

URGENT -- UNCW Media Advisory

FROM: Mimi Cunningham, 910/962-3171

TITLE: Right Whale Disentanglement Team To Update Media About Calling off Today's Mission and Future Plans to Help Endangered Right Whale

DATE: Friday, March 26, 2004

TIME: 9 a.m.

WHAT: Press Briefing

WHERE: UNCW Center for Marine Science (directions follow)
Marvin K. Moss Lane off Masonboro Loop Road

Members of the disentanglement team will be on site to talk about calling off the expedition and update you on plans for future disentanglement efforts.

WILMINGTON, NC -- The University of North Carolina at Wilmington, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and their rescue team partners have postponed the mission set for Friday, March 26 to disentangle a juvenile North Atlantic right whale caught in fishing line and presently off the coast of Cape Fear North Carolina.

The crew of UNC Wilmington's 70-foot Research Vessel Cape Fear, scientists and other members of the team had planned to go to sea Friday, March 26 to track and locate the whale, assess the situation and make another attempt to disentangle the mammal. The whale moved out-of-range over night.

NOAA Fisheries first notified the Coast Guard late Thursday (March 18) that the North Atlantic right whale was entangled in fishing line off the coast of Jacksonville, FL. NOAA and Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Mass. rescue crews made a first attempt to save the whale Friday (March 19) when the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Kingfisher intercepted the North Atlantic right whale 60 miles east of Mayport, Fla.

North Atlantic right whales are considered to be the most endangered of the large whale species with a population estimated to be around 300. They range in size from 45 to 60-feet in length and weigh between 30 to 80 tons. The mammal is typically found in the waters of Southern Georgia and Northern Florida from the beginning of December through the end of March as part of the animal's normal migration. Coastal Southern Georgia and Northern Florida waters are also the only known calving grounds and are considered a critical habitat for this endangered species.

Directions to the Center for Marine Science can be found at:

<http://www.uncw.edu/cmsr/maps/index.html> or:

Travel 132 South (College Road) to the traffic light at Mohican Trail. Make LEFT onto Mohican, continuing straight until it ends at Masonboro Loop Road. Turn RIGHT onto Masonboro Loop Road. Marvin K. Moss Lane is about ½ mile on the LEFT. Our facility is at the end of the Intracoastal Waterway.

For more information on North Atlantic Right Whales:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/species/Cetaceans/rightwhalefacts.html