

Sharks in Florida Worth More in the Water: A 2016 Economic Analysis





Healthy shark populations are vital to ocean ecosystems and equally important to local economies.

Global shark tourism is a rapidly growing industry. A 2017 independent report commissioned by Oceana found that in Florida alone, direct expenditures by divers such as boat rentals, food and lodging for shark-encounter dives totaled roughly \$221 million and fueled over 3,700 jobs in 2016.¹ However, these highly valued animals are facing serious threats and are in need of protection.

Sharks are caught and killed, on average, 30 percent faster than they can reproduce,² and because of this, nearly one in four species are threatened with extinction.³ Human activities are the leading cause of these population declines.³

One of the greatest threats facing sharks is the demand for their fins.⁴ In fact, fins from as many as 73 million sharks end up in the global shark fin trade every year.⁵ This demand has led to the wasteful and inhumane practice of shark finning — cutting the fins off a shark and discarding its body at sea, often still alive, only to drown, starve to

An independent study commissioned by Oceana showed that the value of Florida shark diving in 2016 is more than 200 times the value of shark fin exports for the entire U.S. in 2015.¹

death, or be eaten alive. This practice is illegal in U.S. waters but finning continues in many areas of the world, and shark fins are still being imported to and exported from the U.S.

Once the fins have been sliced from the body of a shark and put on the market, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether they came from sharks that were caught legally or those caught illegally or in unmanaged, and therefore unsustainable, fisheries.

In an effort to combat the global shark fin trade, 11 states and three U.S. territories have passed laws that ban the buying and selling of shark fin products. Despite this, the remaining states continue to allow the trade of shark fins,

including those imported from countries that do not have finning prohibitions.^{6,7}

A national prohibition on shark fin products is the best way to ensure the U.S. is no longer participating in this global trade. Simply put: this study shows that sharks in Florida are worth millions of dollars to the U.S. economy when they are alive and swimming in the ocean.

By the Numbers

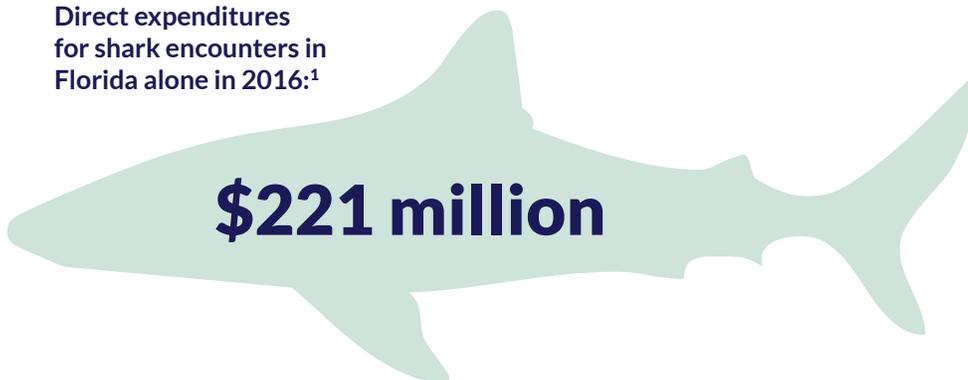
To be specific, direct expenditures from shark encounters in Florida alone contributed \$221 million to the economy in 2016.¹ This represents a reoccurring benefit to the economy as long as sharks are swimming in the ocean.⁸ In contrast, the value of shark fin exports from the entire United States was a little more than \$1 million in 2015.⁹

Whether for economic or ecological reasons, the United States should take the next step in shark conservation by passing the bipartisan Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act. The bill would ban the possession and sale of shark fins in the U.S., remove the U.S. as a global actor in the fin trade, eliminate U.S.-caught fins from the global shark fin trade and protect shark populations that are contributing millions of dollars to local economies.

VALUE OF SHARKS: FLORIDA'S DIVE BUSINESSES VS. FIN EXPORTS

Direct expenditures for shark encounters in Florida alone in 2016:¹

\$221 million



Exports of shark fins from the U.S. in 2015:⁹

\$1.03 million



DOLLARS AND DIVES¹ Sharks Brought Big Bucks to Florida Dive Businesses in 2016



Total economic impact for shark encounters was over

\$377 million

Shark encounters generated wages of more than

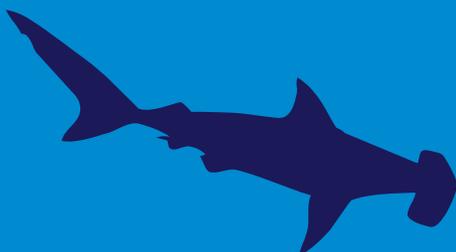
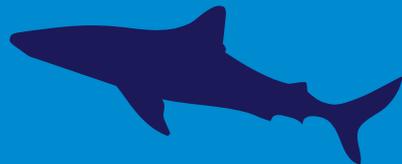
\$116 million

Direct expenditures for shark encounters totaled over

\$221 million

Shark encounters fueled over

3,700 jobs





Shark Tourism: A Growing Industry

Shark tourism is a growing industry,¹⁰ however the demand for shark fins, as a contributor to the global decline of sharks, can threaten ocean-based tourist economies. People all over the world are recognizing the beauty and importance of these creatures, and are increasingly seeking opportunities to interact with sharks through diving and snorkeling.

According to the Florida economic analysis, a survey of dive operators revealed how vital sharks are to Florida's economy. In Florida alone, there are at least 365 dive operation businesses, and a substantial portion of their incomes comes from shark diving.¹

The Florida economic analysis identified two kinds of shark diving:

In the long run, sharks in Florida are simply more valuable alive and in the water, with all of their appendages attached.

shark encounters and targeted shark dives — the latter representing a subset of shark encounters.

Shark encounters are trips in which customers expressed interest in seeing sharks, so the guides took them to known shark gathering spots. In targeted shark dives, customers pay money explicitly for the purpose of seeing a shark. In 2016, general shark encounters generated about \$221 million, including more than \$126 million from targeted shark diving alone, which represented \$67 million¹ in wages and over 2,100 jobs.

Dive operators reported that more than 32 percent of their dive time was dedicated to shark encounters, and that nearly 20 percent of their dive time was dedicated specifically to targeted shark dives.¹ Due to the limitations of this study, these numbers are likely conservative, but provide an initial indication of the economic impacts associated with shark-related diving.

In the long run, sharks in Florida are simply more valuable alive and in the water, with all of their appendages attached.

Researchers anticipate further growth and estimate that shark tourism could double in the next 20 years.¹⁰



Surveys
were sent
to 365 dive
operators in
the state of
Florida¹

237

*responded and results were
weighted to represent all
365 active dive operators*

88.6%

*were considered
small operations
(<10,000 trips per year)*

11.4%

*were considered
large operations
(>10,000 trips per year)*

MANY COMPANIES AND STATES HAVE BANNED SHARK FIN

Many domestic and international companies, as well as 11 states and three U.S. territories, have refused to participate in the shark fin trade. As a world leader in fisheries management and conservation, it's time for the entire U.S. to do the same and ban the shark fin trade.



19+ Shipping Companies



35+ Airlines

including American Airlines, Air France, Air Hong Kong, British Airways and Lufthansa



11 U.S. States and 3 Territories

California, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam



7 Additional Corporations

Amazon, Disney, Fairmont Hotels Group, GrubHub, Hilton Worldwide, Marriott Hotel Group and Starwood Hotels and Resorts



The United States of America

Conclusion

Living sharks are vital not just to ocean ecosystems, but to our economy. Congress recognized the need to protect sharks when it outlawed finning in 2000 with the Shark Finning Prohibition Act, and again in 2010 when it closed loopholes in that law.¹¹

However, fins — including those from countries that allow finning — are still being bought and sold in the United States.¹² By allowing this trade, the United States is undermining small businesses and threatening thousands of diving and tourism jobs that depend on healthy shark populations, both in the U.S. and around the world.

As sharks disappear, jobs may follow. A shark in the water will continue to attract divers and their dollars as long as it is alive. It's time for Congress to stand up for sharks and for the small businesses that depend on them by passing the Shark Fin Trade Elimination Act.



OCEANA Protecting the
World's Oceans