

Introduction to the “*Learning from Unusual Sawfish Mortality Events: Causes, Effects, and Conservation Applications*” Symposium

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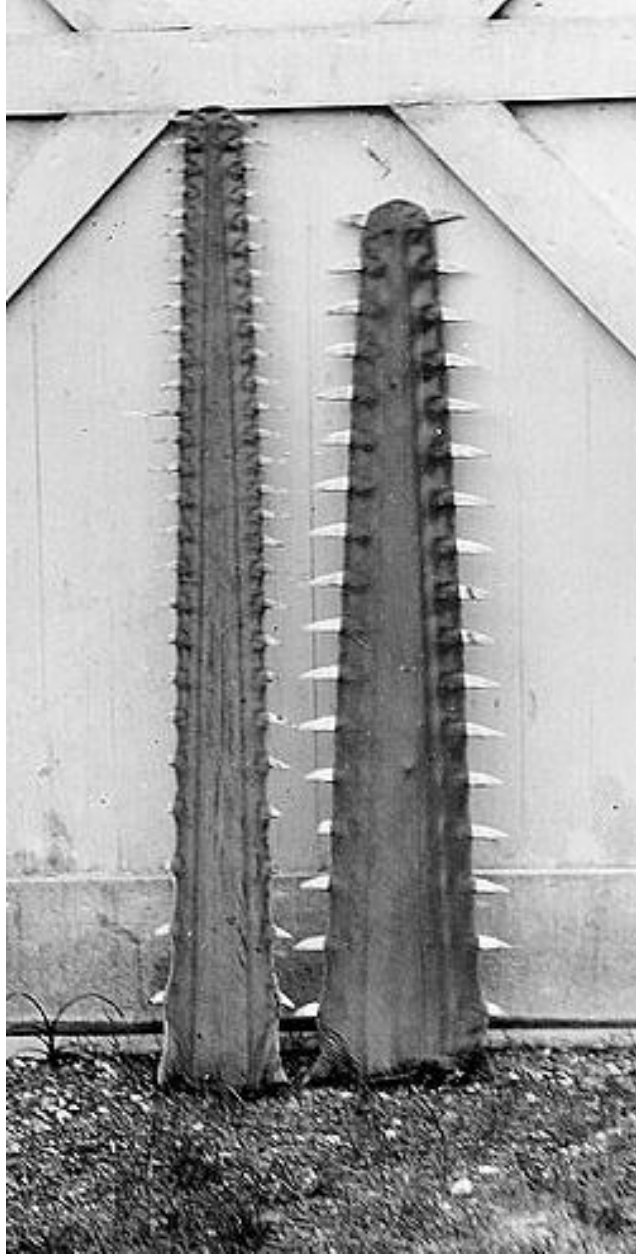
Sawfish

- Large, distinctive rays
- Possess rostrum or “saw”
- 5 species worldwide
- 2 species in the United States historically
- Both species were once considered common & abundant



Smalltooth Sawfish

Pristis pectinata



Courtesy George Burgess,
Sawfish Conservation Society

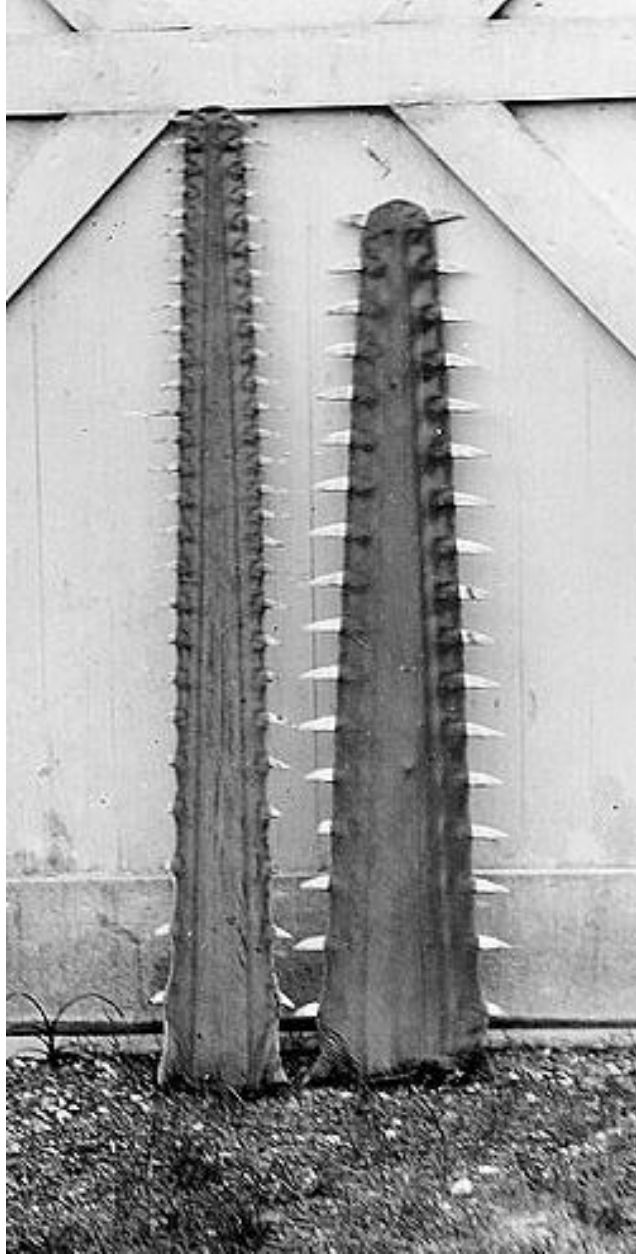
Large-tooth Sawfish

Pristis pristis



Smalltooth Sawfish

Pristis pectinata



Courtesy George Burgess,
Sawfish Conservation Society

Large-tooth Sawfish

Pristis pristis

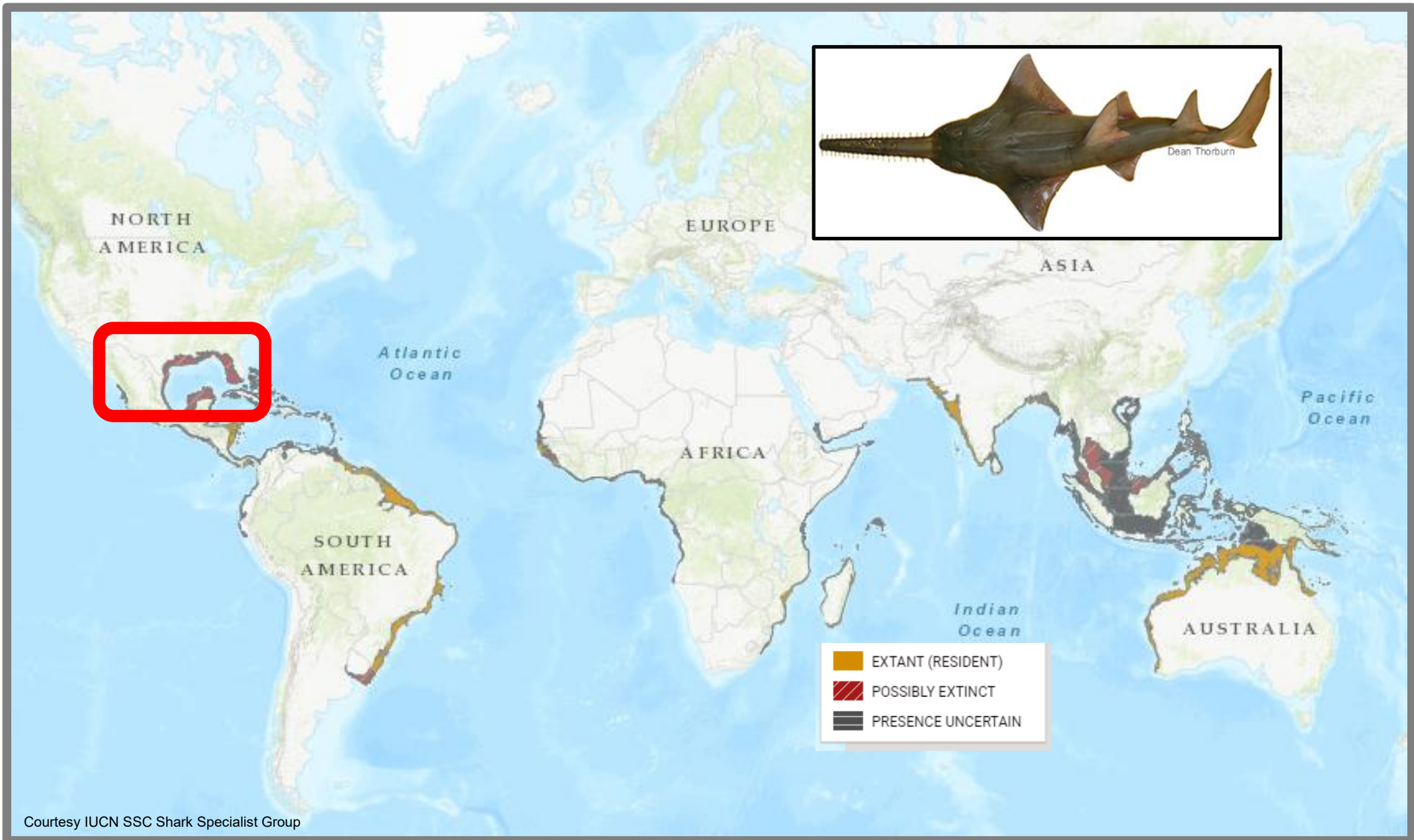
Last confirmed
U.S. record

Texas 1961

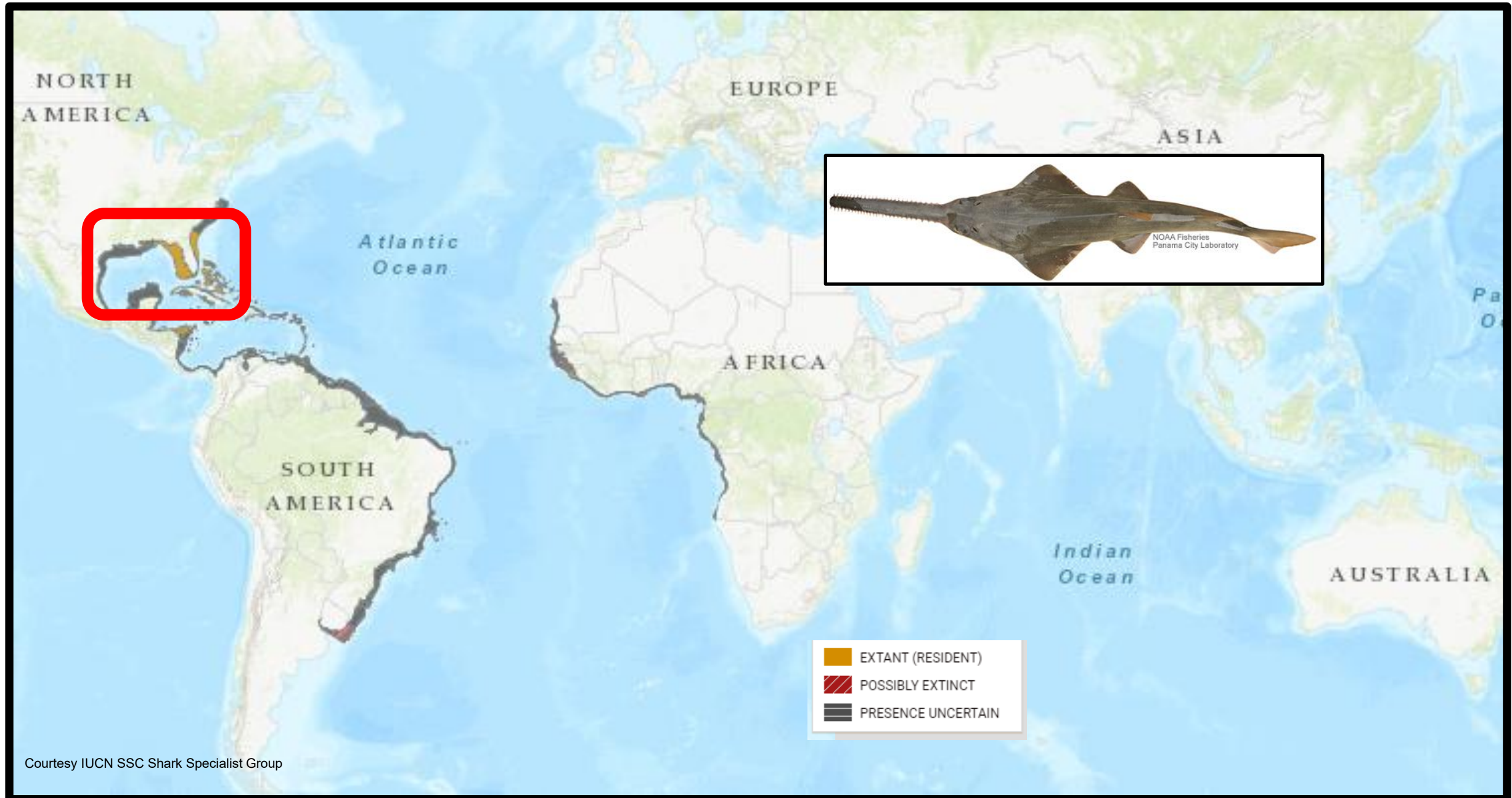
Locally extinct



Decline of Largetooth Sawfish



Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish



U.S. Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish

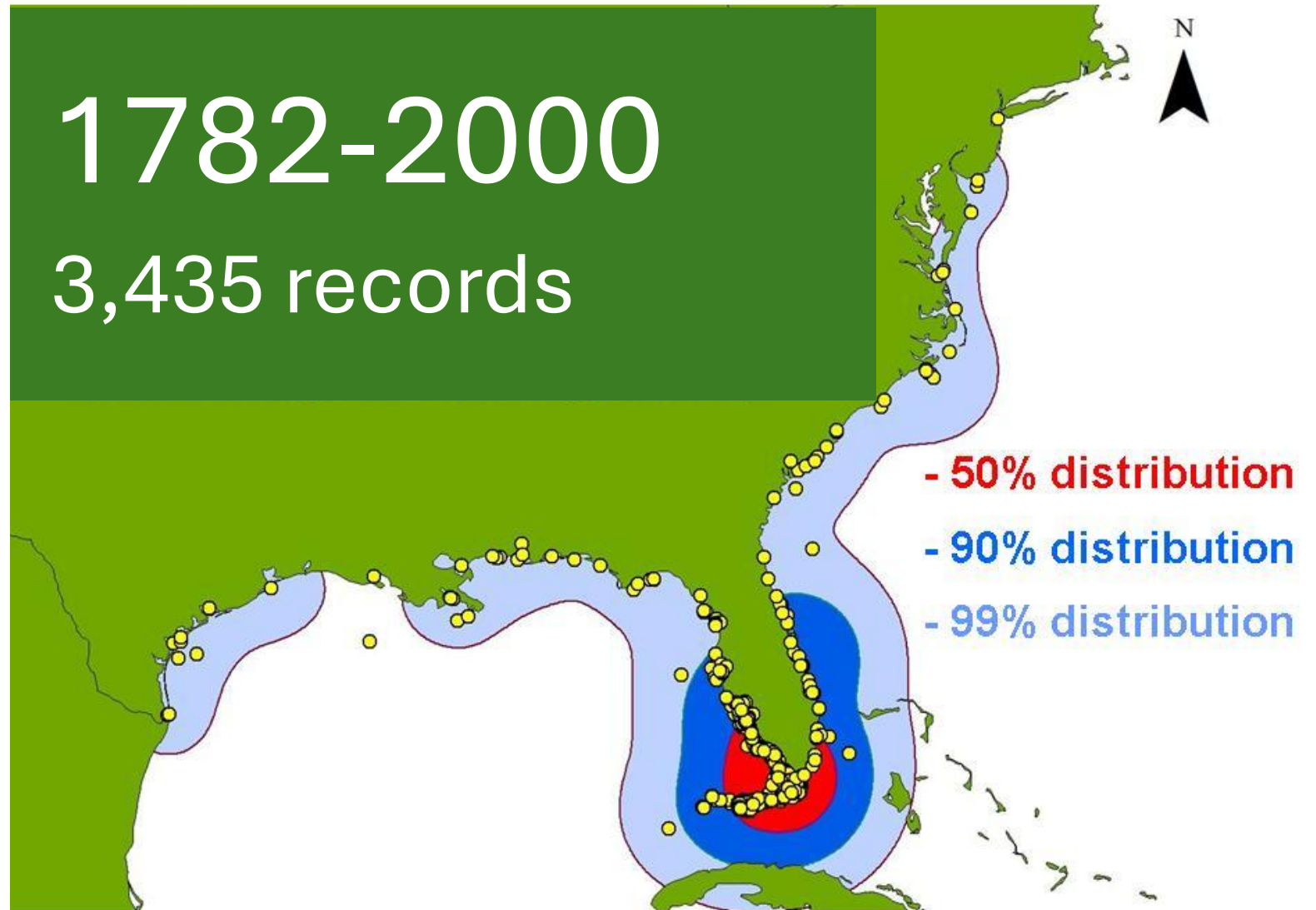
- Ranged from Texas to North Carolina
- Occasional migrants further north
- Most records in south Florida



Pristis pectinata – US records

1782-2000

3,435 records



Courtesy Florida Museum of Natural History

U.S. Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish

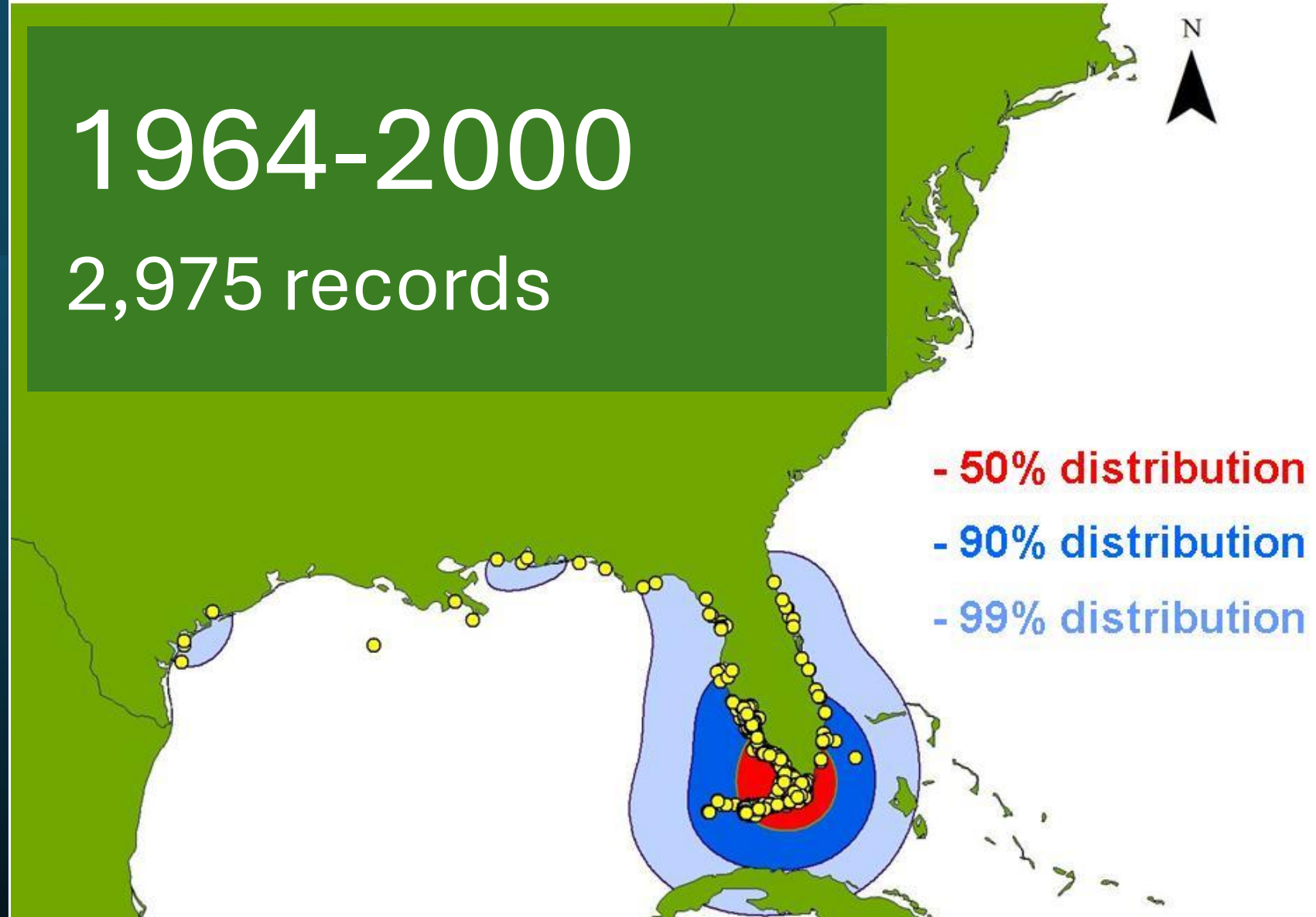
- Small numbers in western Gulf of Mexico
- No records north of Florida in Atlantic Ocean
- Most records in south Florida



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Pristis pectinata – US records

1964-2000
2,975 records



Courtesy Florida Museum of Natural History

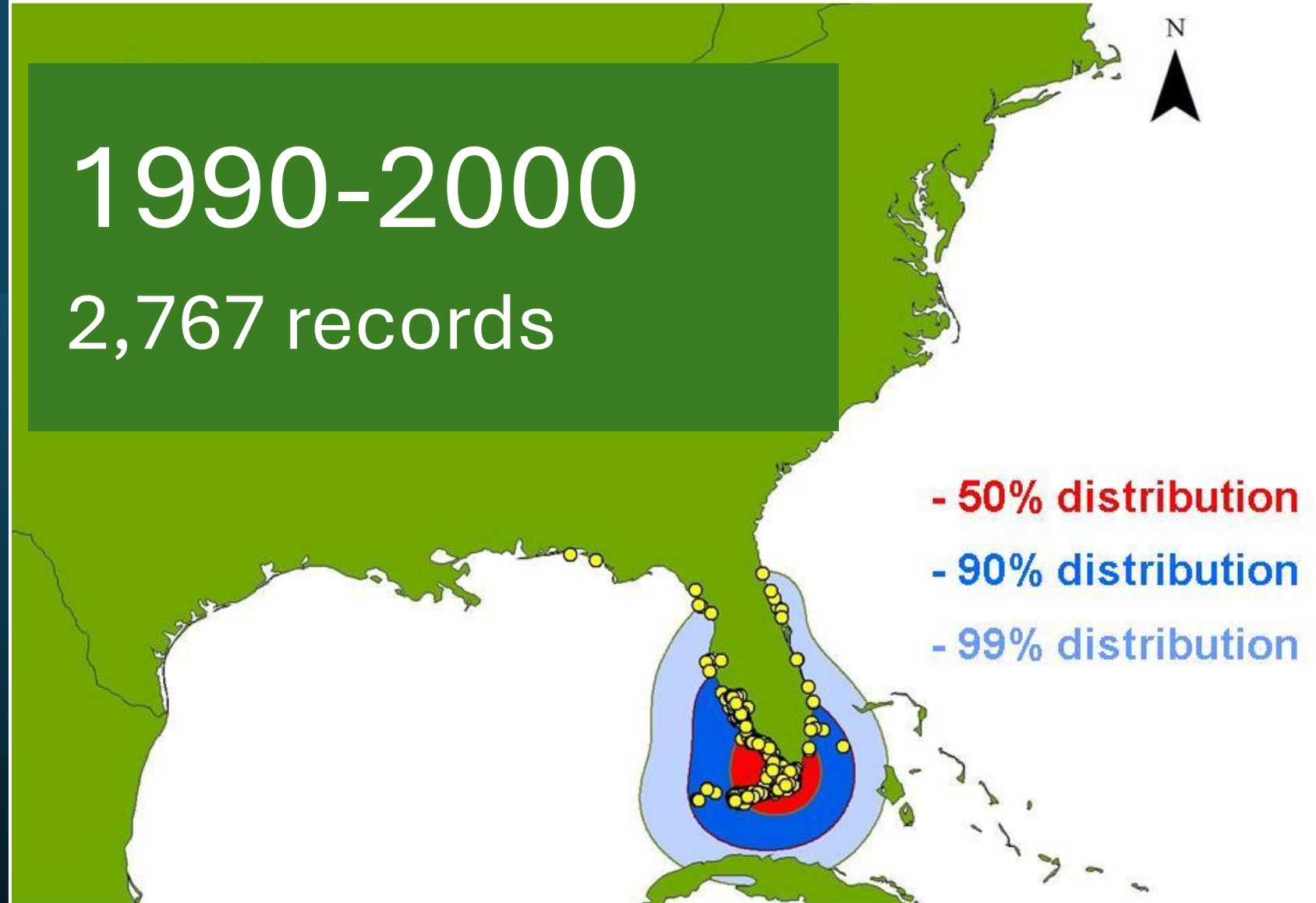
U.S. Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish

- No records outside Florida
 - Most records in south Florida



Pristis pectinata – US records

1990-2000
2,767 records



Response to Decline

1992

Protected from harvest in Florida

1999

Petition to list both species

2000

Status review completed

2003

ESA Endangered listing for smalltooth sawfish

2009

Recovery Plan published and juvenile Critical Habitat designated

Since 2009

Continuing research and implementing Recovery Plan



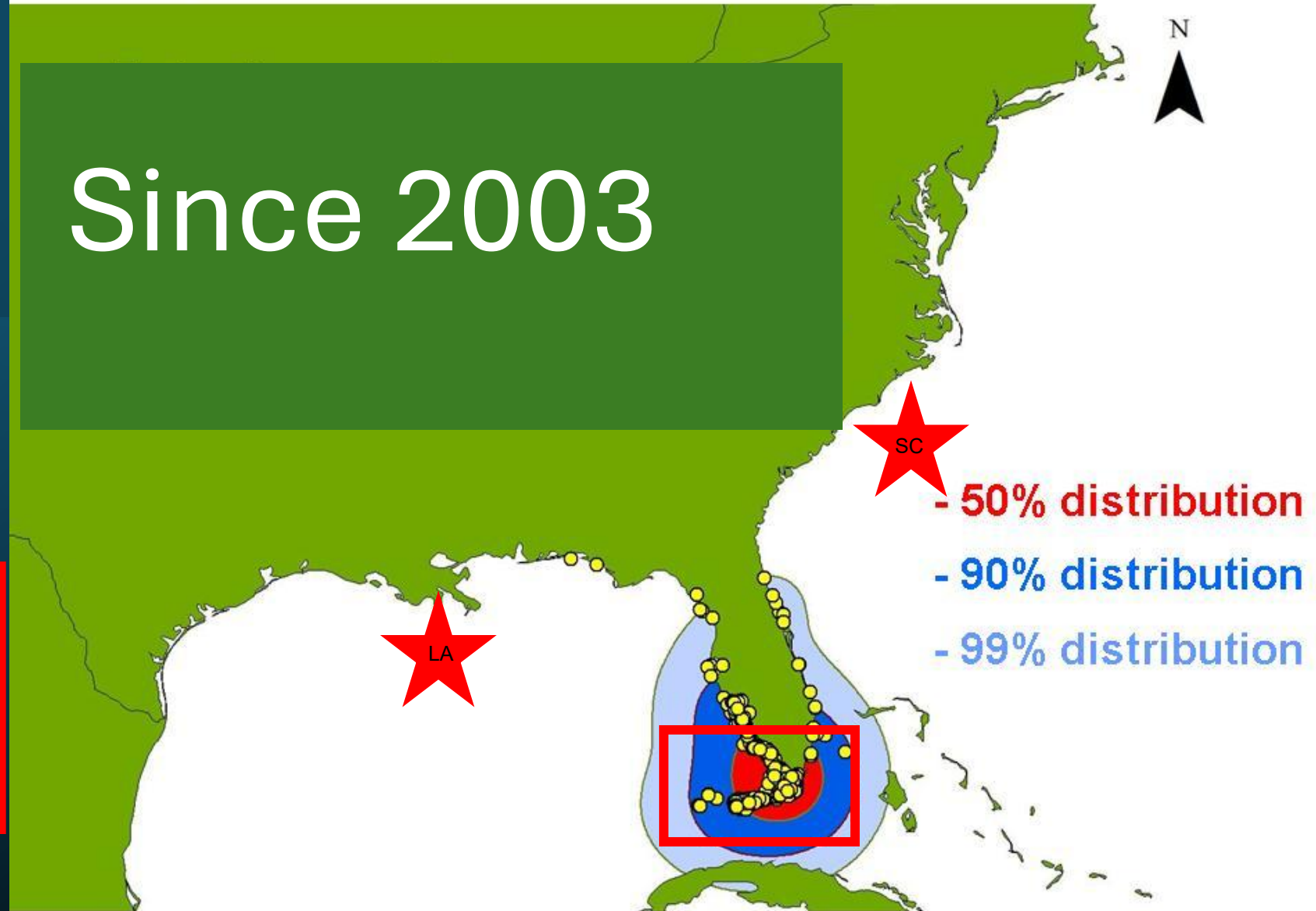
U.S. Decline of Smalltooth Sawfish

- Confirmed records in Louisiana and South Carolina

- Most records in south Florida**

Pristis pectinata – US records

Since 2003



Late 2023 Spinning Fish in the Florida Keys



More than 80 teleost, invertebrate, and elasmobranch species



Early 2024 Abnormal Sawfish Behavior



Sawfish Are Endangered Respect • Release • Report

Sawfish are protected by State and Federal laws:
It is illegal to harm, harvest, or handle sawfish



You Can Help Save Smalltooth Sawfish

Angler Guidance:

- ▶ Release sawfish immediately
- ▶ Never lift from the water or drag ashore
- ▶ Do not use gaffs or ropes to secure
- ▶ Cut the line as close to the hook as possible

Diver Guidance:

- ▶ Keep your distance
- ▶ Avoid disturbing sawfish
- ▶ Do not chase or pursue
- ▶ Never feed or touch

Share Information About Your Encounter

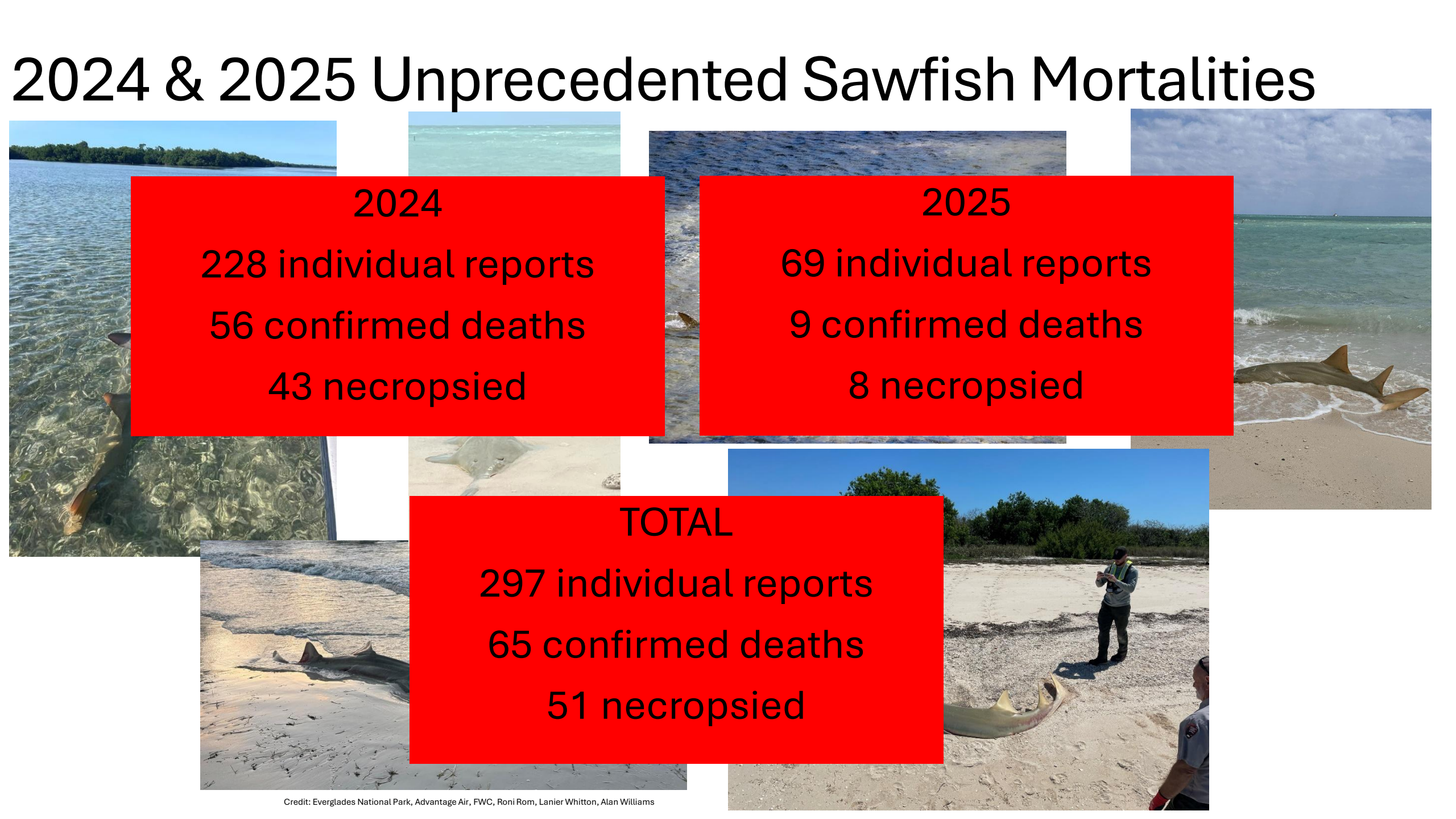
1-844-4SAWFISH

www.SawfishRecovery.org

The information you provide helps scientists track sawfish recovery



2024 & 2025 Unprecedented Sawfish Mortalities



2024

228 individual reports

56 confirmed deaths

43 necropsied

2025

69 individual reports

9 confirmed deaths

8 necropsied

TOTAL

297 individual reports

65 confirmed deaths

51 necropsied

Sawfish Recovery Team



Smalltooth Sawfish Recovery Implementation Team



Adam Brame
NOAA Sawfish Recovery
Coordinator

NOAA FISHERIES



Tonya Wiley
Team Leader

HAVENWORTH COASTAL CONSERVATION



Anonymous Foundation



Sonja Fordham

SHARK ADVOCATES INTERNATIONAL



Dean Grubbs

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY,
COASTAL AND MARINE LABORATORY



Gregg Poulakis

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION



John Carlson

NOAA FISHERIES



Symposium Topics



All activities performed under
authorization and guidance of NOAA
Fisheries Emergency Section 7
consultation #SERO-2024-00402

and ESA Section 10 permits
to Gregg Poulakis,
Tonya Wiley,
John Carlson,
and Colin Simpfendorfer.

Field observations

Cause of the spinning events

Cause of sawfish mortalities

Emergency response and rescue attempt

Opportunistic research from necropsies

Tracking, PVA, and genetic analysis

Long-term effects on U.S. smalltooth sawfish population

What this means for smalltooth sawfish in the U.S.

Why this symposium is so important!

- Given the limited population size of smalltooth sawfish, these mass mortality events could have a severe impact of the recovery of this species
- Affected sawfish and mortalities have been large juveniles and adults
- Concern about ability to reproduce and keep the population viable
- Species at severe risk and needs continued and more protections
- Recovery now uncertain and extinction is a real concern



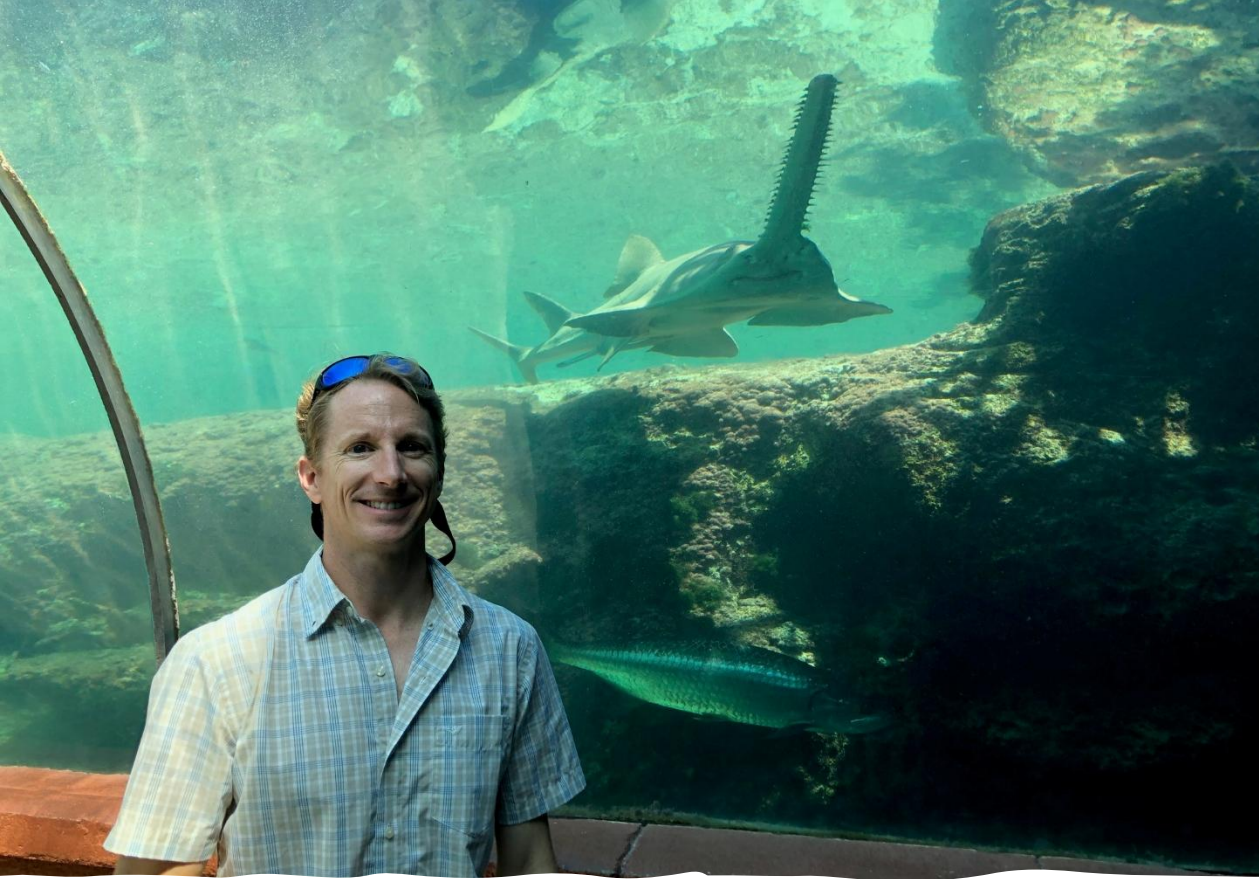
Symposium Group Photo!

-
- **ALL PRESENTERS**
 - In this room at NOON.



Courtesy Andrea Kroetz





**We now have data.
*What do we do next?***



Symposium Roundtable Discussion

- Led by Adam Brame, NOAA Fisheries Smalltooth Sawfish Recovery Coordinator
- In this room, at 4pm
- Future management and research directions

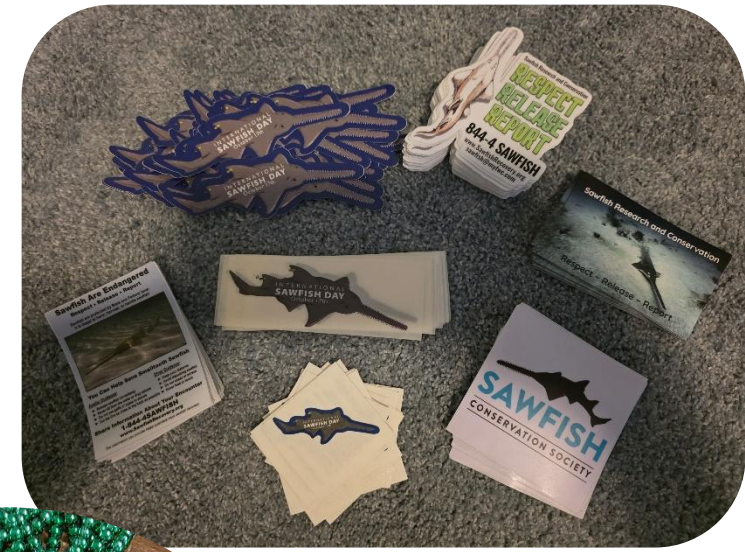
Symposium Social

- **7-10 pm tonight**
- Napoleon House
- 500 Chartres Street
- Hors d'oeuvres, cocktails,
wine, beer & sodas provided!



Symposium Swag Bag!!

- **ALL PRESENTERS** come find me to get your swag bag!!
- Thank you to Shark Conservation Fund and Ripley's Aquariums for the sawfish outreach funding!!



Shark
Conservation
Fund

**RIPLEY'S
AQUARIUMS**
MYRTLE BEACH | TORONTO | GATLINBURG

SAWFISH
CONSERVATION SOCIETY

**THE
DALLAS
WORLD
AQUARIUM**

**THE
FLORIDA
NOMAD
APPAREL**

Thank You Symposium Sponsors!



save our seas
foundation



All activities during the
“spinning fish events”
performed under the authority
and guidelines of
NOAA Fisheries Emergency
Section 7 Consultation
#SERO-2024-00402

Non-spinning-event research
activities performed under
authority of
ESA Section 10 permits
to Gregg Poulakis,
Tonya Wiley,
John Carlson, and
Colin Simpfendorfer