

# US: Oceanic whitetip shark warrants 'threatened' listing

February 5 2017, by Patrick Whittle

---



In this June 21, 2008, photo provided by the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, a whitetip shark swims off Cat Island in the Bahamas. The National Marine Fisheries Service said in December 2016 that the sharks are likely to become endangered. Threats to the sharks include fishing pressure all over the world, as their fins are prized in Asian markets for use in soup. (Neil Hammerschlag/University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science via AP)

The oceanic whitetip shark's declining status in the wild warrants listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, an arm of the federal government has determined.

The shark is found around the world, mostly in open water, and the conservation group Defenders of Wildlife called on the government to list the species. The listing would be the most widespread shark listing in the U.S. to date.

The National Marine Fisheries Service said in a document published in the Federal Register in December that the [sharks](#) are indeed likely to become endangered in all or at least a significant portion of their range "within the foreseeable future."

Threats to the sharks include fishing pressure all over the world, as their fins are prized in Asian markets for use in soup. The sharks have declined by 80 to 90 percent in the Pacific Ocean since the 1990s, and 50 percent to 85 percent in the Atlantic Ocean since the 1950s, said Chelsey Young, a natural resource management specialist for the fisheries service.

"The oceanic whitetip has very large pectoral fins, and so they have fetched a high price on the international market in Asia," Young said. "It incentivized the fin trade."

The [fisheries service](#) is collecting public comments about the shark's status until March and is expected to make a final decision in November. Listing the species as threatened would afford it protections aimed at recovery.

The shark is also listed as "vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species. Additional protections would only help, said Lora Snyder, a campaign director for

conservation group Oceana. The group has also pushed for a broader ban on the U.S. shark fin trade, which is already restricted.

"In order to truly combat the global trade of [shark fins](#), which kills tens of millions of sharks every year, we need to pass a full ban in the U.S. on the buying and selling of shark fins," Snyder said.

Attacks on humans by the sharks are extremely rare. Oceanic whitetips are thought to be responsible for some of the deaths of sailors who were aboard the USS Indianapolis, a Navy cruiser that was sunk during World War II. But there have been only 10 documented non-provoked attacks on humans by the sharks, according to the Florida Museum, which collects records about [shark attacks](#).

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: US: Oceanic whitetip shark warrants 'threatened' listing (2017, February 5) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-oceanic-whitetip-shark-warrants-threatened.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--