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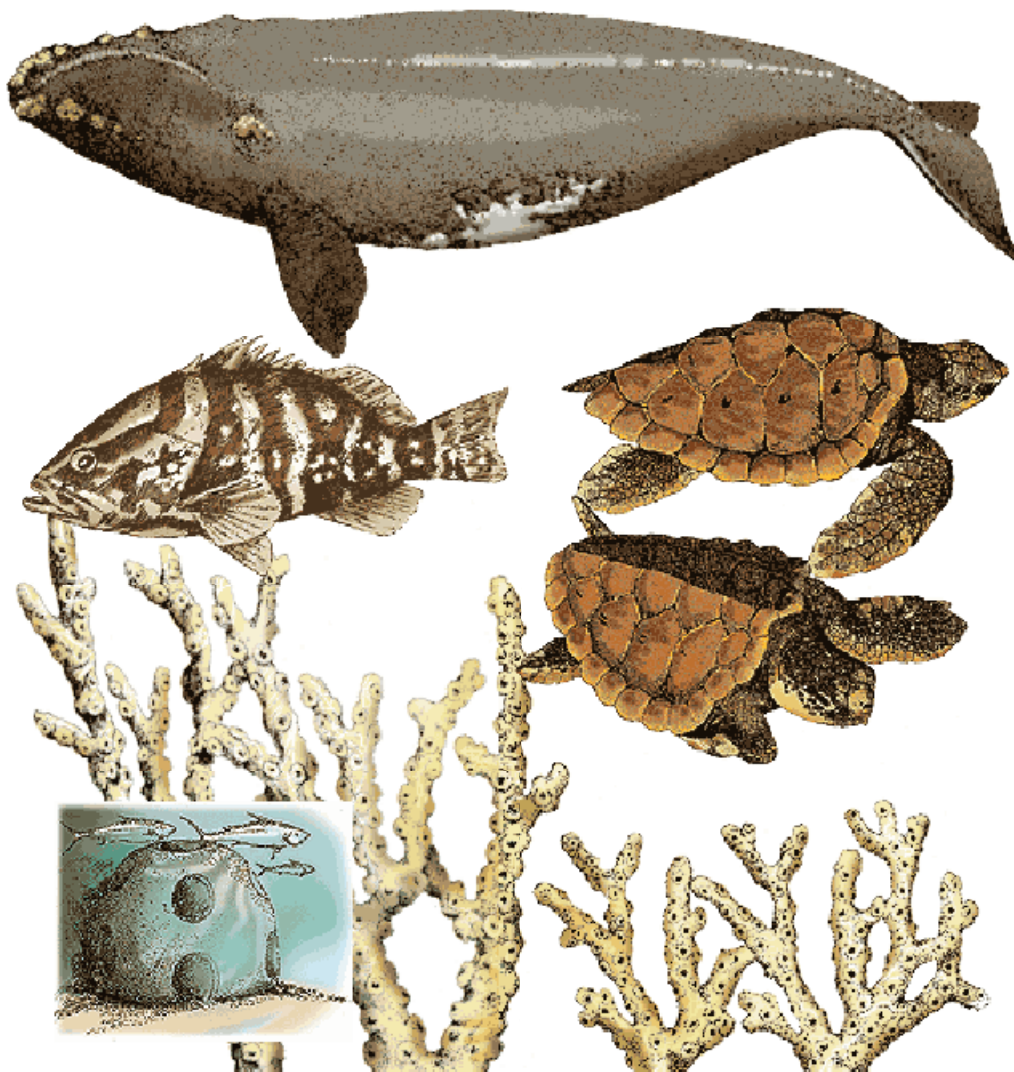


-Saving the OCULINA BANK

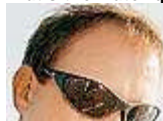
Our NATURAL TREASURES
Are we losing our way?



The Oculina coral reefs are a rare and wondrous natural treasure, just 25 miles east of Daytona Beach. Up to 300 feet deep on the Atlantic Ocean floor, the delicate coral seems worlds away. But, they weren't far enough away to prevent widescale destruction by unchecked fishing practices in the 1970s and '80s. And now, even though miles have been protected, the Oculina's destiny is still unknown. **Roll your mouse over the images for more details.**



What's the water quality on our beaches?

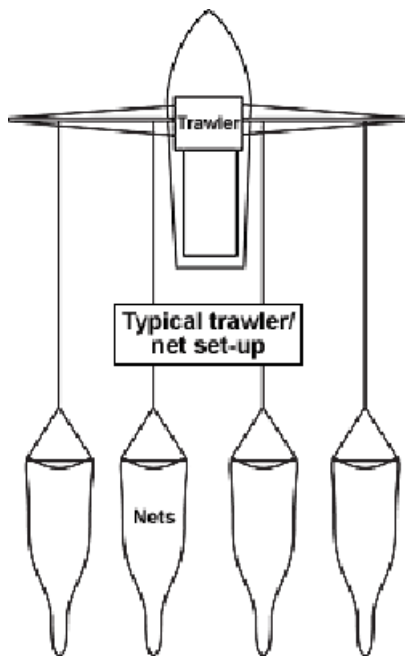


Environmental specialists with local health departments waded into the sea once a week collecting samples to answer that question. Local water quality benefits from wide beaches and strong currents, said Chip Schelble, who oversees the program in Volusia County. The samples are tested for bacteria that can cause stomach illness and indicate other, more hazardous bacteria. If bacteria counts are high, a swimming advisory is issued. Flagler County has never issued an advisory in six

years of monitoring. But it's happened six times in the past two years on Volusia beaches, usually in the spring and winter, which Schelble attributes to the droppings of large flocks of migrating birds. Workers have tested the water after huge storms, he said, and did not find high bacteria levels.

Eat more fish... maybe not

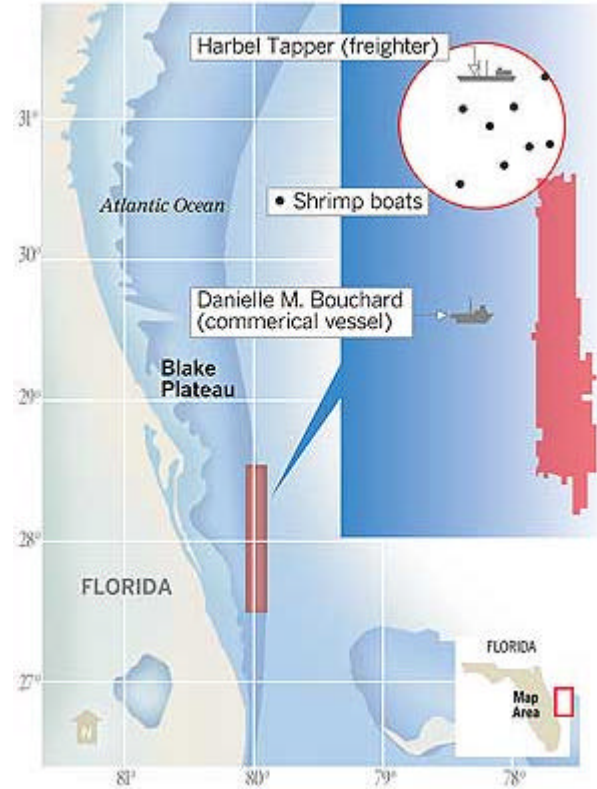
A spiraling demand for seafood worldwide, aided by high-tech advances in the fishing industry, sent the populations of many marine life species plummeting. The world's seafood consumption nearly tripled in 25 years between 1950 and 1975 and has fluctuated since then. Shown below is the weight of seafood caught in the Atlantic Ocean between 1950 and 2004 in 1,000 tons.



- A typical shrimp trawler is 90 plus feet long, 700 to 1,000 horsepower
- It's pulling four 60-foot nets 12-feet wide, with 42-inch tall doors.
- The combination of the gear is about 3,500 pounds on each side.

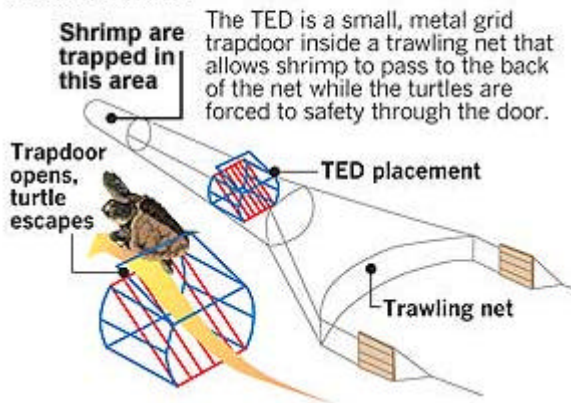
Where the Oculina is and what's out there

In a busy ocean, marine life and vessels compete for space. At one time on a clear day in August, all of these boats were spotted on the radars of the Coast Guard cutter Shrike, just a mile outside the borders of a protected area of the Oculina Bank. A pod of 18 to 20 Atlantic spotted dolphins and two sea turtles also were seen.



Safe exit

Since 1989, federal law requires all nets on U.S. fishing trawlers have the Turtle Excluder Device (TED). The TED was developed at a cost of millions of dollars by the National Marine Fisheries Service.



SOURCES: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, New England Aquarium, Reef Ball Foundation and News-Journal research.
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