

Contact: Allison Garrett
727-551-5750
727-330-0309 (cell)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 9, 2011

NOAA Fisheries Service advises mariners, right whales are on the move
Endangered species migrates to Southeast waters November through April

NOAA Fisheries Service is reminding all mariners 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 southeast coast.

Boaters are asked to report sightings of the endangered whale and keep a distance of at least 500 yards from the protected species. Currently scientists estimate as few as approximately 360 right whales remain, making the right whale one of the most endangered marine mammals in the world.

Each winter pregnant right whales migrate south, 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 Service’s southeast right whale recovery program coordinator. “Many mariners mistakenly assume that because of their large size, right whales would be easy to see, but often a slight difference in texture on the water’s surface is the only clue that a whale is present.”

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, and in New England waters from January through December. Additionally, surface buoys are deployed in strategic locations to acoustically detect right whales. The nearly real-time information from these 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 also 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/>

(more)

NOAA Fisheries Service encourages people to report sightings of dead, injured, or entangled whales to NOAA at 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>

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

Facebook US NOAA Fisheries GOV

Follow us on Twitter @USNOAAGOV