



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FWS STUDYING SPONGE DISEASE OFF FLORIDA

The sponge industry in waters off Florida and Cuba is threatened by a new disease which in the last few months has put an end to sponge fishing from Tarpon Springs to St. Marks, Florida, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

A FWS study of the sponge disease has been underway in cooperation with Mr. George Vathis, state supervisor of conservation, Florida, and Dr. F. G. Walton Smith of the University of Miami Marine Laboratory. Boats making the survey are the FWS Pompano and the Athens -- the latter boat, with crew, being donated by George Georgiou, a sponge fisherman.

Commercial sponges, non-commercial sponges, and varieties of coral are killed by the disease -- which was first noticed in December 1948. A similar disease in 1938-39 killed practically all sponges in waters deeper than 10 fathoms. At present, most of the remaining sponges -- now hit by disease -- lie within four fathoms.

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