

Why Protect Marine Turtles?

Marine turtles have existed for over 180 million years and play a substantial role in marine ecosystems. All species of marine turtles are classified as either threatened or endangered. Species observed in the southeast Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico include Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, green, leatherback, and hawksbill.

What Laws Protect Marine Turtles?

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is the primary Federal law that protects marine turtles. International agreements, such as the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) are also instrumental in marine turtle conservation.

The ESA prohibits the **take** of endangered marine turtles in U.S. waters and on the high seas. **Take** is defined as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect." **Harm** is further defined by regulation as an act which actually kills or injures fish or wildlife. Such an act may include significant habitat modification or degradation which actually kills or injures fish or wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, spawning, rearing, migrating, **feeding**, or sheltering.



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How Can YOU Protect Marine Turtles?

Prevent the event—if you see marine turtles surface:

- Slow down.
- Steer away from their direction of travel.
- DO NOT cast your line or set gear near marine turtles.
- Keep your distance. The NOAA Fisheries minimum recommended viewing distance for sea turtles is 50 yards.

What Should YOU Do If You Hook or Entangle a Marine Turtle?

- Gently bring the turtle close to you, use a dip net or firmly hold its front flipper and shell to safely lift it out of the water.
- DO NOT lift the turtle above water by pulling the line—this will result in further injury.
- AVOID the turtle's mouth and flipper claws.
- Cut line close to the hook using blunt scissors or knife and remove any excess line that has become entangled around the turtle.
- DO NOT remove the hook unless the turtle is lightly hooked and it can be taken out without further injury. If you are uncertain, DO NOT remove the hook.
- Disengage the engine and release the turtle on the side away from the engine.
- If the retrieval distance is too great or the turtle too large, cut the line as short as possible to release the turtle.
- DO NOT dispose of line and hooks overboard. DO NOT place your anchor on coral or seagrass beds, as this may harm marine turtle habitat.

Turtles with serious cuts, ingested, or deeply embedded hooks need veterinary care. Keep turtle in the shade and DO NOT transport. Immediately call your local wildlife agency!

The maximum fine for violating the MMPA is \$20,000 and one year in jail.

The maximum fine for violating the ESA is \$50,000 and one year in jail.



For more information, contact:

NOAA Fisheries

Protected Resources Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
727-824-5312

ON THE COVER

*Dolphin photo by Randall S. Wells,
Sarasota Dolphin Research Program*



Courtesy of NOAA Fisheries in collaboration with Alabama Marine Resources Division, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, North Carolina Department of Marine Fisheries, Save the Manatee Club, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

HELP PREVENT ENTANGLEMENT

Protecting Marine Mammals and Marine Turtles
A Guide for Recreational Fishermen

Why Protect Marine Mammals?

Marine mammals are an important part of the marine ecosystem. Some species of marine mammals are classified as depleted, endangered, or threatened. Of particular concern in the southeast Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico are the right, humpback, sperm, and fin whales; as well as the bottlenose dolphin, harbor porpoise, and manatee.

What Laws Protect Marine Mammals?

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are the principle Federal laws that guide marine mammal species protection and conservation policies. The MMPA delegates authority for whales, dolphins, porpoise, seals, and sea lions to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries); and manatees, walrus, and sea otters to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Some states also have protective laws in place.

The MMPA prohibits the **take** of all marine mammal species in U.S. waters. **Take** is defined as “to harass, hunt, capture, or kill, or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal.” **Take** is further defined by regulation to include **feeding** or **attempting to feed** a marine mammal in the wild.

Why is Feeding Marine Mammals Illegal?

Animals accustomed to eating bait, chum, or released fish and, in the case of manatees, produce, may lose their natural wariness of humans. Acclimation to humans makes marine mammals more susceptible to gear entanglements and boat collisions, lose their ability to forage, become “nuisance animals,” or get sick from spoiled bait or chum.

How Can YOU Protect Marine Mammals?

- If fishing from a boat, don't chum when marine mammals are nearby.
- Avoid fishing in an area where marine mammals are actively feeding, as they may mistake bait for food.
- Watch your bait and fishing gear continuously and don't let marine mammals grab it.
- If marine mammals continue to grab bait, try hauling gear and moving.
- Avoid catching and releasing fish in the presence of marine mammals, as the marine mammals may try to eat them.
- Don't leave fishing gear unattended.
- Don't dispose of fishing gear in the water. Even small amounts can be harmful to marine mammals if entangled or ingested.
- **THROWING PLASTIC INTO THE OCEAN IS ILLEGAL.**
- Keep your distance. Avoid approaching and pursuing any marine mammals. Avoiding direct interactions with these animals and watching from a distance are best for both people and marine mammals.

NOAA Fisheries' minimum recommended viewing distances are:

- dolphins, porpoises, and seals:** 50 yards
- whales:** 100 yards (Federal law prohibits all approaches to right whales within 500 yards)



Wendy Noke, Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute

- Don't encircle, entrap, or chase marine mammals.
- When in the presence of marine mammals, idle your watercraft's engine to allow them to pass safely.
- Wear polarized sunglasses to better see marine mammals in the water and avoid contact.
- When in manatee areas, obey posted speed limits and “No Entry” signs to avoid hitting manatees.
- Pole, paddle, or use a trolling motor when near grass beds, which are preferred manatee habitat.

What Should YOU Do If You See Harassment of a Marine Mammal?

Report any violations of the MMPA to the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Enforcement Division at 1-800-863-1964.

If you are in the following states, you can also call:

- North Carolina:** 1-800-682-2632
- South Carolina:** 1-800-922-5431
- Georgia:** 1-800-241-4113
- Florida:** 1-888-404-FWCC (3922)
- Alabama:** 1-800-262-3151
- Mississippi:** 1-800-294-5551
- Louisiana:** 1-800-442-2511
- Texas:** 1-800-962-6625
(1-800-9mammal)
- U.S. Virgin Islands:**
St. Thomas/St. John:
1-340-775-6762—A/H 911
St. Croix:
1-340-773-5774—A/H 911

Learn more about preventing and reporting entanglement by visiting NOAA Fisheries online at www.nmfs.noaa.gov

What Should YOU Do If You Entangle or Spot an Entangled/Injured Marine Mammal?

Contact the NOAA Fisheries Stranding Hotline at 1-305-862-2850. You can also call the numbers below if you are in the following states:

- North Carolina:** 1-252-728-8762
- South Carolina:** 1-800-922-5431
- Georgia:** 1-800-241-4113
- Florida:** 1-888-404-FWCC (3922)
- Alabama:** 1-800-799-6637
- Mississippi:** 1-800-799-6637
- Louisiana:** 1-504-378-2580
- Texas:** 1-800-962-6625
(1-800-9mammal)
- U.S. Virgin Islands:**
St. Thomas/St. John: 1-340-775-6762

REMINDER: All commercial fisheries are required to report to NOAA Fisheries all incidental injuries or mortalities of marine mammals caused during the course of fishing activities. Call NOAA Fisheries at (727) 824-5312 for reporting forms or further information.



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