



NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center

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BELUGA MONITORING TEAM URGES BOATERS AND ONLOOKERS TO STAY CLEAR OF THE WHALE

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Trenton, NJ - The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Marine Mammal Stranding Center (MMSC) are urging boaters and onlookers to keep a safe distance from a beluga whale which has been plowing the waters of the Delaware River between Burlington City and Trenton for the last two days.

"While we are extremely fortunate to have such a majestic animal visit our waters, it is important that we take the proper precautions to give this whale the best chance of returning safely out to sea," said DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell.

Boaters (including personal watercraft and kayakers) are being advised to voluntarily honor a no wake zone in the Delaware River from Burlington City north to Trenton Falls. State and federal authorities also urge those who are seeking to observe the whale to remain at least 150 feet away from the wild animal.

"We're concerned about public safety as well as enforcing the Federal Marine Mammal Protection Act," said Andrew Cohen, top enforcement agent in the Northeast for NMFS. "People need to stay at least 150 feet away from the whale and not do anything that changes its natural behavior," said Cohen.

"If the whale looks like he is in trouble, is beached or appears sick, we need to know so we can take immediate action to help him," said Bob Schoelkopf, MMSC director.

The whale was initially spotted in the Lamberton Road area in Trenton, New Jersey early Tuesday. Researchers in Canada have identified the whale by an old healed scar on his back, and believe the whale is a male named Helis. Helis was first sighted as an adult in 1986 in the St. Lawrence River. He had been seen regularly until 1994, then only twice in 2000 and 2003.

Beluga whales are protected under Federal law. Boaters and onlookers are reminded that it is a violation of Federal law to try to feed, capture, harm or harass a marine mammal. Violators may be subject to penalties under Federal and state law. Officials from DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife will join state police and NOAA/NMFS Office of Law Enforcement special agents this weekend to monitor the whale and ensure his safe return to sea.

Marina owners and boat launch operators are being asked to inform boaters about the precautionary no-wake zone and stay clear advisory.

The Beluga Monitoring Team encourages anyone who notices unusual behavior in the whale to immediately contact the MMSC in Brigantine at 609-266-0538, or NOAA/NMFS Office of Law Enforcement at 800-853-1964.

For further information about the beluga whale, visit:
http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/press_release/ma0503.htm
<http://www.mmsc.org> -- click on "articles"

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