



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Best Practices for Recreational Anglers to Handle Sharks

Many of the shark species commonly caught in Massachusetts waters may not be retained under state and federal regulations. Accordingly, it is critical for anglers to be able to properly identify shark species and to know how to properly release these animals. Shore-based anglers in Massachusetts will catch mostly shark species that may not be retained, such as sandbar sharks ("brown sharks"), dusky sharks, and sand tiger sharks. While vessel-based anglers may also capture these species and others that cannot be retained, they may also encounter blue sharks, porbeagle sharks, and thresher sharks, which can be retained. If you catch a shark and cannot identify it, release it.

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) recommends that all anglers familiarize themselves with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries' [online materials for Atlantic shark identification](#) and sign up for an [Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop](#). These resources will educate you on how to properly identify shark species and teach you best handling practices for release. The Atlantic Shark Identification Workshop is a mandatory requirement when obtaining a NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Permit to fish for sharks in federal waters but remains a voluntary program for vessel and shore-based anglers operating exclusively in state waters.

If you do catch a shark that may not be retained or a shark that you do not wish to retain, you must release the animal in a manner that maximizes its survival. Techniques to maximize survival include releasing the animal when it is in the water and cutting the leader as close to the hook as possible, allowing it to eventually fall out. Do not sit on top of the animal, pull it or lift it, or drag it up on land. We recognize that there is a strong impulse to conduct these activities to take a picture of the animal, however, these activities may harm or kill the shark and are unlawful. If you are retaining a shark species for personal use, do not remove its fins, fillet the shark, or remove the head or tail when at sea.

Recreational anglers are also advised that when fishing for sharks, you are required to fish only with non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks (unless fishing with flies or artificial lures). Additionally, anglers fishing from shore may not chum during daylight hours (sunrise to sunset); may not use mechanized propulsion, compressed propulsion, or remote-controlled devices to deploy bait; and

may not fish terminal tackle that consists of a metal or wire leader 18 inches or greater with a hook that has a gap of 5/8 inch or greater if fishing along the shoreline of Plymouth Point around the shoreline of Cape Cod Bay and the eastern shore of Cape Cod to Stage Harbor (Chatham), including all coasts of Monomoy Island, and all of the Nantucket shoreline.

For more information, please visit our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries