to live and build houses by the waterfront, and because of this much of the smalltooth sawfish habitat is being destroyed, making it very difficult for sawfish to find places to live.



Marine Trash

Because smalltooth sawfish have so many teeth on their rostrum, they can get entangled in trash that finds its way into the ocean or estuary. Trash like old nets, fishing line, elastic bands, and many other types of plastic can become wrapped around the saw or body of the animal, which can lead to its injury or death.



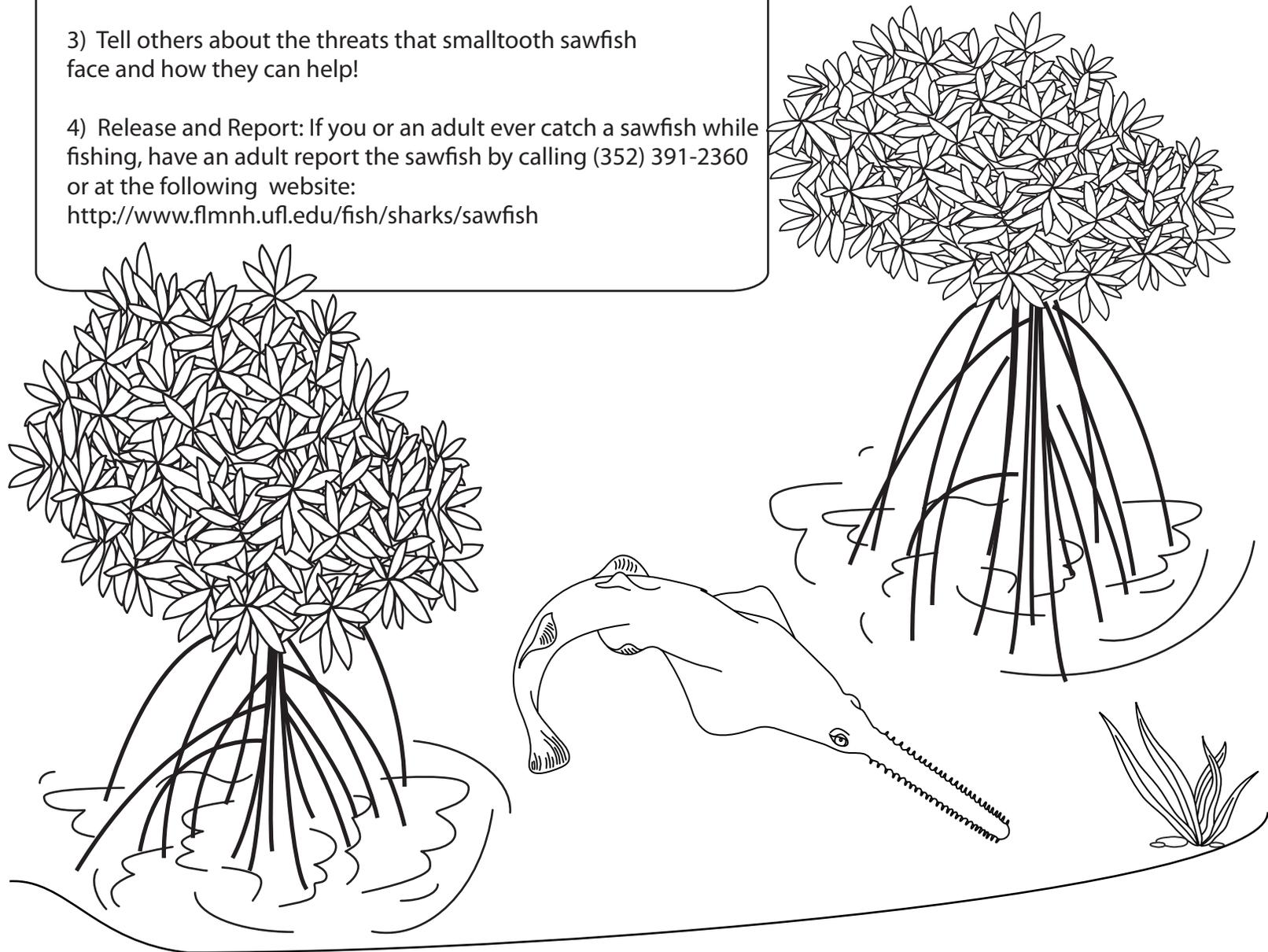
How You Can Help

There Are Many Ways You Can Help Prevent The Future Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish:

- 1) Help restore coastal habitats by participating in mangrove planting and local habitat restoration projects
- 2) Help keep our ocean clean by participating in coastal clean ups and always properly dispose of trash and fishing line
- 3) Tell others about the threats that smalltooth sawfish face and how they can help!
- 4) Release and Report: If you or an adult ever catch a sawfish while fishing, have an adult report the sawfish by calling (352) 391-2360 or at the following website:
<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/sharks/sawfish>

Remember only adults should attempt to cut the line to free the sawfish. The line should be cut as close to the hook as safely possible, and the sawfish should always remain in the water.

For more information on smalltooth sawfish and sawfish conservation please visit:
<http://sero.nmfs.gov/pr/pr.htm>



About NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office

We are dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, enforcement, and habitat conservation.

For copies of this document, please contact Calusa.Horn@noaa.gov.

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