



NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION for the Endangered Smalltooth Sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why did NOAA Fisheries Service designate critical habitat for the endangered smalltooth sawfish?

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires the federal government to designate “critical habitat” for any species it lists under the ESA. NOAA Fisheries Service listed the endangered smalltooth sawfish as endangered under the ESA on April 1, 2003.

What does the designation of critical habitat for the endangered smalltooth sawfish population do?

The designation of critical habitat will not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. Federal agencies that undertake, fund, or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the NOAA Fisheries Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

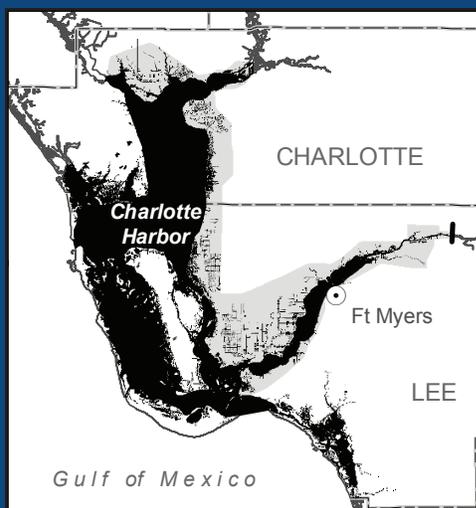
What is critical habitat?

The ESA defines “critical habitat” as: (1) specific areas within the geographical area occupied by the species at the time of listing, that contain the physical or biological features essential to the species’ conservation, and which may require special management considerations or protection; and (2) specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species if the agency determines that the area itself is essential for conservation.

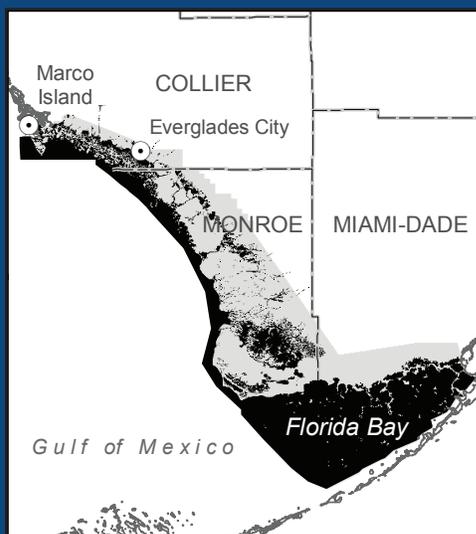
Where is critical habitat for the endangered smalltooth sawfish?

The two areas for designation included are: (1) The Charlotte Harbor Estuary Unit; and (2) the Ten Thousand Islands/Everglades Unit (see maps to left; black shading denotes open-water areas, and gray shading represent inland waters included within the designation). The specific boundaries of the two units can be found in the text of the rule. Within these two areas, the features essential to the conservation of the species are red mangroves and shallow euryhaline habitats (habitats with fluctuating salinity levels) characterized by water depths between the Mean High Water Line and 3 ft (0.9 m) measured at Mean Lower Low Water. These features are included within the specified boundaries of the units, except where the features are currently not accessible to sawfish.

(1) Charlotte Harbor Estuary Unit



(2) Ten Thousand Islands/Everglades Unit





What are the economic impacts of the designation?

The limitations to the type and amount of existing information do not allow us to predict the total costs and benefits of the designation. The primary impacts of the critical habitat designation would result from the requirement that federal agencies ensure that their actions are not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Private citizens, small businesses, small nonprofit organizations, and small governmental jurisdictions may be affected by the designation if they engage in activities that affect the features essential to the conservation of smalltooth sawfish and if they receive funding or authorization for their activities from a Federal agency. The economic impacts of the designation are discussed at length in the Final 4(b)(2) Report (available at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/SmalltoothSawfish.htm>).

Are the features essential to smalltooth sawfish conservation located everywhere within the two critical habitat units?

No. The features essential to smalltooth sawfish conservation can be found unevenly dispersed throughout the two areas. The limits of available information on the distribution of the features, and limits on mapping methodologies, make it infeasible to define the specific areas containing the essential features. Additionally, man-made structures such as boat ramps, docks, pilings, maintained channels, or marinas do not provide the essential features that are essential to the species conservation and are thus not critical habitat. Within the critical habitat areas, the designation focuses on the two features: red mangroves and shallow euryhaline habitats characterized by water depths between the Mean High Water Line and 3 ft (0.9 m) measured at Mean Lower Low Water, to support the recruitment of juvenile smalltooth sawfish into the population. Only activities that may affect these features would be subject to the ESA's consultation requirement for federal agencies.



Photo Credit: Diana Godwin

How did NOAA Fisheries Service identify these areas as critical habitat areas?

NOAA Fisheries Service used the best available science to identify areas that contain the features essential to the conservation of the endangered smalltooth sawfish. This involved gathering information on the natural history, habitat needs, and all known sightings and/or encounters with the species. We used reports of captures and sightings of smalltooth sawfish from recreational and commercial fishers, and from researchers to identify the critical habitat areas.

Who do I contact for more information?

The NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Region Protected Resources Division is the lead in developing the rules and all subsequent management actions for this species. For more information, please contact:

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