

Why Report a Sawfish Encounter?

Sawfish are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Populations of this species are in decline, making all information about the species invaluable. Sawfish sighting reports are very important for the evaluation of the species abundance, habitat, and range and consequently for the success of the "Smalltooth Sawfish Recovery Plan."

Please Report Any Sawfish Encounter!

National Sawfish Encounter Database

The National Sawfish Encounter Database (NSED) was established as a sawfish tracking database to assist in sawfish research and conservation efforts. Your report can greatly help conservation efforts by providing the following information:

- Your name, phone number, and email address
- Date, time, and location of the encounter
- Number, size, and behavior of the sawfish
- Your activity at time of encounter
- Any tags, scars, or distinguishing marks
- No records are too old - historic reports welcome!

You can learn more about sawfish by visiting our website: www.flmnh.ufl.edu/sawfish

Where to Report an Encounter

Report a Sawfish Encounter Online:

www.flmnh.ufl.edu/sawfish/form.html

Report by email: sawfish@flmnh.ufl.edu

Report by phone: (352) 392-2360

Or, contact the National Sawfish Encounter Database:

George H. Burgess
National Sawfish Encounter Database
Florida Program for Shark Research
Florida Museum of Natural History
Dickinson Hall
Museum Road / PO Box 117800
Gainesville, FL 32611-7800

Smalltooth Sawfish Biology

Sawfish, like sharks, skates, and rays, belong to a class of fish called elasmobranchs, whose skeletons are made of cartilage. Sawfish are actually modified rays with a shark-like body and gill slits on their ventral side. Early sawfish arose around 100 million years ago, but these first sawfish are actually distant cousins to the modern day sawfishes, which first appeared around 56 million years ago. Sawfish get their name from their "saws"—long and flat snouts edged with pairs of teeth that are used to locate, stun and kill prey. Their diet includes mostly fish but also some crustaceans.

The smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) is one of two species of sawfish that inhabit U.S. waters. Smalltooth sawfish commonly reach 18 ft (5.5 m) in length, and may grow to 25 ft (7 m). Little is known about the life history of these animals, but they may live up to 30-60 years and mature after about 10 years. Like many elasmobranchs, smalltooth sawfish are ovoviviparous, meaning the mother holds the eggs inside of her until the young are ready to be born, usually in litters of 1 to 13 pups.



© Doug Perrine / SeaPics.com

Habitat

This sawfish primarily occurs in estuarine and coastal habitats such as bays, lagoons, and rivers, and often occurs near mangroves. However, this fish may occur in deeper waters and may make crossings to offshore islands.



© FLMNH



Cover Photo Credit:
© Doug Perrine / SeaPics.com



Florida Museum of Natural History
Dickinson Hall
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida 32611
E-mail: sawfish@flmnh.ufl.edu
Phone: 352-392-2360

www.flmnh.ufl.edu/sawfish

SAWFISH ENCOUNTERS

National Sawfish Encounter Database



Florida Museum of Natural History

You can greatly help conservation efforts by reporting your sawfish sighting or capture!



Sawfish Are Endangered

Sawfish are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act, which makes it illegal to harm, harass, or handle them in any way. It is illegal to hook or net one, except with a permit. Accidental captures do occur while fishing for other species; if a sawfish is hooked or netted it should be released immediately. Remove as much fishing gear as safely as possible, while keeping the sawfish in the water at all times.



© FLMNH

Sawfish Safe Release Guidelines

WARNING: Sawfish are large powerful animals that can cause serious injury. For your safety, and the safety of the sawfish, use caution if you do hook or net one of these animals.

If hooked:

- Keep sawfish in the water at all times.
- If it can be done safely, untangle the line if it is wrapped around the saw and remove as much of the line as possible.
- Cut the line as close to the hook as possible.
- Do not handle the animal or attempt to remove any hooks on the saw unless you have a long-handled de-hooker.

If tangled in a net:

- Make every effort to free the animal from the net with minimal additional stress or injury.
- Keep sawfish, especially the gills, in the water as much as possible.
- Try to remove all the netting and release the animal quickly.
- DO NOT REMOVE THE SAW!

Dangers to Sawfish

Sawfish are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation due to overfishing and have a propensity for entanglement in marine debris (presence of saw), their restricted habitat, and slow capacity of recovery from population depletion because of their low rate of population growth.

Conservation and Range Reduction

Habitat destruction and overfishing have succeeded in eradicating the smalltooth sawfish from the majority of its former range. Consequently, it survives in small pockets throughout its current range. The last remaining population in U.S. waters is off South Florida, a sad remnant of a population that once ranged from New York to Texas. On April 1, 2003 the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service placed the smalltooth sawfish on the Endangered Species List, making it the first marine fish species to receive protection under the Endangered Species Act. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has also listed *P. pectinata* as "Critically Endangered" throughout its range.

Pristis pectinata
1782-1999
n = 1978

Species distributed from Texas to New York (seasonal migrations)

- 50% distribution
- 90% distribution
- 99% distribution

Pristis pectinata
2000-2009
n = 3305

Currently the population is practically limited to the Florida coast

- 50% distribution
- 90% distribution
- 99% distribution