
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
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NOAA FISHERIES REMINDS BOATERS: GIVE RIGHT WHALES WIDE BERTH
Federal Law Prohibits Approaching Endangered Right Whales Within 500 Yards

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) reminds all whale watchers, commercial vessels and others to give endangered right whales a wide berth, as mandated by Federal Rule 62 FR 6729, 50 CFR 224.103(c) This rule prohibits the approach of vessels, aircraft, or by other means to within 500 yards of right whales, which are an endangered species.

Ship and boat collisions are among the primary causes of death for this critically endangered whale. NOAA Fisheries promulgated this rule in an attempt to reduce the potential for vessel interaction and injury to the whales. The rule includes avoidance measures which require vessels or aircraft within 500 yards of a right whale to immediately depart the area at a slow, safe speed in a direction away from the whale.

According to Barb Zoodsma, a fisheries biologist with NOAA Fisheries, it is more important than ever to give these animals their space – particularly off the Georgia and Florida coasts. "This is the only known right whale calving area in the world, and it is very important that we give these new moms and their calves the solitude and space that they need to nurse and form a strong maternal bond," said Zoodsma. "This is essential for calves to grow, strengthen, and make the long journey north to their summer feeding grounds."

NOAA Fisheries encourages vessel operators transiting along coastal Florida and Georgia to remain alert and look for right whales. If a right whale is spotted, report the sighting to the United States Coast Guard so they can issue alerts, and please remain vigilant as other whales are likely in the area and change course to slowly and safely move away from the whale.

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NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources, and the habitat on which they depend, through scientific research, management and enforcement. Our stewardship of these resources benefits the nation by supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, while helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public. To learn more about NOAA Fisheries, please visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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