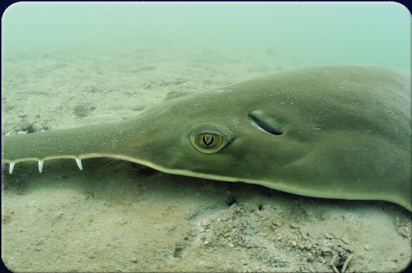


Smalltooth Sawfish Biology

Sawfishes, like sharks, skates, and rays, belong to a class of fish called elasmobranchs, whose skeletons are made totally of cartilage. Sawfish are actually modified rays with a shark-like body, and gill slits on their underside. The first sawfishes arose around 100 million years ago and are 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 and shrimp.

The smalltooth sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*) is one of two species of sawfish that historically inhabited U.S. waters. Little is known about the life history of these animals. At maturity, smalltooth sawfish reach up to 12 ft (3.6 m) in length, with a maximum size of 17 ft (5.2m). The age of maturity for both males and females is about 7 years and they live for decades. 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 7 to 14 pups.



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Habitat

Smalltooth sawfish primarily occur in estuarine and coastal habitats such as bays, lagoons, and rivers, and often occur near mangroves. However, adults of this species may occur in deeper waters.



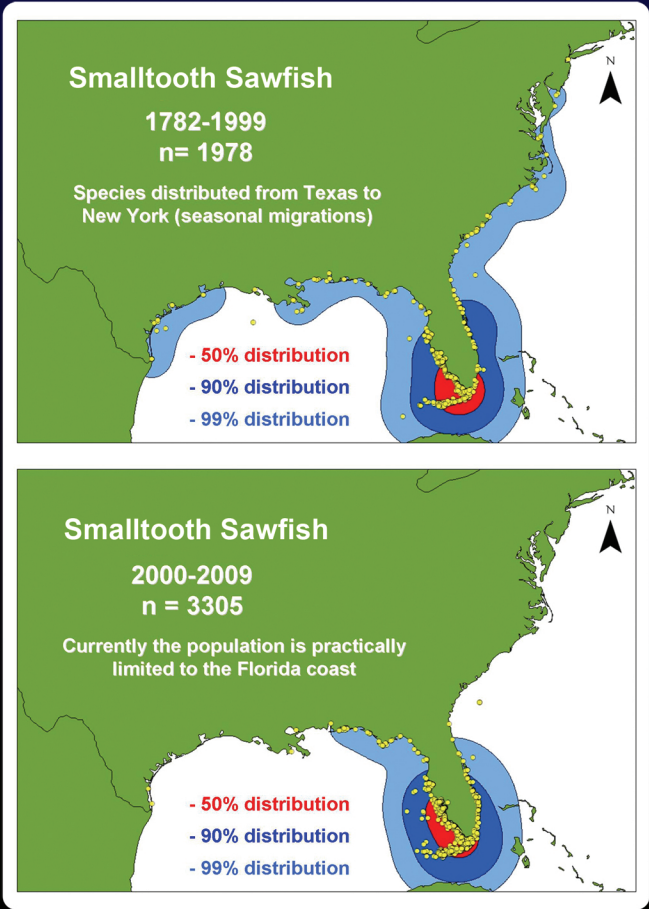
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Dangers to Sawfish

Sawfish are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation due to overfishing and have a propensity for entanglement in marine debris (presence of saw). In addition, their low rate of population growth and their current restricted habitat makes them very slow to recover from population depletion.

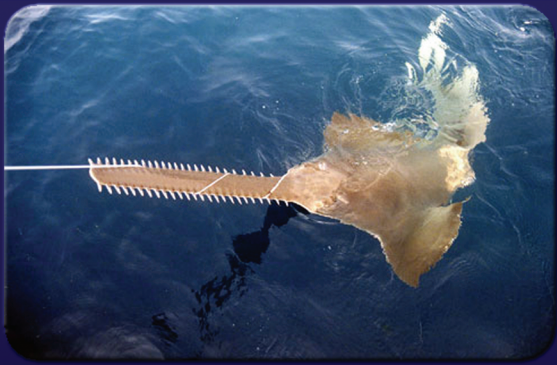
Conservation and Range Reduction

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.



Sawfish Safe Release Guidelines

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 intentionally 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

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!**