

## NOAA Announces Temporary Whale Protection Zone in Wilkinson Basin -- May 11, 2001

### NMFS Northeast Region

N E W S



#### Gear Restrictions To Protect

#### Endangered Right Whales

#### Foraging Off Cape Cod

**Gloucester, Mass.** – NOAA Fisheries announced today temporary fishing restrictions to protect a group of right whales foraging in federal waters northeast of Cape Cod in the Wilkinson Basin. The restrictions, which were filed at the Federal Register today and go into effect Sunday, May 13, prohibit the use of gillnet gear in the area for 15 days. Lobster gear in the area must be modified to reduce the number of vertical lines by one-half.

The restrictions are intended to protect groups of right whales seen in the area from April 30 through to the most recent sighting, May 9.

In addition to the required removal or modification of gear in the restricted area, NOAA Fisheries is asking fishermen to make similar gear changes, on a voluntary basis, in a precautionary area surrounding the restricted area.

The coordinates describing the restricted and precautionary areas are available in the federal register and can also be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region [whale plan website](#) (see "Area and Gear Restrictions" under "What's New").

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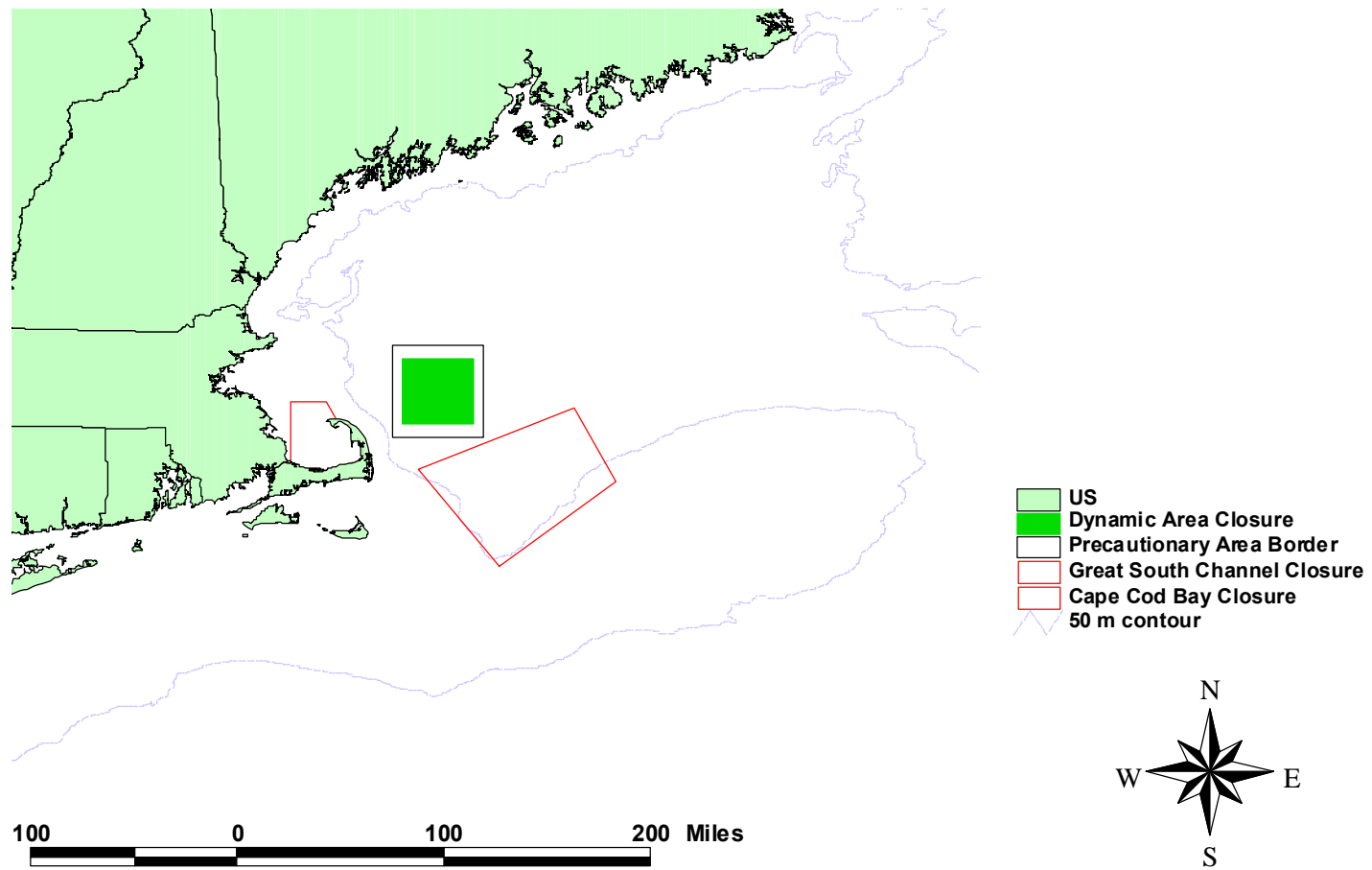
"We are committed to reducing human threats to these highly endangered whales, including fixed fishing gear," says Chris Mantzaris, deputy regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries in the Northeast. "As we learn more about how whales behave, we use that information to improve our protection measures. Based on this improved picture of a sub-group feeding behavior, we can take precautionary step to prevent an entanglement from occurring."

The measures announced today are part of an evolving strategy to protect highly endangered North Atlantic right whales from injury or death caused by entanglement in fishing gear. Recent analyses of right whale sighting data and observations show that sighting three or more animals persisting in an area likely means they are feeding, that there are more animals nearby, and that this sub-group will stay in the area until the prey is depleted or moves away.

The new protection zones are triggered by a confirmed observation of three or more North Atlantic right whales foraging within a 75 nm<sup>2</sup> area. The protection zone size can vary in size and will remain in effect at least 15 days. If three or more right whales are resighted in the second week of the zone protection, then the zone may be extended for another 15 days. While a protection zone is in effect, gillnet gear must be removed and lobster buoys must have 50% of their vertical buoy lines removed within 48 hours of the zone going into effect.

Attempts to mitigate the effects of fishing gear on large whales are complex owing to the large area involved; the difficulty of documenting exactly when, where and how encounters occur; the variety of operations; and the extremely precarious status of the North Atlantic right whale. These whales are one of four species included in the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, under which measures are devised to reduce the serious injuries and deaths of large whales caused by human activities. Other endangered whales included in the plan are the humpback and finback. Minke whales are also covered by the plan, but are a protected rather than an endangered species.

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**Figure 1** Dynamic Area Management Gear Restriction (Gillnet/Lobster) May 13-28, 2001

Table 1.– DAM Restricted Area coordinates.

Area	Latitude (Converted from decimal)	Longitude (same)
Core Dynamic Area Management (460 square nautical mile) (No Gillnet / 50% lobster vertical lines removed by REGULATION)	42E 30' N	69E 40' W
	42E 30' N	69E 15' W
	42E 05' N	69E 15' W
	42E 05' N	69E 40' W
Surrounding Precautionary Area (600 square nautical miles) (No Gillnet / 50% lobster vertical lines removed VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE)	42E 36' N	69E 45' W
	42E 36' N	69E 10' W
	41E 55' N	69E 10' W
	41E 55' N	69E 45' W

## Dynamic Area Management Action in Response to Right Whale Sightings

May 11, 2001

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NOAA Fisheries has taken a management action to restrict fishing activity in the proximity of Wilkinson Basin, as defined on the attached pages. The management action includes: 1) a regulated area in which gillnetting is prohibited and vertical lines on lobster gear must reduced by 50%; and, 2) a surrounding area which is being called a precautionary area. Compliance with the same gear restrictions is requested on a voluntary basis for this precautionary area.

The Dynamic Area Management (DAM) is in effect starting Sunday May 13 through May 28 (15 days). NOAA Fisheries will continue to monitor the area during that time. This action will appear in the Federal Register on Wednesday, May 16, 2001. Continued presence of whales in the area may result in an extension or a revised DAM action.