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## Save endangered sharks, our living 'dinosaurs' this Earth Day and every day

 [Pacifica Beach Coalition](#) | *Special to the Pacifica Tribune*

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As Earth Day 2013 approaches, we look forward to the beach cleanups and environmental actions to be held throughout Pacifica and the enactment of the Plastic Bag Ban, please take a long moment to look out upon the immense aliveness and power that is our nearby Pacific Ocean. In the next most critical climate years, not 50, not 25, but 10 years, our actions in one way or another will directly impact the oceanic composition and thereby this world's climate. This year, Pacifica Beach Coalition has chosen to honor and dedicate our work to the shark, a living endangered species and dinosaur. As you participate in this year's activities, consider helping the sharks of the seas by "Taking a Bite Out of Litter" by using reusable bags, minimizing waste and picking litter up, wherever and whenever you see it. Help our local ocean conservation non-profits take a stand against shark finning, long-line fishing and other threats that litter poses to the sharks and all ocean inhabitants. Ask yourself which side of humanity's impact equation you are on: will you actively and consciously Take A Bite Out of Litter or will you look the other way while our waterways choke with plastic litter, to forever affect the ocean ecosystem?

Back when our Earth was 400 million years younger, in the Pangea days before mammals swarmed the continents, sharks roamed the seas. It was a noticeably more voracious time with sharks competing with multitudes of now extinct, equally voracious, sea creatures. These ancient sharks, members of the subclass Elasmobranchii, evolved in a highly competitive world, with naught but their instincts and highly-adapted natural gifts to guide them. So, how have their descendants fared?

Though versatile and despite having weathered conditions that resulted in extinction bursts in other species, a third of pelagic shark species are now threatened or near threatened to extinction in the face of human consumption; while our population of Great White shark may be classified as endangered. With a count of nearly 500 species of sharks to date, modern-day sharks are classified within the Selachimorpha (or Selachii), and are the sister group to the skates, rays and the chimaera. Ranging in size from 6.7 inch (17 cm) for the small Dwarf Lantern Shark to 39 feet for the Whale Shark, sharks have been found worldwide, with the San Francisco Bay Area and Puget Sound being two of the important West Coast nurseries. Sharks are common to a depth of 6,600 feet (2,000 meters) mostly in salt water, but with a rare freshwater species located in Lake Managua, Nicaragua.

Have you touched a shark's skin? If you had, you'd know it has a sandpaper quality, exotic to the touch with a glistening otherworldly hue. Shark skins are covered with dermal denticles, responsible for the sandpaper quality, which protects the shark from parasites and skin damage as well as improving the shark's fluid dynamics. Sharks are a group of fish, which are characterized by a cartilaginous skeleton, five to seven gill slits on the sides of the head and pectoral fins that are not fused to the head. Sharks are apex predators, organisms at the top of the underwater food chain, and subsequently of critical importance towards maintaining the health of the oceans' ecosystems. As go sharks, so go the ecosystems they frequent. While often misunderstood, feared and seldom considered an ocean friend, sharks should not be thought of as expedient ocean consumables, to the point of extinction. On March 4, 2013 it was officially reported that the Great White Shark is being considered to be added to the California endangered species list. So, California, it's time to step it up for the shark. If Bald Eagles have returned to Crystal Springs Reservoir from scarcity while on the endangered list, then sharks and the environmental health benefits they bring to the Pacifica Ocean's diversity, can also rebound. But it will definitely take our help. It will take us to "Take A Bite Out of Litter" and a stand for environmental protections for the

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help. It will take us to "Take A Bite Out of Litter" and a stand for environmental protections for the species challenged by human interventions.

Upcoming events:

•Friday, March 22, 7 p.m.: Shark Evening, Pacifica Library, 104 Hilton Way; Shark conservationist and expedition filmmaker David McGuire will bring two of his feature films on sharks. David will team up with Lincoln Shaw of Whale Wars' fame to capture the importance of sharks and their place in the ocean's ecosystem. Lincoln will update us on the Sea Shepherd's shark fin war in the Galapagos Islands. Free. All ages welcome, limited seating available on a first-come basis.

•Saturday, April 20, Earth Day 2013: visit [pacificabeachcoalition.org](http://pacificabeachcoalition.org) (<http://pacificabeachcoalition.org>) for information on cleanup/restoration/gardening activities (9 to 11:30 a.m.), as well as on the environmental festival (11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Linda Mar Beach.

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