



**NOAA** NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Contact: Kim Amendola  
(727) 551-5707

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Heightened Mariner Awareness Requested During Right Whale Birthing Season**  
*Endangered Species Migrates to Southeast Waters November 15, 2010 – April 15, 2011*

NOAA Fisheries Service reminds mariners that the start of North Atlantic right whale calving season begins November 15 and continues through April 15. Boaters in the southeast United States are asked to report sightings of the endangered whale and to keep a distance of at least 500 yards from the protected species. Scientists estimate as few as 350 right whales remain, making it one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world.

Each winter, pregnant right whales migrate southward 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.

“The survival of each whale and calf is crucial to the recovery of this species,” said Barb Zoodsma, NOAA’s Fisheries Service’s southeast right whale recovery program coordinator. “Vessel operators play a critical role in the protection of right whales, and mariner awareness this time of year is imperative to helping the population survive.”

Right whales are dark with no dorsal fin, and they often swim slowly at or just below the water’s surface. Many mariners mistakenly assume that because of their large size, right whales would be easy to see. In many cases however, a slight textural difference on the water’s surface is the only clue that a whale is present. These physical characteristics, coupled with migration routes that frequently intersect busy shipping lanes and ports, make right whales vulnerable to vessel strikes. Ship strikes and entanglement in fixed fishing gear are the two greatest threats to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales.

To reduce the risk of collisions between right whales and vessels, NOAA and its partners conduct aerial surveys over northeast Florida and Georgia waters from December through March. Additionally, underwater buoys are deployed in strategic locations to acoustically detect right whales. The nearly real-time information from aerial surveys and buoys is used to alert mariners of the presence of right whales, enabling ships to alter their course to avoid potential collisions with the whales.

North Atlantic right whales are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Federal law prohibits approaching or remaining within 500 yards of right whales, either by watercraft or aircraft.

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 places 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/>

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

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

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On the Web:

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

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