



IMPACTS OF RECREATIONAL SHARK FISHING

While recreational shark fishing is not the biggest threat facing sharks, its impacts are substantial. According to the NOAA National Marine Fisheries, the US recreational harvest of sharks, skates and rays in 2007 (not including Texas and Alaska) was 559,000. An additional 14,369,000 were caught and released. And of the animals released, it is estimated that at least 20% end up dying, according to NMFS stock assessments for many species. For deep water species, this number is much higher. Education and use of appropriate fishing gear, such as circle hooks and hook removal devices, however, should greatly improve the survival rate.

Many recreational shark fishermen have lobbied for tighter restrictions on commercial operations, fearing that overfishing might lead to the eradication of their hobby. Studies have shown, however, that estimated recreational catches of large coastal sharks were higher than commercial landings in 15 of 21 years between 1981 and 2001.

Almost all of the shark species targeted by recreational fishermen and shark fishing tournaments are classified as at high risk of extinction or are approaching threatened status. The Great Hammerhead, for example, which is considered a prized catch by some shark fishermen, is listed as Endangered -- Very High Risk of Extinction. To make matters worse, competitive fishermen often target pregnant females, which obviously weigh more.



SHARKS ARE DANGEROUS..... IF YOU EAT THEM

As top of the food chain predators that are also very long-lived, sharks contain very high levels of mercury and other contaminants that make it dangerous to human health. This is why the U.S. FDA, the EPA, the Environmental Defense Fund, Seafood Watch, and many regional health authorities carry warnings regarding consumption of shark meat. In fact the Florida DOH advises that EVERYONE should avoid eating meat from ALL sharks over 43 inches from ALL Florida coastal waters.

Mercury is absorbed by all marine animals and accumulates exponentially on the way up the food chain. Large predators, like sharks, can have concentrations of mercury that are 10,000 times higher than their surrounding waters. Mercury in fish cannot be trimmed off or destroyed by cooking.

Mercury is a dangerous neurotoxin to humans, and is especially harmful to children and pregnant women. Even in low doses, it can interfere with a child's brain development. In adults mercury affects fertility, blood pressure regulation, is linked to increased risk of heart disease, and causes a host of neurological problems including memory loss and chronic fatigue.

HEALTHY OCEANS NEED SHARKS



SHARK SAFE NETWORK SUPPORTS RESPONSIBLE SPORT FISHING

Most sport fishermen are responsible and understand the importance of protecting the marine environment. For this reason, it has become the norm for ethical anglers to either catch fish that they plan to eat or practice catch and release.

Shark populations are being decimated at an alarming rate, and many species are on the brink of extinction. Sharks play a key role in maintaining the delicate balance of our ocean ecosystems. Without them the oceans will die. One third of our planet's oxygen and one sixth the protein that feeds the world comes from the oceans.

We need the oceans and the oceans need sharks. If you care about the future of sportfishing and the oceans, please practice catch and release!

Contact Shark Safe Network

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Sharks Are In Trouble



WHY DO HEALTHY OCEANS NEED SHARKS?

As apex predators, sharks are absolutely vital to the ocean's ecosystems. They maintain the balance in the oceans, and without sharks the oceans die. Sharks help to regulate the abundance, distribution and diversity of other marine animals. They also remove the sick and weak from fish populations making the gene pools stronger for these species and preventing devastating disease outbreaks. As the number of large sharks declines, the oceans will suffer unpredictable and devastating consequences.

Scientific studies show that ecosystems with healthy populations of sharks have greater biodiversity, larger numbers of fish and healthier sea grass beds as compared to similar systems in which the sharks have been overfished.

Other studies document the consequences of the loss of sharks, ranging from the decline of coral reef systems in the Caribbean to the collapse of the century old scallop fishery in the Mid-Atlantic.

And the full ramifications are still not known. In fact there is increasing alarm among scientists regarding how the loss of sharks may affect the oceans as the great lungs of the earth. Phytoplankton are the micro-plants of the ocean that represent the biggest quantity of vegetation on the planet. Phytoplankton consume more carbon dioxide than all the trees in our forests and produce most of the oxygen we breathe. Without sharks to keep the system in balance, will phytoplankton go the way of the North Carolina's scallops?

SHARKS FACE THE THREAT OF EXTINCTION IN EVERY PART OF THE WORLD DUE TO OVERFISHING

Over 100 million sharks are killed each year, and they are not able to reproduce fast enough to keep up with this level of fishing pressure. Most of the overfishing is driven by the high demand for shark fins for shark fin soup - an Asian delicacy - but it is also due to unintended bycatch from other fisheries and recreational shark fishing.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) conducts assessments of plant and animal species at risk of extinction. In 2008, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species listed 50 shark species as being at high risk of extinction (Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable). Another 63 shark species are approaching threatened status (Conservation Dependent or Near Threatened). Many other shark species are listed as Data Deficient since there is not enough information available to assess their population numbers.

To compound the problem of extreme fishing pressure, sharks reproduce very slowly. They take many years to reach maturity - up to 20 years for some species - have long gestation periods and give birth to relatively few pups.

Complicating matters further is man's fear and ignorance of sharks, which results in people either not caring about sharks or thinking that it is a good thing to kill them.

The media perpetuates this fear and misunderstanding through sensational programming and hyped up news coverage. The media generally portray sharks as vicious man-eaters, when in fact only 1 person on average per year is killed by a shark in the US. And almost all shark attacks are cases of mistaken identity.

To put this into perspective, the number of people in the US who die from being struck by

lightning is 47 per year and the number of people who drown is 3,306. There are actually more deaths on US beaches from people being smothered by collapsing sand holes than from shark bites! And meanwhile people are killing over 100 million sharks every year!!!!

Sharks have inhabited our oceans for over 400 million years and in less than two decades man has brought them to the brink of annihilation. This over-exploitation of sharks must stop or our oceans will die along with the shark!

Some text provided by www.sharksavers.org and www.shark.ch. Live shark photos by Mary O'Malley.



100 MILLION SHARKS ARE KILLED EVERY YEAR

