



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Connie Barclay
(301) 713-2370
Teri Frady
(508) 495-2239

NOAA05-R122
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 22, 2005

NOAA TAKES STEPS TO REDUCE SHIP COLLISIONS WITH ENDANGERED NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES *Fewer Than 300 Critically Endangered Right Whales Exist*

NOAA Fisheries Service published a notice today as part of the ongoing strategy to reduce ship collisions with endangered North Atlantic right whales. The agency published a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in its effort to provide a comprehensive strategy for reducing collisions between ocean-going vessels and highly endangered North Atlantic right whales along the U.S. East Coast.

The ship strike strategy includes regionally-based measures tailored to vessel traffic patterns and right whale occurrence during times and in areas where collision risk is high. The environmental impact statement is a required step to analyze alternatives for a ship strike reduction program.

“We believe the ship strike strategy can make U.S. East Coast waters safer for right whales,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Service Director. “Vessel strikes are a leading human-caused threat to these rare whales, and we are working closely with maritime commerce professionals and other interested parties to devise this strategy.”

The proposed ship strike strategy relies on a combination of routing and speed options, narrowly defined (in time and area) by right whale presence, and tailored to conditions in each of three major regions along the East Coast (mid Atlantic, southeast and northeast ports). The proposed measures are adapted to each area where right whales feed or travel, and take into consideration commercial ship traffic patterns and navigational concerns. The strategy also recommends continuing support for existing protective actions, including expanded education and outreach initiatives.

Currently, NOAA Fisheries Service conducts a multi-faceted effort aimed at reducing human-caused injuries and deaths to North Atlantic right whales. NOAA and its partners conduct aerial surveys to notify mariners of the location of right whales.

NOAA and the U.S. Coast Guard operate mandatory ship reporting systems to provide right whale locations to mariners entering right whale habitat. To further address the threat of ship strikes, the agency developed the comprehensive ship strike strategy that includes operational measures for vessels in U.S. Atlantic waters.

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The North Atlantic right whale primarily lives in coastal or shelf waters. It ranges from winter calving and nursery areas in coastal waters off the southeastern United States to summer feeding grounds in New England waters and north to the Bay of Fundy and Scotian Shelf.

Historically depleted by commercial whaling, the North Atlantic right whale suffers the most injury and death from human-related activities such as ship strikes and entanglement in fishing gear. These events may continue to contribute to the species decline and inability to recover. Biologists believe that there are less than 300 of the whales left in the U.S. waters.

Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires recovery plans to serve as guides to promote the conservation and recovery of listed species. On June 1, NOAA Fisheries Service released a revised North Atlantic Right Whale Recovery Plan that provides an overall framework for promoting recovery of the whale. In addition, on June 21, NOAA Fisheries Service issued proposed rules implementing modifications to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. The modifications will further reduce entanglements of large whales in commercial fishing gear along the East Coast.

NOAA Fisheries Service invites the public to provide comments on the alternatives being considered in the environmental impact statement. The comment period ends on July 22.

Send public comments to: Chief, Marine Mammal Conservation Division, Attn: Right Whale Ship Strike Strategy, Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Comments may also be sent via email to shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov or to the Federal Rulemaking portal: <http://www.regulations.gov> (follow instructions for submitting comments). A copy of the Notice of Intent can be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of the nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

More Info: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/trt/shipstrike/index.htm>