



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA Announces Emergency Rules to Protect Right Whales from Gillnet Entanglement during Calving Season in Southeast United States

NOAA Fisheries Service has announced a temporary emergency rule prohibiting gillnet fishing and possession of gillnets in Atlantic Ocean waters off South Carolina, Georgia and northeast Florida during right whale calving season from November 15, 2006 through April 15, 2007. An exemption is provided to the prohibition on possession of gillnet gear for transiting through this area if the gear is properly stowed and no fish are on board.

Continued gillnet fishing in the southeast calving grounds without seasonal closures constitutes a significant risk to the well-being of critically endangered right whales. The North Atlantic right whale population is estimated to be approximately 300 animals.

“It is critical that we protect the endangered right whales from entanglement in gillnet gear during the peak of right whale calving season to improve the survival of the species,” said Dr. Bill Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service.

The coastal Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. are the North Atlantic right whale’s only known – and likely only – calving grounds. During the winter calving season, these waters support the entire population’s calving females and their calves, and in some years may also support a large proportion of the remaining population. A map illustrating the closed area can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/RightWhaleDocs.htm>.

NOAA Fisheries Service is also publishing a proposed rule in the Federal Register which will permanently protect right whales during calving seasons. To ensure full public participation prior to implementing the rule, NOAA Fisheries Service will seek public comment through December 15, 2006.

NOAA Fisheries Service is directed by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to reduce incidental serious injury and mortality of marine mammal stocks in commercial fishing operations.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service 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.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

Map of Southeast U.S. Restricted Area

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/RightWhaleDocs.htm>

Right Whale Photos

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/RightWhaleDocs.htm>

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