



# NOAA FISHERIES FACT SHEET



## Summary of Information for the National Whale Conservation Fund, Right Whale Grant Programs

A special project of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

### PURPOSE

The National Whale Conservation Fund (NWCF or Fund) was established to support research, management, conservation and education/outreach activities related to the conservation and recovery of whales. The NWCF is a special project of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization established by Congress in 1984. The Foundation operates the Fund under the direction of the National Whale Conservation Fund Advisory Council (Advisory Council), a panel of conservation leaders and representatives of cooperating entities.

### RIGHT WHALE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The Right Whale Research Program, a partnership between NFWF and NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Office, will emphasize funding projects that have a strong likelihood of reducing death and/or serious injury to right whales due to entanglements in fishing gear, and are consistent with applicable regulations pertaining to the Magnuson Act, Endangered Species Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. This program provides competitive grants and engages in contracts to finance creative and innovative proposals that seek to work with industry to significantly diminish whale entanglements in fishing gear.

In addition, this Program is accepting proposals that address some right whale biological needs in support of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP).

#### Who is Eligible to Apply?

Any U.S. citizen is eligible to receive assistance for an idea or method that has a strong likelihood of reducing death and/or serious injury to whales caused by entanglements.

#### What Kinds of Proposals will be Accepted?

Project funding priorities for gear investigation and testing to reduce death and/or serious injury due to entanglements are:

- Research related to reducing risk associated with vertical lines. Important data gaps include development of the following:
  1. Lipid soluble rope that would quickly deteriorate if it came in contact with a whale.
  2. Device to reduce the separation between buoys in the surface system of buoy line.
  3. Mechanical time release which holds the buoy and buoy line on the bottom for a predetermined length of time and then releases the buoy allowing it to float to the surface with the buoy line.
  4. Device to store and release buoy line on the ocean bottom such as through an acoustic release, galvanic time release or mechanical time release.
  5. Thwartable bottom link, located at the bottom of a buoy line, that will act as a weak link until the gear is ready to be hauled. At that time, the device is switched from a weak link mode to a strong link mode, allowing the gear to be hauled.
  6. Continue with field testing of time tension line cutter bottom release units and improve handling and safety concerns. Time tension line cutters are located at the bottom of a buoy line, that will release the buoy line from the bottom gear after a predetermined load and time period have been exceeded.

- Research related to lowering the profile of groundlines. Important data gaps include studies to improve the abrasion resistance and overall durability of sinking/ neutrally buoyant rope.
- Research the profile of gillnet and trap/pot gear in the water column in various habitats and oceanographic conditions.
- Develop technology for producing knotless splices. Proposals will also be accepted for projects that address right whale biological needs to support the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. Project funding priorities for this type of work are:
  - Research on the horizontal and vertical distribution of right whales in the water column throughout their range in U.S. waters. Important data gaps include behavior over rocky, coral or wreck habitats (e.g., inshore areas and depths over 100 fathoms), as well as on the migratory corridor and breeding grounds.
  - Information on the temporal and spatial distribution of right whales (e.g., utilizing aerial surveys, vessel surveys, passive acoustics). Important data gaps include: 1) the occupancy of right whales in coastal waters of Maine; 2) the mid-Atlantic, from the coast to the EEZ; and 3) discovery of the principle wintering area for non-calving right whales.
  - Research on the vertical distributions of both the processes and the prey organisms related to right whale foraging for habitat characterization and predictive modeling.
  - Develop technical advances/improvements for disentanglement including sedatives and tools. Also, investigate behavioral issues that may affect and should be considered during disentanglement.
  - Research on the development of long-term tracking tags suitable for deployment on right whales with minimal health risks.
 

Note that all proposals will be evaluated and selected based on criteria that includes but is not limited to merit, proposal quality, and available funding.

### ATLANTIC COAST STATES COOPERATIVE PLANNING FOR RIGHT WHALE RECOVERY PROGRAM

In addition to the Right Whale Research Program, the NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Office partners with NFWF to provide Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 6 funds to East Coast states for projects that have a strong likelihood of reducing the death and/or serious injury of right whales through the development or implementation of recovery plan programs. The section 6 program is designed to encourage cooperation between the state and federal governments through the development of agreements to further recovery efforts for endangered and threatened species that are resident in those states.

#### Who is Eligible to Apply?

Any Atlantic coast state government agency is eligible for funding, regardless of whether or not the state has an active agreement with NOAA Fisheries Service. Applicants that propose to build on existing cooperative efforts with NOAA Fisheries Service or to enter into additional collaboration with other states and/or federal agencies are encouraged.

#### What Kinds of Proposals will be Accepted?

Project funding priorities for gear investigation and testing are the same as those described under the Right

Whale Research Program. Additional funding priorities under the Atlantic Coast States Program include:

- Vessel strike mitigation to:
  1. Reduce right whale interactions via cost-effective technology, including alternative detection technology, or other acceptable means;
  2. Develop a better understanding of right whale behavior and responses to approaching vessels;
  3. Develop risk assessment/modeling;
  4. Develop merchant mariner training curriculum;
  5. Develop materials and requirements to raise awareness among commercial and recreational mariners via state licensing authorities;
  6. Research the feasibility and methods for enhancing or replacing Southeast aerial survey monitoring efforts.
- Enforcement as it applies to individual or cooperative states.
- Right whale research to support the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, specifically:
  1. Research on the horizontal and vertical distribution of right whales in the water column throughout their range in U.S. waters. Important data gaps include behavior over rocky, coral or wreck habitats (e.g. inshore areas and depths over 100 fathoms), as well as on the migratory corridor and breeding grounds;
  2. Research on the vertical distributions of both the processes and the prey organisms related to right whale foraging for habitat characterization and predictive modeling;
  3. Research on the development of long-term tracking tags suitable for deployment on right whales with minimal health risks.
- Disentanglement activities which will reduce mortality and/or serious injury of entangled whales, specifically:
  1. Develop technical advances/improvements for disentanglement including sedatives and tools;
  2. Investigate behavioral issues that may affect and should be considered during disentanglement;
  3. Improve disentanglement response infrastructure.
- Education and outreach programs to fishermen, mariners, recreational vessel operators (commercial and private), and the general public to facilitate reduction of gear interactions.
 

Note that all proposals will be evaluated and selected based on criteria that includes but is not limited to merit, proposal quality, and available funding.

### BOTH PROGRAMS

#### How Do I Apply?

Grants and contracts from the NWCF for these programs are awarded on a competitive basis. To apply, submit a pre-proposal via the NFWF online application system ([www.nfwf.org/programs/nationalwhalefund.cfm](http://www.nfwf.org/programs/nationalwhalefund.cfm)) by **April 5, 2006**. Applicants will be notified by **early May 2006** as to the status of their preliminary applications and whether they are invited to submit a full proposal. Proposals will be reviewed by NFWF staff, an external panel of fishing gear experts and resource managers and the NWCF Advisory Council. **Matching funds are not required for these programs.**

#### Who Can I Contact with Questions?

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