

Reducing Ship Strikes of Endangered North Atlantic Right Whales

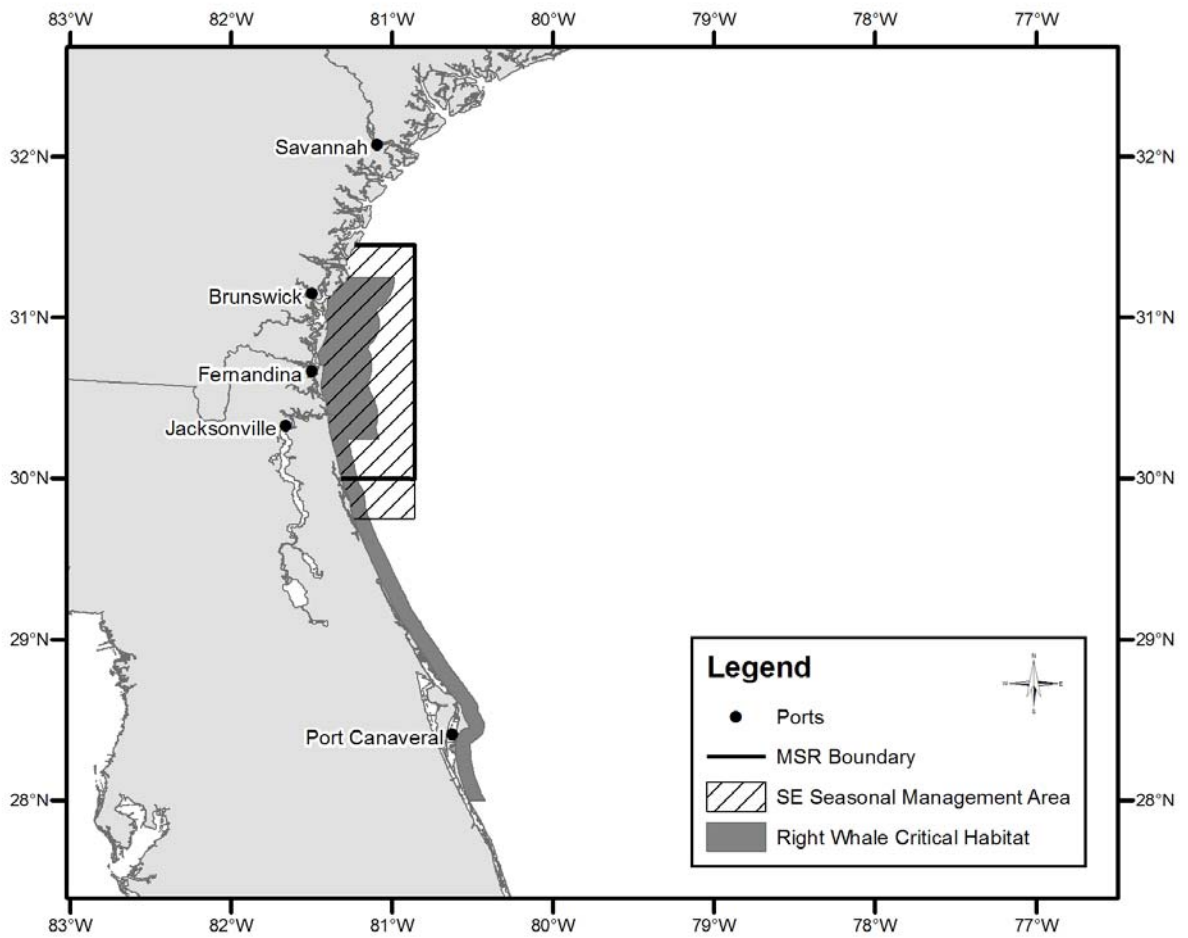
October 2008

- The North Atlantic right whale population contains between 300 and 400 individuals, making it one of the most critically endangered whale species in the world. Collisions by ships are the main threat to the population. Existing conservation measures have not been sufficient to reduce right whale deaths and serious injuries associated with ship strikes. The threat is ongoing.
- NOAA Fisheries has issued new regulations to reduce the likelihood of ship collisions with right whales.
- The regulations implement speed restrictions of 10 knots or less for certain vessels (65 ft or greater) in certain times and areas (e.g., key port entrances) along the U.S. Atlantic seaboard that correspond to right whale occurrence. Exempted from the rule are State enforcement vessels and U.S. government vessels that will be expected to adhere to guidance provided under ESA Section 7 consultations. The rule also contains a provision exempting vessels from speed restrictions in poor sea and weather conditions, thereby ensuring safe vessel maneuverability under those special conditions.
- This final rule provides for establishment of temporary, voluntary “dynamic management areas” (DMAs) in times and/or areas where the seasonal management measures are not in effect, and where whales occur. In these locations, mariners would have the option to cross through the DMA at a speed no greater than 10 knots or route around the area.
- The regulations will be in effect five years after implementation. During this time, NOAA will be conducting additional research on whale distribution and the effectiveness of the rule.
- NOAA publicly released a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (available at: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike) that identifies and assesses alternatives to the regulations. The FEIS includes analysis of environmental and economic impacts of the action.
- Additional steps taken by the U.S. government to reduce the likelihood of ship strikes include:
 - a reconfiguration of the Traffic Separation Scheme servicing Boston, MA, that would result in an estimated 58% reduction in the risk of ship strikes to right whales in that area;
 - issuing vessel speed advisories of 10 knots and other precautionary information to vessels in specific locations where right whales are seen;

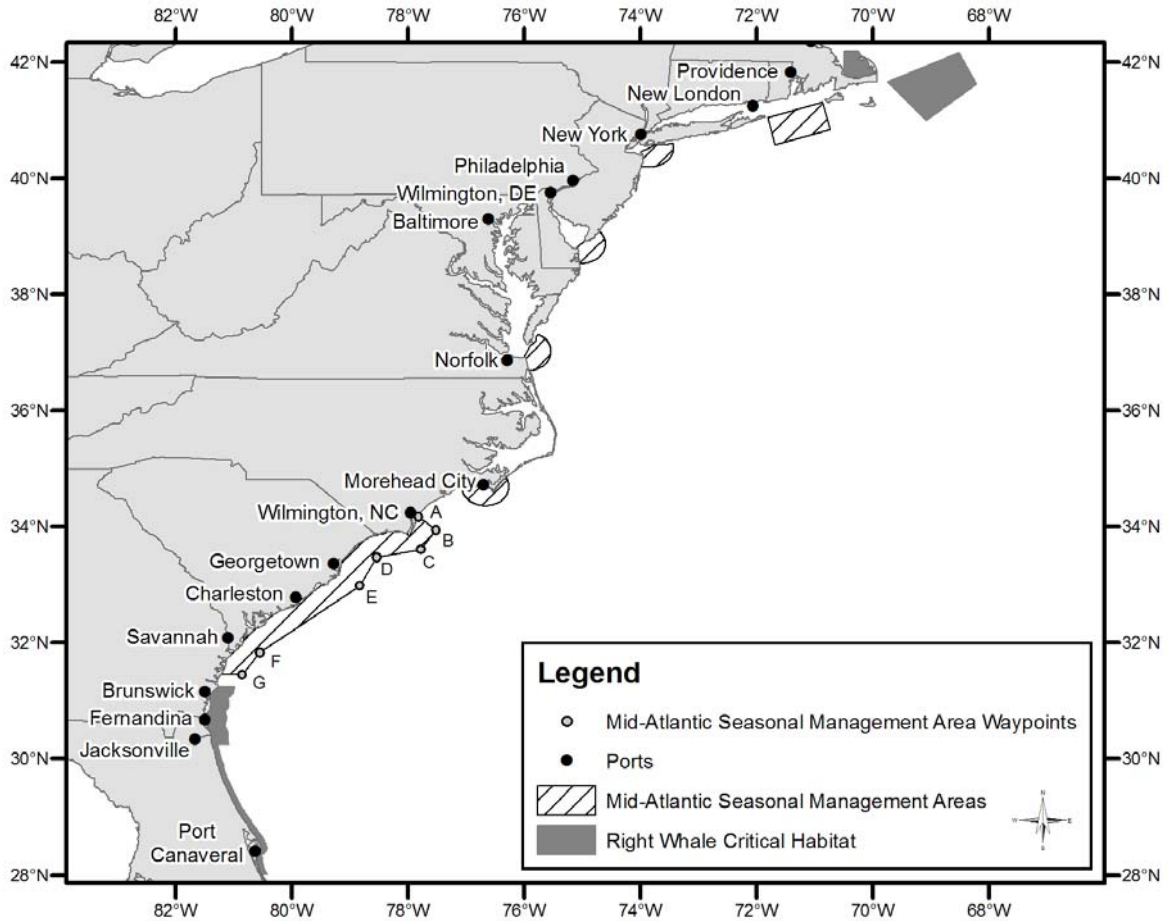
- establishing recommended shipping routes at port entrances in key calving areas off Florida and Georgia and aggregation areas in Cape Cod Bay;
- operating Mandatory Ship Reporting systems that provide right whale sighting information to mariners; and
- proposing to the International Maritime Organization the creation of an Area To Be Avoided in important right whale waters off New England.

**For background information, visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>
or <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike/>.**

Southeastern U.S. Area
Mandatory Speed Restriction **November 15th through April 15th**
Calving and Nursery Grounds

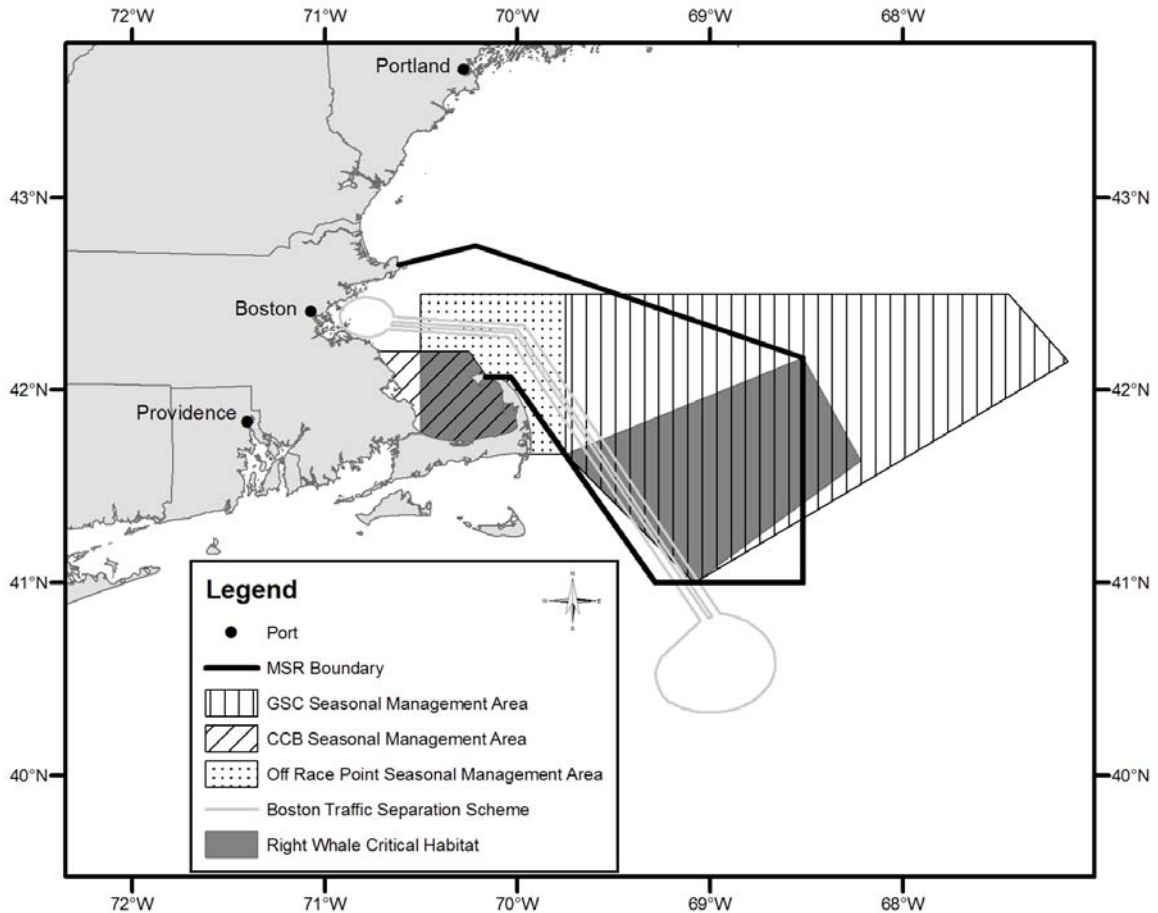


Mid-Atlantic U.S. Area
Mandatory Speed Restriction **November 1 through April 30**
Migratory Route



Vessel speeds are restricted around each of the port or bay entrances identified and the designated area around Block Island Sound (a box with a 30 nm width extending south and east of the mouth of the Sound--reference points: Montauk Point and the western end of Martha's Vineyard). The areas are defined as the waters within a 20-nm area with an epicenter located at the midpoint of the COLREG demarcation line crossing the entry into the designated ports or bays.

Final Northeastern U.S Area
Mandatory Speed Restriction Times Vary
Feeding Areas



Right whales occupy and forage in four distinct areas in the NEUS from January through July: Cape Cod Bay; the area off Race Point at the northern end of Cape Cod; the Great South Channel; and the northern Gulf of Maine. Little is known about recurring whale presence or density, and vessel traffic patterns (besides Portland transits) are not consistent or predictable, in the northern Gulf of Maine. No seasonal speed restrictions are implemented in the northern Gulf of Maine. For the other three areas:

Cape Cod Bay

**January 1st through
May 15th**

Off Race Point

March 1 through April 30

Great South Channel

April 1st through July 31st