

AMERICAN HORSESHOE CRAB

Limulus polyphemus

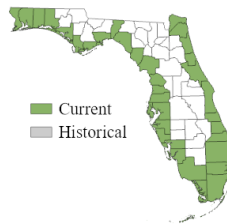
Order: Xiphosura

Family: Limulidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none



Description: Unique in the Americas. Distinctive rounded, hard body consisting of a cephalothorax (carapace) with a hinge at the abdomen and at the telson (tail). Tail length roughly the same as body length. Five pairs of appendages underneath carapace. Sex can be determined by the first pair of appendages. Females have claws while males have enlarged claspers that superficially resemble boxing gloves (Gerhart 2007).

Similar Species: Rays and skates have a similar shape but their bodies are made of soft flesh surrounding a cartilaginous skeleton. Horseshoe crabs have a hard exoskeleton.

Habitat: Adults spend most of their life along the continental shelf at depths sometimes exceeding 200 meters but return to shorelines to spawn (Smith et al. 2016). Juveniles occupy the intertidal zone and sand flats for the first two years of life (Rudloe 1981).

Seasonal Occurrence: Present year-round.

Florida Distribution: Present in every coastal county in Florida (Gerhart 2007).

Range-wide Distribution: From Maine to Louisiana along coastlines. Absent from Texas. A disjunct population also occurs along the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico (ASMC 2019).

Conservation Status: Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Florida. A fishery is actively managed by the state.

Protection and Management: Shorelines affected by erosion and the erection of man-made structures should be restored to natural conditions. Separate

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management strategies based on genetically distinct populations may be necessary (Gerhart 2007).

References: Rudloe 1980, Rudloe 1981, Penn and Brockmann 1994, King et al. 2005, Gerhart 2007, Smith et al. 2016, ASMC 2019



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