

2008 Peter Benchley Shark Conservation Award To Sawfish Advocate Matthew T. McDavitt

Princeton, New Jersey: The Shark Research Institute (SRI) created the Peter Benchley Shark Conservation Awards to honor the memory of the late Peter Benchley, and spotlight those who are working internationally to protect sharks as valuable ocean resources.

The first of the 2008 Peter Benchley Shark Conservation Awards, sponsored by **Rolex**, was presented by SRI President Stan Waterman and Wendy Benchley to Matthew T. McDavitt on March 29, 2008 at an Award Ceremony hosted by **Beneath The Sea**. The ceremony was attended by celebrities and marine conservationists from around the world including Dr. Sylvia Earle, National Geographic photographer David Doubilet, and marine artist Wyland.



(left to right) Wendy Benchley, Matthew T. McDavitt and SRI President Stan Waterman

For more than a decade Matthew T. McDavitt, an estate lawyer from Virginia, worked on his own to gather data on the international sawfish trade. In 2006, his data convinced eBay to prohibit sales of small-tooth sawfish rostra on their website. In 2007, his comprehensive fully-referenced 40-page overview of the trade enabled the USA to successfully propose sawfishes for protection at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), making them the first elasmobranch fishes (and the only Family of elasmobranches) listed on CITES Appendix I.

Sawfish fins are among the most valuable in the shark fin trade. In US waters, these rays once ranged from New York to Texas. Critically endangered, their numbers have declined by 99%; today they are only found in a few marine reserves in Florida.

The Peter Benchley Shark Conservation Award for Media will be presented in June in Manila, Philippines at **Celebrate the Sea**, the largest Imagery festival in the Asia Pacific region. The festival, which runs from June 13 to 15, will be attended by marine photographers and filmmakers from around the world, and Gloria Arroyo, President of the Philippine Republic.