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SHARKDIVERTM MAGAZINE

ISSUE 23

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THE MOVEMENT

SHARK-FREE MARINA



WE SUPPORT
CATCH AND RELEASE

Bimini Sands Resort & Marina supports the Shark-Free Marinas Initiative. The Bahamas is home to many shark species, all of which play a crucial role in balancing the health of the ocean. We feel that the harvesting of sharks for photo images or souvenir jaws is not in the best interests of the Bahamian people or Bahamian tourism.

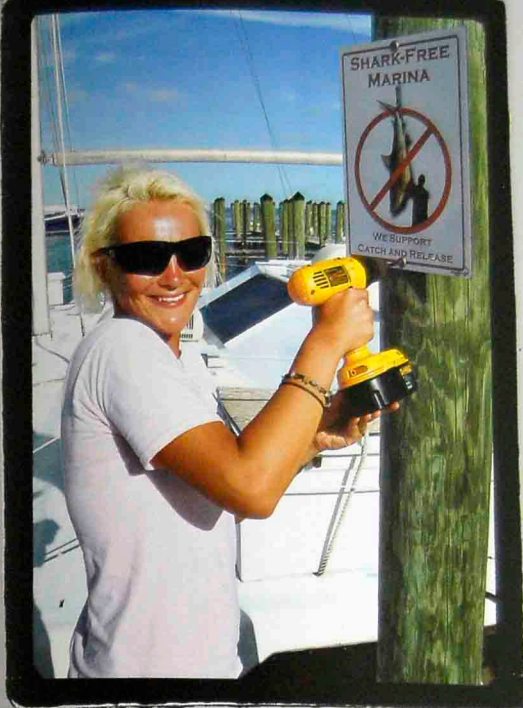
Worldwide, sharks are being decimated for fins and jaws at a completely unsustainable rate. An estimated 60 million sharks per year are taken in this manner. By asking vessels not to arrive at our facilities with sharks, we hope to encourage responsible sport-fishing. By ensuring a lasting and healthy population of sharks in Bahamian waters, we can contribute to the overall health of the Caribbean & surrounding regions.

Please practice Catch-&-Release with all sharks and enjoy our facilities.
Welcome to the Bahamas.

Article by Jillian Morris

One of the signs at the Bimini Sands Marina - Image by Jillian Morris

Each year millions of sharks are killed globally. A large percentage are killed to supply the shark fin industry. As a result, anti finning has become the focal point for the shark conservation movement. However sport fishing is also a primary culprit in the decimation of these animals. The Shark Free Marina Initiative is targeting an issue that hits closer to home for many people.



Jillian Morris putting up a sign—image by Duncan Brake



Sign at the entrance of the Bimini Sands Marina—image by Jillian Morris



Duncan Brake, Luther Ferguson, Jackie Carroll, Sharon Whyms and Jillian Morris pose with a sign at Old Bahama Bay - image by Nathan Moody

NUMEROUS SPECIES OF SHARKS are revered as prize game fish; launching expeditions reminiscent of Captain Ahab's. A man standing next to a massive shark, strung up on the dock, has become an iconic symbol for sport fishing. Jaws are cut out to take home as a memento of the epic battle between man and beast. Cash prizes are even handed out for killing the biggest or the most sharks in organized competitions. This is a reality that is not only happening on the other side of the world, but right in our own back yards.

The Shark Free Marina Initiative is encouraging people to take local action, through its' dedication to reducing shark mortalities. Marinas that sign on make a commitment to prohibit the landing of any shark species for any reason within their facility. This means people cannot process the meat, cut out the jaws, or bring in dead animal for photographs. There is also no shark fishing allowed within the marina. The goal is to encourage catch and release of these creatures if people insist on catching them at all. The program also facilitates instruction of proper catch and release techniques. Certain species, including hammerheads and Caribbean reefs, are highly susceptible to the stress of being captured. If handled improperly, they often die shortly after release.

This campaign is spreading rapidly across the globe. Marinas from the Bahamas to Fiji have made the promise to be Shark Free. The *Bimini Sands Resort and Marina* took a bold step, with a strong push from Recreation Managers Grant Johnson and Katie Grudecki, and was the first in the Bahamas to join the campaign. Big game fishing is as deeply rooted in Bimini's culture as Hemingway and rum. Weekend warriors show up with the hopes of landing the big one and stringing it up on the dock for all to see. The owner of the Sands felt that it was not only important, but also necessary to protect the natural resources of this very small island. Most people do not want to see a bloody animal carcass strewn all over the dock. Marinas and resort owners are realizing it is not only bad for the environment, but also bad for business.

As Regional Ambassadors for the campaign, Duncan Brake and I have continued to push for the support of other marinas throughout the Bahamas. In September of 2009, after nearly 6 months of deliberation, *Old Bahama Bay Marina* joined the campaign. Located on the West End of Grand Bahama Island, this marina is the customs clearance point for all liveboards that visit Tiger Beach. It is also one of the busiest marinas in the Caribbean. Tiger Beach is a world famous shark spot that draws scientists, film crews and divers from across the globe. As a gateway to this underwater Mecca, Director of Operations Nathan Moody, felt that it was Old Bahama Bay's duty to protect it anyway possible. He was integral in pushing this forward, despite the initial obstacles he faced. General Manager Jackie Carroll, Transportation Director Luther Ferguson and dock attendant Sharon Whyms, joined us for the official hanging of signs. Old Bahamas Bay's participation sets a strong and powerful example for other marinas within the Bahamas and marks a huge success for the SFMI.

I was also fortunate enough to take, Luther Ferguson, a native Bahamian, on a trip to Tiger Beach. Over the course of 3 days I saw an amazing transformation in Luther's opinion of sharks. Raised on the island, he was taught from an early age to hate these animals. On the last day of our trip Luther pulled me aside to ask how he could get certified to scuba dive. Watching from the boat was not enough; he wanted to slip beneath the surface and see the sharks up close. He compared the sharks swimming around the boat to Bahamians dancing; beautiful and something you just feel in your soul. Conversations like this confirm my belief that first hand experience is the most powerful tool in our fight to save sharks. Writing about it now, gives me goose bumps. It is a testament to the impact the Shark Free Marina Initiative is having.

For more information please check out the website;
www.sharkfreemarinas.com