



# Take Pleasure in Protecting Our Treasures

## Help Prevent Extinction of the North Atlantic Right Whale

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to promoting the conservation and recovery of the most endangered marine mammal in U.S. waters – the North Atlantic right whale.

Historically depleted by commercial whaling, the biggest known threats to North Atlantic right whales today are vessel strikes and entanglements in fixed fishing gear. Scientists estimate that in 2002, a minimum population of 313 right whales inhabited the North Atlantic. For the North Atlantic right whale population to recover, death and injury from human activities must be reduced.

### Sharpen Your Vision!

Mariners should keep a sharp lookout for right whales along the entire East Coast, especially during right whale calving (birthing) season from November through April. In late fall and early winter, pregnant females make their annual north-south migration from their feeding grounds off Canada and New England, to give birth and nurse their young in the warm, calm coastal waters off South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida. **This calving area is their only known – and likely only – calving area.**

We are fortunate to have these rare winter visitors in our nearshore coastal waters, but remember, these whales are teetering on the brink of extinction and it is up to each one of us to do what we can to help protect them.

### It's Up to You!

1. Stay at least 500 yards away from right whales! It's the law!
2. Operate your vessel at a slow, safe speed of 10 knots or less in areas where right whales are known to occur.
3. Move away slowly if a right whale approaches you.
4. Wear polarized sunglasses and stay alert.
5. Avoid boating during times of poor visibility (fog, night, etc.)
6. Know how to properly identify right whales and immediately report dead, injured, or entangled whales to the U.S. Coast Guard via marine radio VHF Ch 16 or call the NOAA Fisheries Service Stranding Hotline at 1-877-433-8299.



### CAUTION MARINERS!

**MOVE SLOWLY...**  
**Lives depend on it**



*Right whale calf injured by vessel strike*

NOAA Fisheries Service  
Southeast Regional Office  
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>





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### CAUTION MARINERS!

- Most of the time, right whales are difficult to spot and identify—a distant blow may be all you see.
- Any vessel finding itself closer than 500 yards of a surfacing right whale, must depart immediately at a safe, slow speed.

### Right Whale Identification

- Black to dark-grey skin sometimes with white splotches on belly or neck.
- Large white bumps on the head called callosities.
- Black, paddle-shaped, short, stubby flippers.
- Black, deeply notched, triangular tail.
- *No* dorsal fin on its back.
- V-shaped blow from blowhole when whale exhales, which is visible only when positioned directly in front of the whale or directly behind.

### Right Whale Behavior

- May not move away from boat's path.
- Movement may be unpredictable.
- Mothers and calves travel together.
- Calves may be curious and approach vessels.
- Calves have limited diving ability, so mothers and calves spend a lot of time near the surface.
- Pregnant females don't eat during calving season; therefore, they need to conserve energy for giving birth, nursing, and migrating northward to feeding areas.
- Rest at water's surface.

### Right Whale Biology

- 45 to 50 feet in length.
- Sexually mature at around age 10.
- Produce one offspring every 3 to 5 years.
- Filter feeders using baleen plates.
- Feed on dense patches of zooplankton called copepods.
- Live at least 70 years and probably well over 100 years.



Dark skin; callosities on head



Short, stubby flippers



Broad, deeply-notched, black tail



No dorsal fin



V-shaped blow

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### The Problem

Pregnant females and females with calves are known to have been struck by vessels along the East Coast in recent years. It is estimated that an average of two North Atlantic right whales are killed each year either by vessel strikes or entanglement in fixed fishing gear. The 2005-2006 calving season turned out to be a particularly devastating season for the species in the Southeast, as two calves were killed in January 2006 – one related to a vessel strike and one from gillnet entanglement.

**Right whales are particularly vulnerable to collisions with vessels for a number of reasons, including:**

- 1) They inhabit nearshore coastal waters laden with heavy vessel traffic.
- 2) They are slow swimmers.
- 3) They often rest at, or near, the surface.
- 4) They are difficult to spot because they are dark in color and lack a dorsal fin.

**Any whale accidentally struck or any dead whale carcass should be reported immediately.**

### If You See a Right Whale

Please help NOAA Fisheries collect vital information about right whales—dead or alive. If you see a right whale, record the latitude and longitude or position in regard to buoys, then slowly move away from the whale.

**Immediately report all dead, injured, or entangled whales to the U.S. Coast Guard via marine radio VHF Channel 16 or call the NOAA Fisheries Stranding Hotline at 1-877-433-8299.**



Three right whales observed from a small vessel



V-shaped blow



*Right whale injured by vessel strike off the east coast of Florida*

### Fact Box

- The loss of one or two female right whales per year from human activity could lead to extinction.
- Calving season is the most vulnerable time in the entire life of a right whale—any disturbance could affect calving, nursing or other behaviors critical to the survival of the species.
- Calves are about 14 feet long at birth, weigh about 2,000 pounds, and nurse for 10 to 12 months.

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### What NOAA Fisheries is Doing to Protect Right Whales

The North Atlantic right whale is protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, and through these Acts, NOAA Fisheries Service is strengthening protection of the species.

First, NOAA Fisheries Service published a proposed rule, that among other things, proposes to slow vessels greater than 65 feet in areas and times when right whales are present. The proposed rule, which targets the entire U.S. Atlantic Coast will be finalized, if appropriate, later this year or early next year.

Second, NOAA has included on its electronic navigational charts, recommended lanes in the proximity of the ports of Jacksonville and Fernandina Beach, Florida, and Brunswick, Georgia. Research has shown that if mariners operate at a slow, safe speed of 10 knots or less and use these lanes, as opposed to transiting to and from ports along other pathways, the risk of ship strikes to right whales will be reduced.

Third, a final rule was issued in June 2007 permanently closing portions of the Atlantic Ocean off the Southeast U.S. to gillnets during right whale calving season. Additional management measures affecting gillnet and trap/pot fisheries in the Southeast, such as gear modifications, will be required during the calving season beginning in April 2008.

NOAA Fisheries Service also conducts extensive outreach to mariners and the general public about right whale protection and conservation. Outreach efforts include: brochures, fact sheets, Web site pages, placards, radio announcements, ads in boating magazines, press releases, signs at boat ramps, videos, and more.

### Additional Information About Right Whales

Right Whale Conservation

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



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