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## **Shark Research and Education Activities Frequently Asked Questions**

Since 2000, biologists working at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve have been studying sharks to understand their habitat needs and learning about their stress levels, with the goal of ultimately enhancing their chances of survival. This work is primarily grant funded and is focused on observing the changes in shark distributions in the Ten Thousand Islands before, during and after completion of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

### **Q: How and where are sharks being studied?**

**A:** Scientists deploy longlines and gill nets at targeted locations in the reserve three times per month. This equipment is carefully supervised during each 4-hour study period. Staff researchers demonstrate and promote ethical and humane treatment of any and all animals captured during their studies.

### **Q: What kind of information is collected?**

**A:** When a shark is caught it is temporarily housed in an onboard holding tank so that the following basic data can be obtained; species, size, weight, estimated age, and gender. The shark is then tagged on its dorsal fin and released as quickly as possible to minimize stress to the animal.

### **Q: How is this information used?**

**A:** Long-term monitoring of shark populations can help us learn what conditions sharks need for survival and how they use different estuaries. The presence or absence of specific species, as well as the number of different species in the study area can show scientists if, and to what extent, water quality has been altered by adjacent human activities. This is the kind of information that can help evaluate the outcome of a large-scale restoration such as in the Everglades.

### **Q: Are the studied sharks intentionally harmed or killed?**

**A:** No. Research protocols ensure that scientists have minimal contact with their subjects (sharks) and constantly monitor the animals in an effort to maximize survival rates upon release. Rarely, an animal involved in their study is unable to be returned to the waters alive. In this event, the animal is preserved intact and stored on ice. This enables future opportunities to advance the body of scientific knowledge of the species, as well as to educate the community about shark biology and natural history.

### **Q: How can the community learn from the deceased shark?**

**A:** Rookery Bay Reserve educators occasionally use the preserved sharks to teach visitors at the Environmental Learning Center about shark biology and survival strategies. Lessons focus on how sharks hunt, feed, and adapt to changing conditions in the estuary. Through carefully led dissection activities, educators teach about adaptations of these amazing fish.