



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Contact: Charlene Ponce
(813) 334-0895

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov.13, 2007

Endangered Right Whales Headed South for Winter Alert for Mariners and Fishers in Southeast U.S. Waters

To help protect the highly endangered North Atlantic right whale population, NOAA Fisheries Service is reminding mariners and fishers that the start of calving (birthing) season begins Nov. 15, and continues through April 15. Regulations and recommendations are in place to help protect these endangered whales during this critical period. The calving season is particularly critical because pregnant mothers and new-born calves are susceptible to ocean-surface traffic.

"Protecting right whale mothers and their young is critical to the recovery of the population," said Barb Zoodsma, NOAA Fisheries Service right whale biologist. "The loss of any right whale is of concern, and we ask for everyone to adhere to measures that protect this critically endangered species."

Each year, pregnant females migrate southward more than 1,000 miles from feeding areas off Canada and New England to the warm, calm, coastal waters off South Carolina, Georgia and northeastern Florida to give birth and nurse their young. These waters are the only known calving area for the species.

Collisions with ships and entanglement in fixed fishing gear are the two greatest threats to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales, which is why it is important that all mariners and fishers are aware of the following regulations and recommendations:

- Federal law prohibits approaching or remaining within 500 yards of right whales.
- Gillnet fishing and possession is prohibited annually in the [Southeast U.S. Restricted Area North](#), Nov. 15 – April 15, with an exemption for transiting through this area if gear is stowed in accordance with the rule.
- Gillnet fishing is prohibited annually in the [Southeast U.S. Restricted Area South](#), Dec. 1 – March 31, with limited exemptions for gillnet fishing for sharks and Spanish mackerel.
- Recommended routes are in place for mariners entering or leaving the ports of Jacksonville and Fernandina, Fla., and Brunswick, Ga. The routes are expected to reduce the chances of ship strikes with whales.
- Speeds of 10 knots or less are recommended when consistent with safe navigation.
- Always wear polarized sunglasses and stay alert in right whale habitat. Although right whales are large animals, they have dark skin, no dorsal fin, and can remain at, or just below the water's surface making them extremely difficult to see.

North Atlantic right whales are among the most endangered marine mammal populations in the world. This species is protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

To report sightings of dead, injured, or entangled whales, contact the U.S. Coast Guard via VHF marine radio channel 16 or call the NOAA Fisheries Service Stranding Hotline at 1-877-433-8299.

To report right whale sightings, please call the following numbers depending on location:
South Carolina: 1-843-762-8592
Georgia: 1-800-2-SAVE-ME or 1-800-272-8363
Florida: 1-888-97-WHALE or 1-888-979-4253

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 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

###

On The Web:

[Southeast U.S. Restricted Area South](#)

http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/Images/RevSEUSResArea_Rule.jpg

Recommended Shipping Lanes Fact Sheets

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/mm/rightwhales/rwconservation.htm>

Final Rule for Right Whale Gillnet Restrictions in the Southeast U.S.

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/fr72-34632.pdf>

General Right Whale Facts

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals/cetaceans/rightwhale.htm>

<http://rightwhalessouth.nmfs.noaa.gov>