



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Shelley Dawicki
508-495-2378
shelley.dawick@noaa.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 5, 2013
SS13.09A

Tag On! Cooperative Shark Tagging Program Celebrates 50 Years, and Counting

NOAA's Cooperative Shark Tagging Program (CSTP) celebrated its 50th anniversary this past year, and is one of the longest-running shark tagging programs in the world. It is also one of the largest, with thousands of volunteers in the US and in Europe.

The idea for the Cooperative Shark Tagging Program (CSTP) began developing in 1962 at the Sandy Hook Laboratory in New Jersey, then part of the Department of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). During the late 1950s and early 1960s, sharks were considered a liability to the economy of resort communities, of little or no commercial value, and a detriment to fishermen in areas where sharks might damage expensive fishing gear or reduce catches of more commercially valuable species. Several shark attacks along the New Jersey coast at that time gave rise to public concern about a perceived shark menace.

In response, a shark longline survey was conducted in 1961 from Jones Inlet, New York, to Cape Henlopen, Delaware, by Sandy Hook Laboratory staff. The objectives of the survey were to determine the species composition, distribution, abundance, food habits, seasonal occurrence, and other aspects of the biology of large sharks off the mid-Atlantic states.

The survey captured more than 300 sharks, including white and tiger sharks. When the details of the survey were made public, hundreds of recreational fishermen interested in fishing for sharks as "big game" in the rapidly expanding offshore recreational fisheries offered to assist federal fisheries biologists in the shark research.

The Cooperative Shark Tagging Program began in 1962 with less than 100 volunteer fishermen involved in tagging feasibility studies. The program expanded through the years, and moved to the National Marine Fisheries Service when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was created in 1970. Today, more than 6,500 volunteers are distributed along the Atlantic and Gulf coast of North America, and in Europe.

Each year about 5,000 sharks are tagged by cooperating recreational anglers and commercial fishermen. Information from an additional 400 sharks that have been previously tagged is recovered and returned to CSTP and the data on releases and recaptures entered into a database. Volunteers can obtain information about shark tagging sharks, how to obtain and use tags, and how to report tagging information in the CSTP booklet, available online on the program's website under tagging at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/sharks/tagging.html>

Nancy Kohler, head of the APEX Predators Program at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center laboratory in Narragansett, RI, says data from tagging programs like the CSTP provide valuable information on shark migrations and the extent of the movements of these animals with respect to national and international boundaries. The data also helps define the stocks of Atlantic sharks.

"The CSTP is an ongoing endeavor to increase our biological understanding of sharks and to obtain information required for their successful management. The tagging of sharks, and other aquatic animals, provides information on stock identity, movements and migration (including rates and routes), abundance, age and growth, mortality, and behavior," Kohler said. "This information enhances our knowledge on the migrations and the biology of Atlantic sharks."

An update to the first overview of shark tagging results from 1962 to 1993 published in Marine Fisheries Review in 1998 is ongoing. The new report summarizing 50 years of mark/recapture data for 39 species of sharks is planned for release in late 2013 or early 2014.

Coastal Shark Tagging Program Highlights 1962-2012:

- More than 230,000 tagged sharks of 52 species
- More than 14,000 recaptures of 33 species.
- Distances traveled for the 33 species ranged from no movement to 3,997 nautical miles.

The distance record: A blue shark tagged by a sport fisherman south of Shinnecock Inlet on Long Island, New York, and recaptured south of the Equator, approximately 350 nautical miles northwest of Ascension Island 8.4 years later.

- The longest time at liberty for any shark in the CSTP is 27.8 years.

The record holder: a sandbar shark tagged by Narragansett NMFS biologist Charles Stillwell, fishing with a gill net in Great Machipongo Sound, Virginia, in June 1965. The shark was recaptured by a commercial shark longline fisherman east of Daytona Beach, Florida, in March 1993.

###