



## NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE

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NOAA

## Vessels over 65 feet Must Slow down for Right Whales

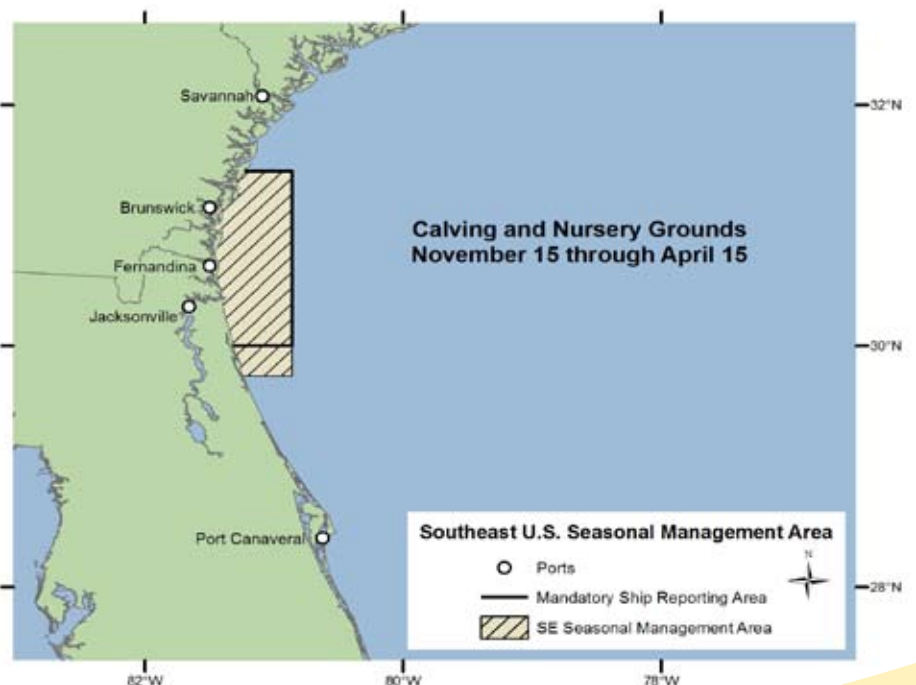
### New Rule in Effect until December 9, 2013

Mandatory speed restrictions of 10 knots or less are now required in three Seasonal Management Areas along the east coast of the United States during times when right whales are likely to be present. This regulation, known as the Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Rule, is designed to reduce the likelihood of deaths or serious injuries to these endangered whales that result from collisions with vessels.

Speed restrictions are required at times when whales are known to frequent certain areas for feeding and calving. They also are designed to help protect whales when they migrate along the coast. Specifically, when whales are migrating vessel speed is restricted in the following areas (November 1-April 30): Block Island Sound, within a 20-nm radius of the Ports of New York/New Jersey and Ports of Morehead City and Beaufort, North Carolina, the entrances to Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and within a continuous area 20 nm from shore between Wilmington, North Carolina to Brunswick, Georgia.

The only exception to this rule is in situations where the pilot or master of a vessel determines that conditions severely restrict vessel maneuverability and the vessel may have to operate at greater than 10 knots. If this is the case, then the following information must be recorded in a logbook: reasons for deviation, speed at which vessel operated, latitude and longitude at time of deviation, time and duration of deviation and signature of vessel master and date of entry.

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## Implications of the Recent Findings of the Data Poor Stocks Working Group

At the end of last year, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center held several sessions of the Data Poor Stocks Working Group. The Working Group was comprised of Center assessment scientists, and personnel from the Northeast Regional Office, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The Working Group reviewed 12 fishery stocks for which traditional measures of stock status (biomass and fishing mortality levels) were not available, because of limited data or because they were difficult to model.

The Working Group's Scientific Review Panel, which was composed of expert scientists from outside NOAA Fisheries Service, completed its external peer review of working papers on these stocks and prepared a report of its findings and

recommendations in January.

Specifically, assessment methods and new stock status findings were reviewed for seven skate species, deep sea red crab, Atlantic wolffish, scup, and black sea bass, and there was an evaluation of progress on a new stock assessment model being developed for Atlantic weakfish. To address new stock status findings, management action for these species will be taken through individual Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) or by separate federal action. For instance, stock status changes or adjustments to biological reference points for scup and black sea bass do not require a change to the FMP but may be applied by the Council when it sets its annual catch levels. However, for skates an amendment or framework adjustment to the plan is needed to adjust biological reference

points such as the overfishing definitions, and for wolffish, a new plan or inclusion of the species into an existing FMP would be necessary.

If immediate action is needed to address an overfished stock, NOAA Fisheries Service can take temporary interim action to alleviate overfishing on the stock, while the appropriate Fishery Management Council prepares a FMP or amendment to rebuild the stock. For Atlantic weakfish, the comments provided by the Working Group and Review Panel will help with the completion of a stock assessment that will help guide ASMFC and federal management for that species through the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act. Some of the Review Panel's major findings and implications for management are listed below.

Species	Uncertainty	Status	Next Steps	Best Available Science
Skates	Problems with aggregate data <sup>1</sup> .	Change in status: smooth skate: Not Overfished; winter skate: Not Overfished	Revise draft AM 3 to Skate FMP to reflect change in status	Current survey data, but concerns over future given change to new research vessel and net.
Red crab	Concern over impact on size structure due to removal of large males via fishing <sup>2</sup> .	Reduction in size structure of landings suggest that previous high landings were unsustainable	Need to adjust FMP so allowable catch at sustainable levels -- current MSY is too high	Estimates of MSY in the male only fishery of 3,748,000 to 4,189,000 lb
Atlantic wolffish	No FMP, no BRP, underrepresentation in survey, uncertainties in life history	Overfishing; unknown Overfished <sup>3</sup> .	Develop rebuilding plan; review to determine if species should be listed under ESA	New Statistical Catch at Length Model
Scup	Uncertainties in recruitment	No Overfishing Not Overfished <sup>4</sup> .	No change in FMP necessary, gradual increase in quota recommended	New Age Structured Assessment Program, new reference points
Black sea bass	Considerable uncertainty with respect to model findings on stock status	Overfishing Not Overfished <sup>5</sup> .	No change in FMP necessary	New Statistical Catch at Length Model, new reference points
Weakfish	Concerns over reliability of input data -- catch, etc.	N/A --determining status not a Term of Reference for Data Poor Meeting	Preparing a stock assessment for next peer review SARC in June	N/A

1. Limited information on individual species life history and total catch

2. Limited information on biology so impact on population dynamics unknown

3. Current population is approximately 25-45% SSB<sub>MSY</sub>

4. 2007 SSB (263,106,300 lb) was 130 % of the new overfished biological reference point target while the 2007 fishing mortality (0.054) was 31% of the new overfishing biological reference point threshold

5. Most recent estimate for SSB (2007) indicated that the stock was at 92% of its target level. Recommended a new reference point for F<sub>MSY</sub> and a related SSB<sub>MSY</sub> proxy of 27,639,350 lb

## High Tech Lobsters Help NOAA Attorneys Win Case of Illegal Fishing Activity

A New Jersey fisherman faces a fine totaling more than \$150 thousand dollars after being found liable for unlawful possession of lobsters belonging to another fisherman. The case was prosecuted by the NOAA General Counsel's Office for Enforcement and Litigation.

New Jersey Conservation Officers and a NOAA Fisheries Service Special Agent found the fisherman in possession of five lobsters, equipped with signal-emitting transponders, that had been placed in another fisherman's traps.

The hefty fine and suspension of vessel and operator permits, which prevents the fisherman from fishing for six months, was imposed by an Administrative Law Judge who also was hoping to curb the increasing number of thefts and related violence (i.e., threats, arson, and gunfire) in the fishery. A recent decision by the U.S. District Court concurred with the Administrative Law Judge's original decision.

Prosecuting violators is an important way to protect law abiding fishermen who are working hard to fish responsibly and protect the resource on which they make their living.

## Profile: NOAA's Enforcement Litigation Team in the Northeast

The NOAA General Counsel's Northeast enforcement litigation team works with the Office of Law Enforcement to uphold fishing regulations. Law Enforcement conducts the investigations and the litigation team then determines if these cases warrant prosecution. The office is led by Charles R. Juliand, Mitch MacDonald, and Deirdre L. Casey-- NOAA enforcement attorneys with a combined total of nearly 50 years of experience prosecuting violators of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and other federal statutes. Support staff include: Paralegals Debra Ketchopulos, Ann Favazza, and Cathy Hiland, and Administrative Assistant Marilyn Eldridge.

### General Responsibilities

The office reviews enforcement case files, issues Notices of Violation and Assessment (NOVAs) and Notices of Permit Sanction (NOPS), represents NOAA Fisheries Service in complex civil administrative litigation, negotiates settlements, and oversees the collections process. NOVAs are legal documents that provide official notice to people of legal and regulatory violations, penalty amounts, and what they must do to respond to the NOVA. NOPS are legal documents that revoke or restrict the use of permits, often issued in addition to a NOVA, but they may also be issued as a means of satisfying an unpaid penalty.

NOAA is responsible for enforcing statutes including the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, Atlantic Tunas Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and their regulations. The office also advises NOAA Fisheries special agents and other staff and the U.S. Coast Guard on the myriad of issues that affect how various statutes and regulations are interpreted and enforced. The office also reviews draft regulations and their enforceability, before they are published.

### Recent Activities

Typically in a given year, Northeast-generated enforcement cases account for a total of 50-100 NOVAs and NOPS, which may involve hundreds of separate counts in all. Magnuson-Stevens Act violations account for the vast majority of the fines and permit sanctions issued. The three main types of such cases received have been vessel and dealer reporting violations, closed area cases, and Days-At-Sea cases. The total civil penalties issued for cases in a year can amount to millions of dollars with the average NOVA penalty in the thousands of dollars, along with permit sanctions that require a vessel to stay out of a fishery for given period of time or in severe cases, fishing permits can be revoked. NOAA maintains a publicly available penalty schedule that provides guidelines to NOAA attorneys in determining an appropriate penalty and permit sanction for a charged violation.

### Enforcement Office Priorities

Priorities include, but are not limited to: detecting and prosecuting large-scale violations by fish dealers; the use of illegal gear configurations; and closed area incursions. The office deals with minor and technical offenses through the use of Fix-It tickets (a written warning) and the Summary Settlement System (settlement involving standardized penalty amounts for specific, listed violations). Violations that are not resolved with a Fix-It Ticket or a negotiated settlement are usually resolved through a formal hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, a standard process used by most federal agencies to handle alleged violations. Some of these cases may proceed to litigation in U.S. District Court.

*Cont'd on page 8*





## NOAA Responds to Petition to List Wolffish

NOAA Fisheries Service is assembling a biological review team (BRT) to prepare a status review to determine whether listing Atlantic wolffish as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act is warranted. The agency must complete its review by October 1, 2009.

The status review was initiated as a result of NOAA's finding that a petition submitted by the Conservation Law Foundation and two independent scientists provided substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted.

The Northwestern Atlantic wolffish are found in waters off west Greenland and southern Labrador, in the Strait of Belle Isle and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, off the eastern and western coasts of Newfoundland and over the Grand Banks south to the Scotian Shelf and in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank. The species' range within the United States represents the most southern reach. They inhabit hard rocky bottoms and are believed to be a solitary, relatively sedentary demersal species.

Atlantic wolffish are most often caught as bycatch in the Georges Bank/Gulf of Maine otter trawl fisheries. In the U.S., commercial landings of Atlantic wolffish have declined from 1,200 mt in 1983 to 65 mt in 2007. At present, there is no fishery management plan for Atlantic wolffish in U.S. waters. According to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (2006), Canadian commercial landings have been insignificant in recent years. The average size of wolffish has also declined both in the U.S. and Canada. For 2006 and 2007, the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey indicates that recreational landings of Atlantic wolffish were 28.61 and 15.25 mt, respectively.



Atlantic wolffish. Photo credit: NOAA

**To learn more about wolffish status review contact:**

**Kim Damon-Randall at (978) 282-8485 (Kimberly.Damon-Randall@noaa.gov) or**

**Mike Erwin at (978) 282-8479 (Michael.Erwin@noaa.gov).**

## Restoration Site Unfazed by High Tide

When high tide hit the Medouie Creek restoration site on Nantucket on January 12, the newly installed culvert and excavated historic tidal channel faired well. The first phase of the project, which is expected to restore 19 acres of degraded tidal wetlands, was completed in early January, 2009.

NOAA Fisheries Service is working with the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Massachusetts Wetland Restoration Program and the University of Massachusetts Boston-Nantucket Field Station to restore this tidal creek and surrounding marshland. Restoration goals are to 1) improve fish passage, 2) improve habitat conditions for native salt marsh flora (*Spartina* spp.) through better drainage and regular tidal inundation, 3) restore access to habitat used by juvenile and adult American eels and 4) improve habitat for prey species which are important to commercial and recreational fisheries including striped bass, bluefish, tautog, white perch, winter flounder and scup.

The creek abuts 45 acres of conservation land, owned by the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, which had been altered by, among other things, a series of ditches likely to control mosquitoes in the early part of the 20th century. Growing concerns over reduced ecological diversity, due to the spread of the non-native, invasive species, *Phragmites australis*, led the Foundation to initiate efforts to restore this important habitat.

### Why is this site special?

Medouie Creek is part of Medouie Creek and

Pocomo Meadows salt marsh which borders both Nantucket and Polpis Harbors. Nantucket Harbor is one of the largest enclosed bays in south-eastern Massachusetts and one of the few with relatively high water quality capable of supporting high quality ecological habitats such as eel grass beds and sustain a highly valuable bay scallop fishery.

Foundation staff plan to conduct a five year monitoring program to assess changes in species composition and restoration effort success.



Culvert being restored at Medouie Creek to improve tidal flow. Photo credit: NOAA

## Offshore Canyons May Be Closed To Bottom Trawling to Protect Tilefish Habitat

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) adopted Amendment 1 to the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan and submitted it to the NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Office for Secretarial review. If Amendment 1 is accepted from the Council and found to be complete, NOAA Fisheries Service will seek public comment on both the amendment and the proposed implementing regulations. Amendment 1 contains measures to close four submarine canyons on the continental slope to bottom trawling activity to protect essential fish habitat for juvenile and adult tilefish in areas that include the steep walls and floors of the canyons.

The proposed closures are designed to prevent the adverse impacts of bottom trawling on clay outcrop habitats in Veatch, Norfolk, Lydonia, and Oceanographer canyons – four canyons where

*cont'd on page 7*

## Alternative Energy at Top of Obama Administration's Agenda

### NOAA Fisheries Service Expects To See Rise in Permit Consultations

The proposed Western Passage tidal energy project in Easport, Maine is just one of several alternative energy projects under consideration along the eastern seaboard in state or federal waters.

Ocean Renewable Power Company Maine LLC is trying to secure a pilot project license for this renewable project having completed testing of the technological feasibility of their turbine generator units and hosting a public meeting to share their findings. The company hopes to obtain Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approval for a pilot project next year, and have a 100-megawatt project on line within five to seven years. NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division staff are emphasizing the need for baseline physical and biological data, as well as coordination with the resource agencies to develop a long-term monitoring plan for the proposed project.

Habitat Conservation Staff also attended one of two stakeholder meetings sponsored by the Minerals Management Service (MMS) in New Jersey to discuss several projects proposed to move forward under the Interim Policy on Alternate Energy Projects on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). This policy allows for limited leasing in the OCS for data collection and technology testing. The leases are for a maximum of five years with no priority right for future leasing. Wind farms will not be authorized under the Interim Policy. The meeting included an update on MMS's progress toward a final rule for the Alternate Energy in the OCS, presentations by the three companies seeking leases offshore of New Jersey and Delaware, and questions and answer sessions both with and without the potential leasees.

## A Control Date for the American Lobster Fishery



American lobster (*Homarus americanus*)  
Photo credit: NOAA

NOAA Fisheries Service, at the request of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, proposed a "control date" that may be used to limit future participation in the Area 1 federal American lobster trap fishery. This measure is being proposed to address historically high levels of fishing effort and potentially displaced effort in the fishery.

### Mounting Fishing Pressure

The lobster fishery has experienced a dramatic increase in fishing effort since the 1970s. Biologists estimate that each American lobster trap remains in the water about 30 percent longer than in 1970 before being hauled. Current fishing effort removes a large proportion of lobsters before they have had a chance to spawn even once, and the average size of lobsters landed continues to drop. There are also concerns that recent fishing constraints in several traditional otter trawl fisheries, including the Mid-Atlantic summer flounder, scup and black sea bass fisheries and the New England multi-species fisheries, and broader use of area closures, may cause a shift in non-trap lobster fishing effort. Limited access programs in many lobster management areas also have the potential to cause fishermen who do not qualify

in that area to shift trap fishing operations to the open access management areas.

Because the majority of the lobster fishery occurs in state waters, the federal lobster fishery is governed under Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, rather than the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Commission, with representation from all of the Atlantic coastal states and federal partners, develops fishery conservation and management strategies and coordinates management efforts by the states and federal government to enact regulations for certain coastal species, including American lobster. NOAA Fisheries Service is obligated by the Atlantic Coastal Act to support the Commission's American Lobster Interstate Fishery Management Plan and overall fishery management efforts.

At its October 2008 Annual Meeting, the Commission voted to initiate an addendum to its management plan that includes options for a limited entry program for Lobster Management Area 1, the inshore Gulf of Maine fishery, and to ask NOAA Fisheries Service to publish a control date for this fishing area. On January 2, 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service published a notice in the Federal Register, seeking public comment on a proposed 'control date' that could be used to limit or restrict future access to the American lobster trap fishery in the federal waters of Area 1 based upon a permit holder's ability to document a history of fishing with lobster traps in that area. In the meantime, the agency will work with the Area 1 fishing industry, the impacted states, and the Commission, to devise means for controlling effort in this fishery. The public comment period closed on February 2, 2009.

*cont'd on page 8*



## Bottlenose Dolphins in New Jersey Rivers

From June 2008 through January 2009, NOAA documented a group of coastal bottlenose dolphins in the Shrewsbury and Navesink Rivers, in Monmouth County, New Jersey. A great deal of public interest and emotional debate was triggered over the well-being of these animals.

Many people in the area felt that the dolphins were at risk in the river system. NOAA, in consultation with experts from its Stranding Network and independent scientists who specialize in coastal bottlenose dolphin biology and behavior, felt that luring, herding or live capture would not improve the dolphin's prospects for survival. Rather, the consensus opinion was twofold: that 1) the animals were not out-of-habitat, trapped, ill, injured, or stranded, and 2) intervention would likely not work and may harm them.

There is a high risk that physical interventions with dolphins can cause the animals to strand or be otherwise harmed or killed in the process. Prior attempts to herd (in 1993) and to capture (in 2000) a few bottlenose dolphins in this same area were not successful. The herded animals simply scattered, and were not seen alive again. Carcasses recovered in the area nearly four months later may have been these animals. One of the captured animals died in transit to the open ocean, and the other died some months later in rehabilitation.

The agency and its partners held two public seminars to explore potential options and risks associated with intervention, general information on coastal bottlenose biology and behavior and ongoing monitoring of dolphin health, environmental conditions and prey distribution and abundance.

### Other Potential Threats to the Dolphins

During the dolphins' temporary residence concern also arose about the perceived impacts associated with reconstruction of the Highlands Bridge. The dolphins arrived in the Shrewsbury/Navesink Rivers after reconstruction of the bridge had started.

Many people believed that the construction was preventing the dolphins from moving into Sandy Hook Bay. NOAA worked with the New Jersey Department of Transportation to ensure that the dolphins were monitored, and that work was stopped if dolphins came too close to the site. NOAA found no evidence that the construction project was impeding the dolphins from leaving the river, or altering their behavior.

Based on the data available, NOAA determined that protecting the ability of these wild animals to remain wild and use the very instincts and behaviors that also ensure the long-term health and survival of the larger population was their best chance of survival.

### The River System is Natural Habitat

Coastal bottlenose dolphins are commonly found in New Jersey waters during the summer, but the animals normally move south in late October or early November when the water temperature drops and/or their prey leave. When this group of animals remained past the fall, it was thought they may attempt to overwinter in the rivers, a phenomenon that has been documented in Broad Bay, Virginia and in Cape Cod Bay.

NOAA and independent coastal bottlenose dolphin biologists believe that as the population of coastal bottlenose dolphins increases, the animals are likely to expand their range and investigate new habitat that might not have been previously utilized. Also, expansion of the northeast menhaden stocks, a known prey species for bottlenose dolphins, throughout New Jersey may have enticed these dolphins to inhabit this particular area. Based on the growing menhaden stock, it is also possible that these individuals, or a larger group of coastal bottlenose dolphins, may return to the river system in the future.

### The Outcome

The original group observed in June 2008 included 16 individuals, of mixed age and

sex. There were three confirmed deaths, two juveniles and one adult female. One of the juveniles died of chronic fungal pneumonia and the cause of death for the other animal has yet to be confirmed, but it did have parasites, which may have been a factor. Both of these are common causes of death among young dolphins. The third mortality was an adult, pregnant female. Preliminary results indicate the presence of parasites within the animal's brain.

The whereabouts and condition of the remaining 13 dolphins is unknown, although after an extensive search of the area NOAA believes that these dolphins are no longer living in the rivers. Eight dolphins were last seen in the rivers in December 2008 and five were known to be still in the rivers on January 13. On January 15, 2009, several local eye-witnesses reported that they saw multiple dolphins travel under the Highlands Bridge and into Sandy Hook Bay moving at a fast pace toward the open ocean. Since that time, no dolphins have been observed in the river system. NOAA has conducted regular land based surveys of the rivers and is planning to conduct additional on water surveys as soon as weather conditions permit.



Bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*)  
Photo: NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center

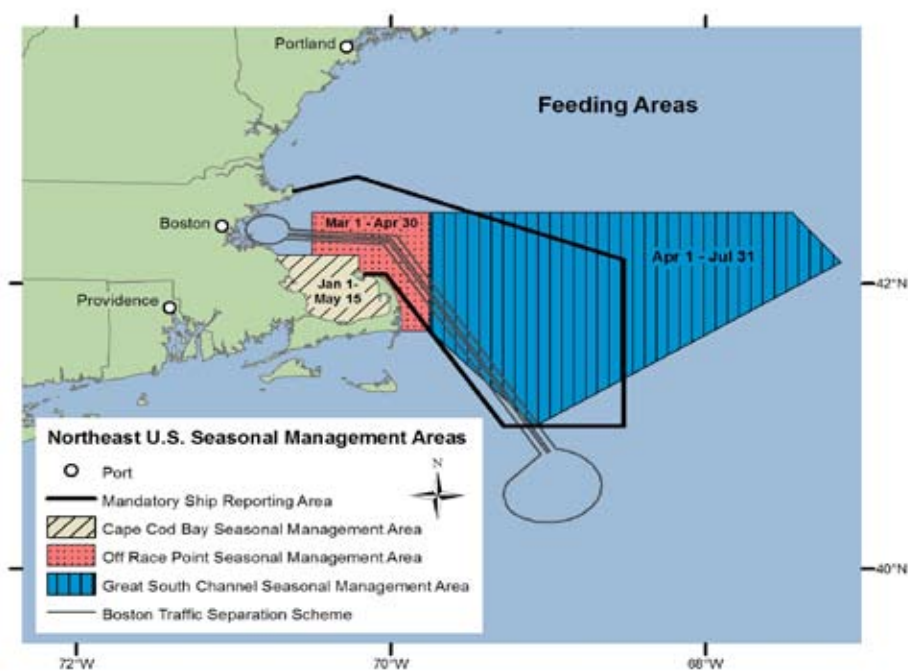
## Vessel Speed Restrictions to Protect Right Whales cont'd from page 1

In the Northeast, Voluntary Dynamic Management Areas (DMAs) may also be established by NOAA Fisheries Service when aggregations of three or more right whales are sighted in close proximity together, indicating that the whales are likely feeding, and are likely to remain in the area for an extended period of time. Mariners are encouraged to avoid these areas or reduce speeds to 10 knots while transiting through them. Once established, DMAs are in effect for 15 days. DMAs are announced over: NOAA Weather Radio, USCG Broadcast Notice to Mariners, Mandatory Ship Reporting System (MSR) return messages, Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (SAS) and an email distribution list. [For more information and to learn more about exact coordinates for seasonal management areas visit:](#)

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike>

<http://nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike>

<http://rightwhalessouth.nmfs.noaa.gov>



## Tilefish cont'd from page 4

this habitat type is known to exist. Tilefish create and live in burrows in these outcrops. The outcrops are extremely vulnerable to damage by bottom-tending fishing gear since any losses of material are permanent.

The proposed closures would not affect fishing activity on the edge of the continental shelf where the bottom is flatter and tilefish burrows extend vertically into the substrate. Video images from these areas have failed to show any evidence that the burrows are adversely impacted by fishing. The proposed closures are mostly precautionary in nature because the canyon walls are not currently being trawled and couldn't be without causing considerable loss or damage of fishing gear.

The floors of the canyons were included in order to make enforcement of the proposed closure areas more feasible. The proposed closures would have the added benefit of protecting deep-sea corals. The tilefish proposed closures in Lydonia and Oceanographer canyons would overlap with slightly larger closed areas that were created in previous fishery management actions to minimize the adverse impacts of bottom trawling for squid and monkfish.



## NOAA's Enforcement Litigation Team cont'd from page 3

### Notable Successes

The fishing vessel Independence case involving a closed area incursion was the first ever fisheries prosecution in the world based solely upon satellite systems and data from a boat's on board Vessel Monitoring System. Recently, the office won a case that was developed using lobsters with implanted transponders (see insert).

### What's Next?

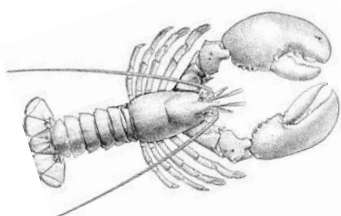
Enforcement personnel continue to work creatively to anticipate potential fishing violations, use technology more strategically, and work with the Coast Guard and within NOAA to support the many law-abiding members of the fishing industry by prosecuting those who do not honor the rules.

## Lobster Rule cont'd from page 5

The American lobster fishery in the United States takes place from North Carolina to Maine. It is a year-round fishery in the U.S.

Over three-quarters of all American lobsters are landed in Maine. Other landings occur mostly in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Long Island Sound, and Georges Bank. The majority of American lobsters are taken in state waters, which extend from the coast to three nautical miles from shore. The offshore trap fishery, which occurs primarily in the offshore canyon areas at the edge of the continental shelf developed in the past 25 years and accounts for most of the remaining landings.

Approximately 96 percent of lobsters are taken in lobster traps. The rest are taken in trawls, gillnets, dredges, and by divers.



## Bluefin Tuna Fishing in 2009

At the end of 2008, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) adopted a revised rebuilding program for the western Atlantic bluefin tuna stock, including a reduced quota for the 2009 and 2010 fishing years, intended to end overfishing by 2010. ICCAT also adopted a revised eastern and Mediterranean recovery plan, including reduced quotas, an extended purse seine closure, and other measures to improve conservation.

The Northeast Branch of the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Division manages domestic Atlantic bluefin tuna fisheries on a calendar year basis. A vessel permit is required to fish for Atlantic bluefin tuna, and permits for the 2009 calendar year were available for a \$16 purchase price beginning in November 2008. Permits are issued via an internet-based service at [www.hmspermits.gov](http://www.hmspermits.gov) or through hardcopy application. The public comment period for annual specifications for the 2009 U.S. fishery which implement the new international measures closed on March 20, 2009.

Transition from 2008 to 2009 fisheries were

seamless for the General (hand gear commercial fishery) category, Longline (incidental retention) category, Angling (recreational fishery) category and Charter/Headboat category (commercial hand gear/recreational) which all remained open during December 2008 and January 2009. During the month of January, a retention limit of two bluefin tuna (73"+) was in effect for the General category fishery, which closed on January 31, 2009, and will re-open June 1, 2009. Vessels in the longline category may retain bluefin tuna incidentally year-round, provided incidental landings are offset by sufficient target catch. The Angling category is open through December 2009. Charter/headboat vessel operators follow the season and retention limits for the General category when fishing commercially, and for the Angling category when fishing recreationally. General category and Angling category retention limits will be included along with the 2009 quota specifications. For further information on the 2009 bluefin tuna fishery, please see the website listed above or [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/).

## NERO'S Aquaculture Program Expands

NOAA Fisheries Service's Northeast Region Office (NERO) is stepping up its involvement in aquaculture. In January the region, hired an aquaculture coordinator and in February the new coordinator, David Alves, along with the State, Federal and Constituent Programs office head, Harold Mears, attended the World Aquaculture Society meeting in Seattle, Washington and a NOAA strategic planning meeting on aquaculture.

Alves has had extensive involvement in the aquaculture field, most recently serving as the aquaculture coordinator for the State of Rhode Island with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council where he wrote aquaculture regulations, advised applicants through the permitting process, conducted applied research (e.g. application of shellfish carrying capacity in management of coastal aquaculture), and interacted with representatives from other state and federal agencies and the fishing and aquaculture industry on aquaculture development. He hopes to apply this knowledge to his new position at NERO.

### Aquaculture Discussions

The World Aquaculture Society involved three days of talks, seminars and a trade show. Highlights of the meeting included sessions on NOAA's alternative feeds project, offshore aquaculture, and industry federal interactions.

Later in the week there was a two day meeting of NOAA's own national aquaculture team at the agency's Montlake Laboratory. Subjects covered over the course of the meeting included current and future directions of the NOAA aquaculture program, updates from the regional science centers, review of the draft Aquaculture Research Plan, update on the alternative feeds initiative and planning for the coming year and beyond.

With Alves now on board, the region intends to keep up with the latest developments in the field in order to accomplish the goals of better integrating aquaculture into NOAA's programs.