



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA Fisheries alerts boaters, right whales are on the move

Endangered species travels south for the winter

NOAA Fisheries is reminding all boaters and fishermen that North Atlantic right whale calving season begins in mid-November and runs through mid-April, which means these large whales are on the move, making their way down the Atlantic coast of the U.S.

Scientists estimate there are as few as 400 right whales left, making them one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world. Each winter pregnant right whales travel more than 1,000 miles from their feeding grounds off Canada and New England to the warm coastal waters of South Carolina, Georgia and northeastern Florida, to give birth and nurse their young. These southern waters are the only known calving area for the species.

“Right whales are dark with no dorsal fin and they often swim slowly at or just below the water’s surface,” said Barb Zoodsma, NOAA Fisheries’ southeast right whale recovery program coordinator. “Many assume that due to their size right whales would be easy to see, but just a slight difference in the texture on the water’s surface is often the only clue that a whale is present.”

North Atlantic right whales are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. To reduce the risk of collisions between right whales and boats, federal law requires vessels 65 feet long and greater to slow to 10 knots or less in Seasonal Management Areas along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard, including the calving and nursery area in the southeastern U.S. Speed restrictions are in place in various areas along the mid-Atlantic from November 1 through April 30, and in the southeast U.S. calving area from November 15 through April 15. For more information on seasonal ship speed restrictions, visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>

Enforcing the Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Rule is a high priority for NOAA’s Office of Law Enforcement. Since 2009, NOAA’s Office of General Counsel has prosecuted 21 vessels for violating the rule, and there have been no reported right whale fatalities due to ship collisions in the seasonal management areas since the rule was implemented in 2008.

Federal law also prohibits approaching or remaining within 500 yards of right whales either by watercraft or by aircraft. NOAA and its partners use planes to fly over the coast of northeast Florida and Georgia from December through March, and throughout the year in New England waters. The information from these aerial surveys is used to alert boaters of the presence of right whales, allowing ships to alter their course to avoid potential collisions with the whales.

NOAA Fisheries encourages people to report sightings of dead, injured, or entangled whales to NOAA at 1-877-WHALE-HELP or 877-433-8299.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast <http://.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Protected Resources http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/

North Atlantic Right Whale <http://rightwhalessouth.nmfs.noaa.gov>

North Atlantic Right Whale ship strike reduction <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>

Right Whale Festival 2012 http://public.sea2shore.org/right_whale_festival/

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