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**ROUGH SEAS THWART NOAA TEAM ATTEMPT TO REMOVE ROPE
FROM ENDANGERED RIGHT WHALE**
Disentanglement Team Returns With Biopsy Samples

Georgetown, S.C. – Rough seas off the Carolina coast prevented veterinarians and whale experts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) and their rescue team partners from attempting to remove rope and buoys from the juvenile male endangered right whale. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

“We were not able to get any of the rope off of the whale today because of high seas, but we were able to collect tissue samples to help assess its health,” said Dr. Teri Rowles, lead veterinarian for NOAA Fisheries and the head of the nation’s Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program. “We will continue to monitor the whale’s location and the weather, and will go out again as soon as possible.”

Today the team checked the condition of the satellite tracking device to make sure it was still working properly, and they took biopsy samples so they can evaluate the whale’s stress levels and health status. The team noted that the whale is still moving north, and traveling quickly.

As soon as the weather permits, the team plans to sedate the whale to slow its movement and use specially constructed tools to try to remove the lines and the buoys that are wrapped around the whale’s body. Members of the same team unsuccessfully tried a similar rescue in July 2001 off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass.

Other members of the South Carolina team include disentanglement and whale experts from the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Mass., and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Logistical support is being provided by the U.S. Coast Guard and its crew of the 87-foot Coast Guard Cutter *Yellowfin*.

On March 19, the team located the whale and was able to remove some of the lines, reducing the drag on the whale. Team members attached a satellite tracking device to track the whale's position. Since that time, the whale has been steadily traveling north.

The North Atlantic right whale is the most endangered off American coasts. After a period of intense whaling in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was on the brink of extinction. Although whaling practices have ceased, right whales face serious risks from ship collisions and entanglements in fishing gear and marine debris. The North Atlantic right whale population is now estimated to be approximately 300 animals and is listed as "Endangered" under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973. Right whales and all other species of marine mammals are also protected under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

On the Web:

<http://www.coastalstudies.org/rescue/kingfishermap.htm>