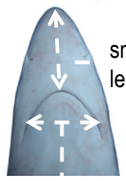
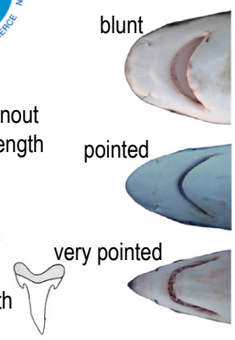
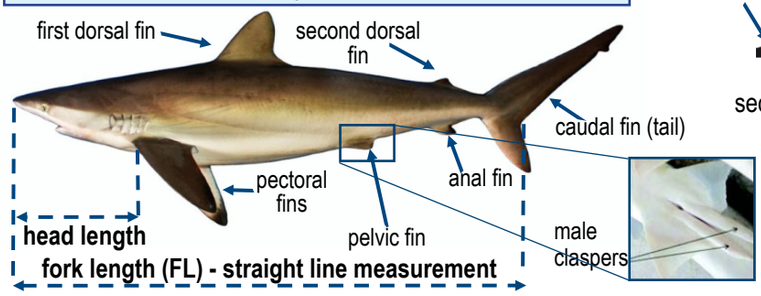
# Shark Identification and Federal Regulations

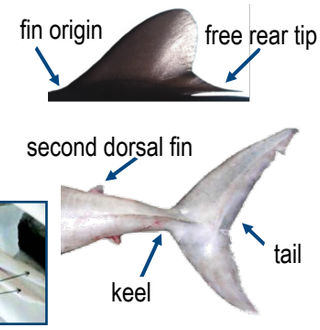
## for the Recreational Fishery of the U.S. Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean




### Anatomy of a Shark



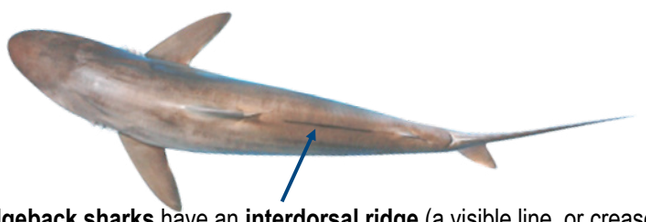




**Federal fishing permit required in federal waters. Purchase at hmspermits.noaa.gov.**
HMS recreational permit holders that fish for sharks will need to obtain a shark endorsement.

| Authorized species | Minimum size (fork lenth) | Bag limit (per trip) |
|---|---|---|
| Smoothhound Shark | None | None |
| Atlantic sharpnose Shark | None | 1 per person |
| Bonnethead Shark | None | 1 per person |
| Hammerheads (great, scalloped, and smooth) | 78 inches | 1 hammerhead, or other shark per vessel |
| Other sharks | 54 inches | |

Recreational anglers are required to use non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks except when fishing with flies or artificial lures.

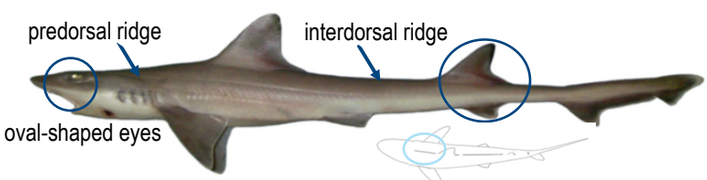
All ridgeback sharks are prohibited, except **Tiger, Oceanic Whitetip, and Smoothhound**.
Prohibited ridgeback sharks include **Bignose, Caribbean Reef, Dusky, Galapagos, Night, Sandbar,** and **Silky**. For more details on prohibited species, please refer to the Prohibited Species Placard.



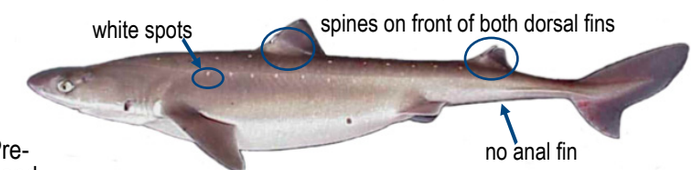
**Ridgeback sharks** have an **interdorsal ridge** (a visible line, or crease of raised skin between dorsal fins)

**Tiger Shark**: Snout length much shorter than mouth width; markings fade with age; max. size 15 feet; coastal and offshore

**Oceanic Whitetip Shark**: Young sharks have black mottling on most fins; does not always have interdorsal ridge; max. size 8 ft; offshore
**Cannot be retained if tuna, swordfish, or billfish are onboard**




**Smoothhound**: (a.k.a. smooth dogfish and Florida/Gulf smouthhound) Pre-dorsal ridge present; second dorsal fin slightly smaller than first dorsal fin and much larger than anal fin; max. size 5ft; coastal and offshore

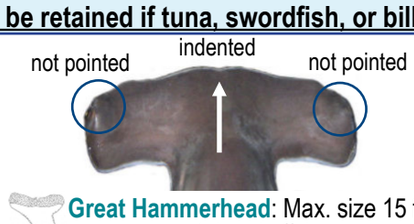



**Spiny Dogfish**: Max. size 4 ft; coastal and offshore
There are no recreational restrictions for **Spiny Dogfish**

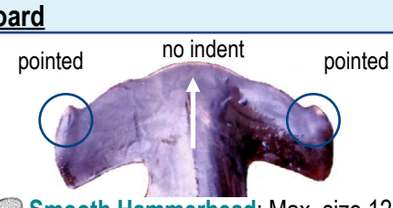
### Scalloped Hammerheads, Great Hammerheads, and Smooth Hammerheads

**Cannot be retained if tuna, swordfish, or billfish are onboard**

**Scalloped Hammerhead**: Max. size 11 ft; coastal and offshore

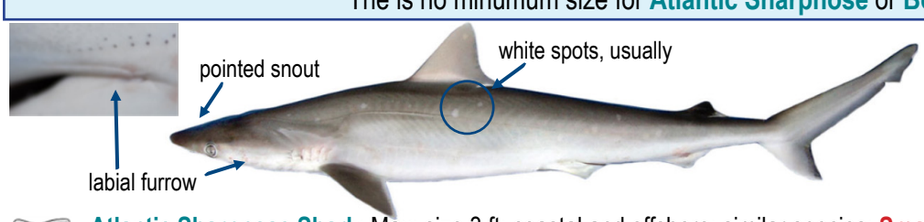



**Great Hammerhead**: Max. size 15 ft; coastal and offshore

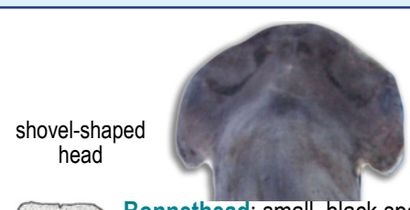



**Smooth Hammerhead**: Max. size 12 ft; coastal and offshore

The is no minumum size for **Atlantic Sharpnose** or **Bonnethead Sharks**




**Atlantic Sharpnose Shark**: Max: size 3 ft; coastal and offshore; similar species: **Smalltail** sharks have very reduced labial furrows and **Caribbean Sharpnose** sharks lack white spots.




**Bonnethead**: small, black spots on body; max. size 4 ft; mostly coastal

All sharks are not identical. These are common characteristics. Young sharks can vary in appearance from adults. Maximum sizes are approximate.

Photographs and illustrations provided by NMFS, J. Castro, W.B. Driggers III, E.R. Hoffmayer, and S. Iglésias. Prohibited species are underlined in red
https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species. Revised June 2022

***If you don't know, let it go***

# Use this key to identify non-ridgeback sharks

**Single dorsal fin** — YES → **Sharpnose Sevengill Shark**: (pictured) Max. size 4 ft; offshore deepwater; or **Sixgill Shark** (not pictured)

NO ↓

**Flattened body** — YES → **Atlantic Angel Shark**: Max. size 5 ft; offshore deepwater

NO ↓

**Blunt snout with mouth at tip; first dorsal fin above pelvic fins** — YES → Dark body with many white spots; lower lobe of tail well-developed — YES → **Whale Shark**: Max. size 45 ft; mostly offshore

NO ↓

Orange/brown body; lower lobe of tail poorly developed — YES → **Nurse Shark**: Max. size 10 ft; mostly coastal

NO ↓

**First and second dorsal fins nearly same size** — YES → Blunt snout; second dorsal fin origin directly above anal fin origin — YES → **Lemon Shark**: Max. size 10 ft; mostly coastal

NO ↓

Pointed snout; second dorsal fin origin well in front of anal fin origin — YES → **Sand Tiger**: All three species of sand tiger sharks are prohibited

NO ↓

**Very long tail (upper lobe)** — YES → Eyes extend to top of head; distinct grooves from above eyes to gill slits — YES → **Bigeye Thresher Shark**: (not pictured) Max. size 8 ft; mostly offshore

NO ↓ **Thresher Shark**: Max. size 9 ft; mostly offshore

NO ↓

**Tail lobes (upper and lower) nearly same size; very pointed snout** — YES → Single caudal keel on each side — YES → First dorsal fin origin behind pectoral fins — YES → Gill slits very long, extending from upper head to nearly middle of throat; teeth very small — YES → **Basking Shark**: (not pictured) Max. size 35 ft; offshore

NO ↓

Head longer than pectoral fin — YES → **Shortfin Mako:** Max. size 12 ft; mostly offshore

NO ↓ **Longfin Mako Shark**: (not pictured) Max. size 13 ft; offshore

NO ↓ **White Shark**: Max. size 20 ft; coastal and offshore

**Porbeagle sharks must be released alive and unharmed if swordfish, tunas, or billfish are onboard.**

NO ↓

**Upper tail lobe obviously longer than lower lobe** — YES → Two caudal keels on each side; first dorsal fin origin above pectoral fins; white marking on rear edge of first dorsal fin — YES → **Porbeagle**: Max. size 11 ft; mostly offshore

Midpoint of first dorsal fin closer to pelvic fins than pectoral fins — YES → **Blue Shark**: Bright blue coloration; max. size 11 ft; mostly offshore

NO ↓

Blunt snout shorter than mouth width — YES → **Bull Shark**: Max. size 9 ft; mostly coastal, but can be offshore

NO ↓

Pointed snout — YES → Black tips on pectoral fins and tail — YES → Black tips on most fins except anal fin; snout length same or shorter than mouth width — YES → **Blacktip Shark**: Max. size 6 ft; coastal and offshore

NO ↓

Black tip on anal fin (except young sharks); snout length same or longer than mouth width; first dorsal fin origin behind pectoral fin — YES → **Spinner Shark**: Max. size 8 ft; coastal and offshore

NO ↓

Grey to blue body; teeth same in upper and lower jaw — YES → **Finetooth Shark**: Max. size 5 ft; mostly coastal

NO ↓

Grey to yellow body; black marking usually on tip of snout; teeth different in upper & lower jaw; second dorsal fin may have markings, but not other fins — YES → **Blacknose Shark**: Max. size 4 ft; coastal and offshore

***If you don't know, let it go***

**All species that may be retained in Federal waters are shown on this placard | Prohibited species are underlined in red**