

Proposal to Address Ship Strikes of Endangered Right Whales

- The North Atlantic right whale population is believed to be at or less than 300 individuals, making it one of the most critically endangered whale species in the world. Existing conservation measures have not been sufficient to reduce right whale deaths and serious injuries associated with ship strikes.
- NOAA Fisheries is proposing new regulations to reduce the likelihood of ship collisions with right whales.
- The proposed rule would implement speed restrictions of 10 knots or less for certain vessels (65 ft or greater) in certain times and areas along the U.S. Atlantic seaboard, corresponding to right whale occurrence. Exemptions are provided for U.S. government vessels that will be expected to adhere to guidance provided under ESA Section 7 consultations.
- The designated areas for speed restrictions are located off the southeast coast, the mid-Atlantic coast, and the northeast coast of the United States.
- The rule would also provide for temporary “dynamic management areas” (DMAs) in times and/or areas where the seasonal management measures are not in effect, and where whales occur unexpectedly. 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.
- NOAA Fisheries will be accepting public comment on this proposed rule for 60 days. Comments may be sent to: shipstrike.comments@noaa.gov.
- In addition, the U.S. government has proposed 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. This proposal was submitted to the International Maritime Organization for consideration in March 2006.

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