



Contact: Kim Amendola  
727-403-6533

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**NOAA and Partners Attempt Disentanglement of Right Whale off Florida**  
*Team feels confident whale will eventually shed gear*

NOAA's Fisheries Service and its rescue team partners attempted a disentanglement of a critically endangered North Atlantic right whale earlier today.

"The disentanglement team removed hundreds of feet of rope yesterday, and was able to cut through more rope today," said Jamison Smith, NOAA's Fisheries Service's large whale disentanglement coordinator. "Although we did not remove all of the entangling rope, we feel confident the rest of the rope will slough off as the whale swims through the water."

A team from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) first sighted the entangled on December 26, 2008 during routine aerial surveys designed to spot right whales in their only known calving (birthing) grounds off northeast Florida and Georgia. These aerial survey teams provide ships early warnings of right whales in their paths, and look for sick, injured and entangled whales.

NOAA scientist Smith says the whale is a young whale born in 2007. It was last sighted on September 25, 2008 in the Bay of Fundy, Canada, where it was not entangled at the time.

"This is good news for North Atlantic right whales and truly a team effort," said Smith. "These rescue efforts are not possible without support from all of our disentanglement network partners."

The disentanglement team consisted of land, sea, and air support from NOAA, FWC, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, New England Aquarium and Wildlife Trust.

With only 300-400 in existence, North Atlantic right whales are among the most endangered whales in the world. They are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Vessel strikes and entanglement in fixed fishing gear are the two greatest threats to their recovery.

NOAA's Fisheries Service encourages people to report sightings of dead, injured, or entangled whales to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC(3922). All live right whale sightings should be reported to 1-877-97-WHALE or 1-877-979-4253.

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