



Area 1 Lobster Trap Program Application Process Underway

On June 1, 2012, NOAA Fisheries Service implemented new rules that will cap the number of federal lobster trap permits in Area 1 in the Gulf of Maine. As of May 1, 2013, federal lobster permit holders will not be able to fish with lobster traps in the federal waters of Area 1 unless they have a permit.

This summer, NOAA Fisheries is accepting applications from federal lobster fishermen who may qualify for the new Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program.

Federal lobster permit holders must apply and qualify for the Area 1 limited-access program with an application postmarked no later than Nov. 1, 2012.

If you are a federal lobster permit holder, you already should have received an application by mail. If you have not received an application, please call us at (978) 281-9180.

The following Q&A addresses common questions about the new Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program.

Why is a limited-access program in Area 1 necessary?

The purpose of the program is to maintain trap fishing effort at the 2008 level, as recommended by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Unchecked lobster trap fishing effort in Area 1 could jeopardize the long-term viability of the Gulf of Maine lobster stock and fishery.

Where is Area 1?

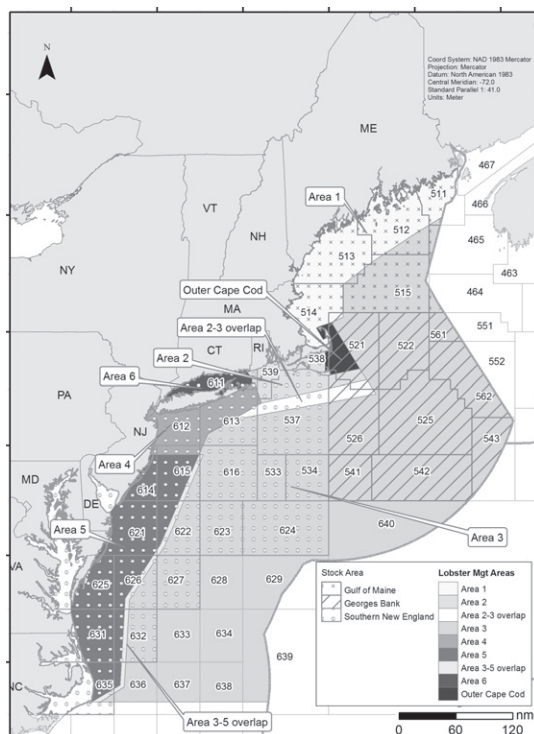
Area 1 lies within the Gulf of Maine and includes the coastal waters of Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts north of Cape Cod.

How can I qualify for the Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program?

To qualify, a permit holder must have a current federal lobster permit that had an Area 1 trap gear designation during federal fishing year 2008 (May 1, 2008, through April 30, 2009).

The permit holder also must have purchased at least one Area 1 lobster trap tag for that permit during any fishing year from 2004-2008.

If a permit holder did not have his/her current federal



lobster permit in 2008, the permit may still qualify for the Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program if the criteria were met by the prior permit holder.

When should I apply?

The deadline to submit an application is **Nov. 1, 2012**. However, applications received by Sept. 1, 2012 will receive priority review.

All Federal lobster permit holders and those with permits in Confirmation of Permit History should have received an application form with instructions. In some cases, you may need to submit additional documents to demonstrate eligibility. These documents must be official documents

from the state or federal government or the trap tag vendor.

Where should I send my application?

A permit holder must submit his/her application by one of the following methods:

- Fax it to (978) 281-9135;
- E-mail it to <Area1applications@noaa.gov>; or

NOAA's FishWatch Helps Consumers Make Well-Informed Seafood Choices

American seafood consumers can sometimes be misinformed about the status of our fish stocks and related harvesting techniques. To help consumers make smart seafood choices, NOAA Fisheries Service has redeveloped the FishWatch website, found at <www.fishwatch.gov>.

FishWatch is not meant to be a buyer's guide designed to discriminate against one fishery or advocate for another, and it is not an ecolabel or certification. Rather, FishWatch helps the public understand that US fishery resources are managed to ensure their long-term sustainability and explains the science supporting their management.

FishWatch provides the consumers with the information they need to make responsible choices themselves. This approach differs from that used by nonprofits and other organizations that have a variety

- Mail it to: Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program, Permit Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, 55 Great Republic Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930.

How will this affect my federal permit?

The application for the Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program is separate from the normal permit renewal process, but if permit holders don't apply or if they apply and are denied, they will not be eligible to elect Area 1 for lobster trap gear on their 2013 federal lobster permit.

What if I am a permit holder and don't apply?

If a permit holder does not apply, NOAA Fisheries will not be able to determine if his/her permit meets the eligibility requirements and his/her permit will not be eligible to fish with lobster traps in Area 1 as of May 1, 2013.

When will the Lobster Area 1 Limited-Access Program become effective?

Decisions on permit eligibility for the Area 1 lobster trap fishery will take effect on May 1, 2013. Any permit holder who elected Area 1 for trap gear during the 2012 federal fishing year will remain eligible to fish with traps in Area 1 until April 30, 2013. However, the permit holder must apply by the Nov. 1, 2012 deadline to qualify to fish with traps in Area 1 beginning May 1, 2013.

Where can I find a copy of the final rule?

The final rule and environmental assessment are available on our website at <www.nero.noaa.gov/sfd/lobster>.

Who should I call if I have questions?

Please call us at (978) 281-9180.

of seafood buyer's guides. These organizations often provide ratings based on their own policy opinions.

It's important for consumers to understand that US fishermen follow the most restrictive regulations in the world. These regulations work to sustain our fishery resources, the ecosystems in which they live, and the people who depend upon them.

Our fisheries are some of the largest and most valuable in the world and supply about a fifth of the seafood we eat in the United States. The US approach for sustainably managing fisheries has become an international model for addressing the challenges facing global ocean fisheries today.

Many people worry that consuming certain "overfished" species is not a responsible choice. However, here in the US, if a species' population falls

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Cut Fuel Consumption to Increase Profitability

Since 2010, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's (NEFSC) Northeast Cooperative Research Program has been supporting region-wide networks to address research needs in several Northeast and Mid-Atlantic fisheries.

These networks bring together members of the commercial fishing industry, researchers, and state and federal government agencies to develop multi-disciplinary approaches. One of the groups, the Northeast Groundfish Gear Conservation Engineering & Demonstration Network (GEARNET) is developing solutions to challenges in Northeast groundfish fisheries.

Coordinated by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI), the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMASST), and several commercial fishermen, GEARNET investigators contacted each groundfish sector and members of the common pool to determine their highest priority gear-based research needs.

While many of the resulting projects are aimed at developing gear to reduce the catch of unwanted species and avoid excessively large catches, several projects also are exploring ways to reduce the environmental impact of fishing activities and increase the profitability of fishing businesses.

One way to increase profitability is to reduce operating costs. According to researchers, diesel fuel accounts for around 25% of a fisherman's total operating costs.

Reducing the amount of fuel used while fishing can be accomplished either by lowering the rate of consumption or by reducing the duration of fishing activities. The GEARNET network is investigating both.

One way is by using new, fine-diameter trawl net material and acoustic codend catch sensors, which signal a predetermined catch volume. Another is by installing fuel flow meters to measure and track fuel consumption.

Two of these projects, led by Steve Eayrs of GMRI and Dr. Pingguo He of SMASST, are evaluating reduced fuel consumption resulting from replacing the netting in a commercial groundfish trawl with fine-diameter Sapphire and Dyneema twine. These projects will install fuel flow meters on six commercial vessels that will tow the newly constructed nets and compare the fuel use to that used when towing traditional nets. Preliminary work with this twine, conducted by Eayrs, indicates that fuel use can be reduced by more than 20% by using the new material.

A third project, led by Shelly Tallack of GMRI and Erik Chapman of New Hampshire Sea Grant intends to demonstrate the effectiveness of codend sensors on smaller vessels to help limit unnecessary fishing time as well as to reduce the bycatch of non-target species and smaller, less valuable cod by using a larger mesh codend.

A standard 6-1/2" codend is being compared to three 7"-to-7-1/2" square and diamond mesh codends to determine the selectivity of the experimental gear. Fuel use also is being calculated to determine the overall profitability of using the modified gear and catch

sensors. Results from this study may aid fishermen in fishing more selectively and economically.

An earlier project, funded through the NEFSC and conducted by Eayrs and Adam Baukus, also of GMRI, tested three acoustic codend sensor systems – the Simrad P150, the Notus Trawlmaster, and the Netmind codend sensor – on nine groundfish vessels over periods ranging from one-to-four days.

This work showed that the sensors were very useful in reducing towing times by minimizing uncertainty with respect to catch volume. Towing durations were sometimes reduced by as much as 50% compared to that normally expected in the location fished.

Additional work on energy efficiency in New England fisheries conducted by Eayrs, Chapman, and colleagues from the Island Institute and Nature Conservancy include testing semi-pelagic otter boards with less bottom contact, conducting energy audits, and exploring the use of alternative energy systems on fishing vessels.

Eayrs and Chapman also have conducted various analyses to look at the cost/benefit ratio of many of the

energy-reducing technologies available.

While individual vessel energy audits can identify a number of things that can reduce operating costs, the simple installation of a fuel flow meter was found to be one of the lowest-cost measures, providing one of the highest estimated savings, with a payback period estimated to be less than nine months.

These relatively inexpensive meters allow fishermen to instantly determine their optimum hull speed in response to varying sea state and operating behavior and conditions, and make immediate changes that affect their profitability. This tool, along with gear modification studies, can help fishermen facing catch-limited fisheries to operate their vessels most efficiently and encourage them to develop additional methods to reduce their fuel consumption and improve the bottom line.

For complete information on all GEARNET projects, please visit <www.gearnnet.org>. For more information on fuel efficiency work in New England fisheries, e-mail Steve Eayrs at <seayrs@gmri.org> or Erik Chapman at <erik.chapman@unh.edu>.

NOAA Fisheries Forms Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder Working Group

NOAA Fisheries Service recently formed the Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder Working Group at the request of the New England Fishery Management Council. The request was made because the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder quota for fishing year 2012 is 61% lower than it was in 2011. At its April meeting, the council heard fishing industry concerns that the lower quota would have significant negative impacts on both groundfish and scallop vessels.

The Georges Bank yellowtail quota is used by both fleets. Groundfish sector vessels are required to stop fishing in the Georges Bank area when they run out of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder quota allocated to them. Groundfish fishermen have raised concerns that Georges Bank yellowtail flounder could be a limiting factor in sector operations and could cause quota for other Georges Bank species, such as haddock and cod, to go unused for the year.

Scallop vessels take yellowtail flounder as bycatch in their scallop hauls. As a result, they need a sufficient amount of yellowtail flounder quota to ensure that they can continue to harvest scallops from Georges Bank. If the scallop fleet yellowtail flounder catch exceeds its established limit, scallop vessels would face reductions in the number of fishing days the following year.

The Georges Bank yellowtail flounder fishery is managed collaboratively with Canada as part of the US/Canada Resource Sharing Understanding. Through this international understanding, the US and Canada use a joint stock assessment process to provide scientific information to a joint management body that develops harvest strategies for three shared stocks, including Georges Bank yellowtail flounder.

The agreed upon harvest strategies result in catch

limits for each country's Georges Bank yellowtail flounder fisheries. The most recent joint assessment of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder shows that the number of incoming young fish has been poor in recent years for reasons not well understood.

For 2012, the US annual catch limit for Georges Bank yellowtail flounder is 547.8 metric tons (mt), down from the 2011 limit of 1,416 mt. Within the US total catch limit, the groundfish fishery was initially provided with an annual catch limit of 217.7 mt and the scallop fleet received 307.5 mt.

The Georges Bank Yellowtail Flounder Working Group was designed to complement the council process by providing a forum for discussion in addition to the regularly scheduled council and council committee meetings. The options discussed by the working group have been considered by the council, which made recommendations to NOAA Fisheries for short-term action in the 2012 fishing year.

The council, consistent with working group recommendations, requested that NOAA Fisheries modify the Georges Bank yellowtail flounder catch limits for 2012 by reducing the scallop allocation to 156.9 mt and increasing the groundfish fishery quota to 368.3 mt. The total yellowtail flounder quota remained unchanged. The revision of the catch levels was based on a revised projection of yellowtail flounder catch in the scallop fishery. NOAA Fisheries completed the adjustment on July 13, 2012.

The council also requested that NOAA Fisheries use emergency authority to partially exempt the scallop fishery from accountability measures associated with the revised scallop quota. NOAA Fisheries intends to

See YELOWTAIL GROUP, next page

Federal Funding Helps Improve Northeast Cooperative Fisheries Data Collection

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) is the main source of fisheries-dependent information on the Atlantic coast. This cooperative state-federal program was formed in 1995 and is made up of 23 coastal resource agencies, including the state marine fisheries agencies, the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries Service, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The objective of the ACCSP is to generate accurate and timely marine fishery statistics for the Atlantic coast that are collected, processed, and disseminated according to common standards agreed upon by all program partners.

ACCSP staff coordinates the program and runs the data management systems. Committees, composed of representatives from each partner organization, provide direction and guidance to the program. And, the partner organizations then implement the program's activities.

Each year, ACCSP works with NOAA Fisheries to provide federal grant funding for partners, including Atlantic coastal states, to improve and enhance fisheries data. These projects often complement federal data collection activities in order to obtain more complete fisheries information.

The types of projects funded by ACCSP are diverse and depend on the needs and capabilities of the partners, as well as the priorities determined by ACCSP.

By working with NOAA Fisheries, ACCSP has been able to provide funding to Atlantic coastal partners for improvements in catch and effort reporting, biological sampling, and other activities. These projects enable

partners to focus their efforts where it is needed most and to work collaboratively with the fishing industry to provide accurate data for fisheries management decisions.

The accompanying chart describes ACCSP funding awards for fiscal year 2012 in the Northeast.

More information on ACCSP and projects funded under this program is available at <www.accsp.org>. To learn more about past ACCSP projects in your state, go to <www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/grantfactsheets>.

| AWARD RECIPIENT | PROJECT TITLE | FEDERAL FUNDING |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission | ACCSP Administrative Grant* | \$1,507,629 |
| Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission | Continued Dealer Reporting, Trip Level Reporting, and Biological Sampling for Commercial Fisheries in New Jersey* | \$168,028 |
| Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission | Observer Program Expansion for Mid-Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia) and Rhode Island Small Mesh Otter Trawls | \$60,962 |
| Rhode Island Division of Fish and Wildlife | Maintenance and Coordination of Fisheries Dependent Data Feeds to ACCSP from the State of Rhode Island | \$99,379 |
| Maine Department of Marine Resources | Managing Mandatory Dealer Reporting in Maine | \$233,622 |
| Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries | Continue Trip-Level Reporting for All Massachusetts Commercial Permit Holders | \$76,050 |

*These two projects are combined into one grant award.

2012 Sector Overview and New Exemptions

On May 1, NOAA Fisheries Service approved 19 sector operations plans for 2012 and allocated quota for 14 groundfish stocks to each sector. For 2012, sectors are allocated 99% of the groundfish quotas based on the landings history of the 850 permits enrolled in sectors.

We also granted the sector vessels a number of exemptions from sector operating rules. These exemptions are intended to provide increased flexibility to address negative impacts of some restrictive measures needed to rebuild fish stocks. In addition to the universal exemptions that were granted to every sector, 16 sector-specific exemptions that were previously approved in 2011 were again granted in 2012.

We also have approved four new exemptions for 2012. The first of the new exemptions enables multiple vessels participating in the same sector to haul each other's hook gear. This provides flexibility in operations that may lead to increased efficiency and less gear in the water.

The second new exemption allows a vessel to use 6" mesh codends to target redfish. Vessels may only use this exemption when carrying an at-sea monitor or an observer and must report catch daily to their sector. This exemption provides increased opportunities to target the abundant and healthy redfish stock.

The third new exemption permits vessels to fish both inside and outside of the Closed Area I Hook Gear Haddock Special Access Program (SAP) on the same trip. To ensure accurate accounting of catch, vessels may not set or haul gear across the border of the SAP, and vessels must report catch from inside the SAP daily. This will provide additional flexibility to vessels when

participating in the SAP.

The final new exemption allows a sector vessel to declare its intent to fish in the Eastern US/Canada SAP and the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock SAP while at sea. This flexibility will help vessels already at sea to take advantage of opportunities to target stocks in the Eastern US/Canada Area without first steaming back to port. This exemption will become effective once a software update to vessel monitoring systems (VMS) is complete.

For more information, call Mark Grant, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9145 or e-mail him at <mark.grant@noaa.gov>.

Fishwatch

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below a sustainable level (overfished), fishery managers reduce harvest of the species to rebuild the population. Even if a species is technically overfished, limited harvest often is still permitted for that species at a rate that will rebuild the species.

By buying fish that are landed under these restrictive catch limits, consumers can support fishermen who are fishing responsibly, as well as support working waterfronts and the many US jobs involved with seafood production and consumption.

What can you do to promote US fish? Many retailers and chefs are making purchasing seafood from responsibly managed sources a priority and implementing sustainable seafood procurement policies. Help chefs, retailers, and consumers stay informed with the most up-to-date, credible resources, including the FishWatch page.

Also, see if there is a marketing effort in your area, such as the Massachusetts Seafood Marketing Commission, which was organized earlier this year.

For more information about FishWatch, call Kathleen Semon, NOAA FishWatch Program, at (301) 427-8530 or e-mail her at <Kathleen.Semon@noaa.gov>.

Yellowtail group

Continued from previous page

publish a proposed rule in response to the council's exemption request as soon as the necessary analysis can be completed. The council also will continue discussions to work toward longer-term solutions for future fishing years.

More than 100 people attended the working group public meeting on May 23, 2012 in New Bedford, MA. The working group panel had a wide range of participants, including groundfish and scallop industry representatives, as well as council members and staff, NOAA Fisheries staff, and environmental non-governmental organization representatives.

Presenters shared information on how stock status is determined, how the joint US/Canada management body makes catch allocations for this shared stock, and existing efforts to reduce yellowtail bycatch in the scallop fishery.

The panel discussed a wide range of preliminary options, which fell into one of three broad categories: How to potentially re-apportion the available US quota between the groundfish and scallop fleet; how additional quota potentially could be acquired from Canada; and how catch of Georges Bank yellowtail flounder could be reduced or avoided to extend fishing opportunities in other fisheries.

Additional background information, as well as updates on future Georges Bank yellowtail flounder issues, including any council or NOAA Fisheries actions taken for fishing year 2012, may be found at <www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/gbytf>.

NOAA, Local Partners Tackle Marine Debris

All marine debris shares a common origin – people. Marine debris is defined as “any persistent solid material that is manufactured or processed and directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, disposed of or abandoned into the marine environment or Great Lakes.”

Ocean-based marine debris largely results from improperly stowed or disposed of materials on board boats, cargo ships, and stationary platforms. Land-based marine debris largely results from littering, dumping, poor waste management practices, storm water discharges, and extreme natural events like hurricanes, tsunamis, and floods.

Regardless of the type of marine debris, the impacts of it are well documented and threaten the livelihoods of those who depend on healthy oceans for employment, food, recreation, or tourism.

Derelict fishing gear and other forms of debris can impact fish populations through “ghost fishing,” entanglement, and destruction of important fish habitat and breeding grounds. Derelict nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear, and other debris can smother and damage sensitive ecosystems, many of which are essential habitat for important fish species, and can entangle, maim, and cause many wildlife species to drown.

Abandoned or lost fishing line, nets, rope, and other trash can pose navigation safety hazards -- and do significant, costly damage to property -- by wrapping around boat propellers and clogging seawater intakes. No one is more affected by this than fishermen themselves, making it no surprise that they are strong partners and advocates in debris removal projects.

The NOAA Restoration Center works in partnership with the NOAA Marine Debris Program to conduct a yearly funding competition that supports local marine debris removal projects throughout the coastal US and territories.

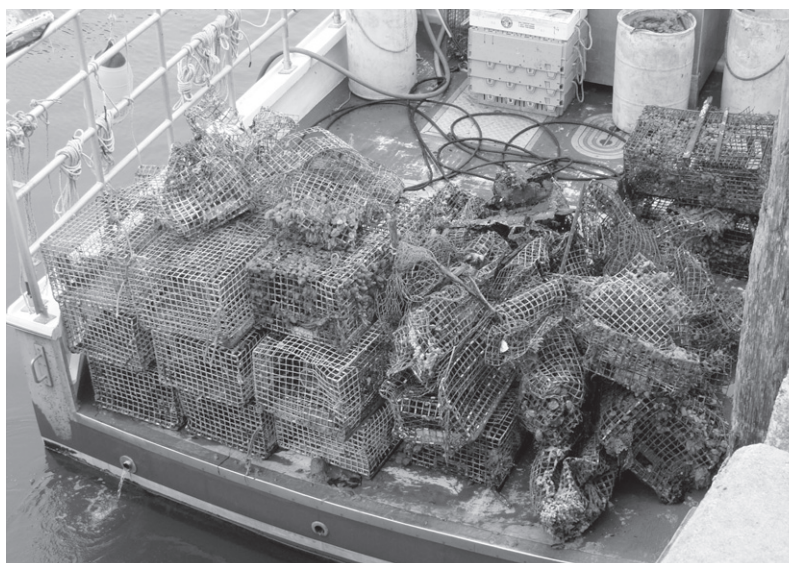
The main priority of this removal program is to support the removal of large-scale debris from important fish habitats. This includes derelict fishing gear removal and prevention projects, vessel removals, and large debris removals both in-water and in riparian or inter-tidal areas.

In the Northeast region, NOAA has funded 16 projects across seven states from Maryland to Maine since 2006, which have removed a cumulative total of over 880 tons of debris from the marine and coastal environment.

Working with industry

The involvement and support of local communities and industries are critical components to each of the projects funded through this partnership.

For example, NOAA is currently funding a derelict fishing gear removal project in the Gulf of Maine. The project, implemented by the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, relies heavily on the time and energy of volunteer commercial lobstermen and their vessels to locate, remove, and dispose of derelict traps that continue to either ghost fish or damage submerged habitat. Those traps that are recovered and can be



Derelict lobster gear removed from the Gulf of Maine

Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation

identified are returned to their rightful owners, thus saving them the cost of replacing that equipment.

Outside of the partnership with the NOAA Restoration Center, the NOAA Marine Debris Program does a significant amount of research, planning, prevention, and outreach related to the impacts marine debris has on our marine and coastal environments and communities.

Most recently, the program convened the New England Derelict Fishing Gear Workshop with non-profit groups, state resource management agencies, and

commercial fishermen from Rhode Island to Canada to discuss solutions to the derelict fishing gear problem, and to find ways to minimize impacts from this debris in the Northeast region.

The workshop, held in Portland, ME Feb. 27–29, 2012, provided a forum for stakeholders to gather, share ideas, and brainstorm both old and new solutions to meet the needs of both people and marine resources. The discussions started at the workshop will be continued through formal and informal partnerships and at fishing-related meetings throughout the region.

From supporting marine debris removal projects to working with state and local agencies on disposing of derelict, obsolete, or unwanted fishing gear to tracking tsunami debris as it crosses the Pacific, NOAA's approach to marine debris revolves around reducing its negative impacts on our natural resources and coastal communities.

For more information visit <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov>.

NOAA Restoration Center encourages those with innovative and habitat-focused debris removal projects to share and develop those ideas. For more information on marine debris funding opportunities, please visit www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/marinedebris.html.

Whale Approach Guidelines Reminder

Most people understand that harming, injuring, or harassing whales, or attempting to do any of these things, is prohibited. When vessels transit or use fishing gear close to whales or to the bubble clouds created by feeding whales, the potential for collision, entanglement, or harassment by interrupting the animal's feeding behavior increases.

To protect North Atlantic right whales, vessels are prohibited from approaching these mammals within 500 yards (1,500'). If a vessel is within this 500-yard buffer, it must depart the area immediately at a slow and safe speed, steering a course away from the right whale.

Additionally, to protect species of whales found in our waters, NOAA Fisheries Service has developed the following Northeast Whale Watching Guidelines.

- Never approach a whale within 100', or, in the case of North Atlantic right whales, 500 yards. If you cannot identify the species of whale, do not approach within 500 yards.

- If a whale approaches your vessel within a 100' buffer, place vessel engines in neutral and do not re-engage propulsion until whales are observed clear of harm's way from your vessel.

- Take into account obstacles and do not box whales in or cut off their paths.
- Parallel the course of the whale and view the animal from behind.
- Do not separate mother-calf pairs or other animals traveling together.
- Do not transit through bubble clouds or groups of feeding whales.
- Do not cast line or troll gear over whales.
- Reduce speed to 7 knots or less when within a half-mile of a whale.
- Limit time within 100'-300' of whales to 15 minutes. And,
- Coordinate viewing time with other vessels in the vicinity.

By following these guidelines, vessel operators can maintain safe distances from whales, avoid violating federal law, and protect their vessels and passengers.

A more detailed version of NOAA's Northeast Whale Watching Guidelines is available online at www.nero.noaa.gov/whalewatch or as a printed brochure upon request.

For more information or to request printed materials, call our Protected Resources Division at (978) 281-9328.



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR