



# Save the North Atlantic Right Whale Fact Sheet

## Stop “Road Kill” on the High Seas

Please send in written comments or attend one of these public hearings by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on proposed regulations to protect the North Atlantic Right Whale. NMFS would like to hear your comments on the North Atlantic Right Whale ship strike reduction strategy and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The NMFS is holding 3 public hearings in which you may submit your oral or written comments:

- Tuesday, August 8, 2006 - **Jacksonville, FL** 1-4 p.m. - University of North Florida, University Center, Board of Trustees Room, 1200 Alumni Drive, Jacksonville FL 32224
- Thursday, August 10, 2006 - **Baltimore, MD** 1-4 p.m. - Maryland Science Center, MSC Theater, 601 Light Street, Baltimore MD 21230
- Monday August 14, 2006 – **Boston MA** 1-4 p.m. – Thomas (Tip) O’Neill, Federal Building Auditorium, 10 Causeway Street, Boston, MA 02222

Written comments may be submitted through September 5, 2006. See details on reverse side.

### The North Atlantic Right Whale

- The North Atlantic Right Whale’s (*Eubalaena glacialis*) numbers were depleted due to commercial whaling which took place until 1935 when they were protected because they had become commercially extinct. Since their protection their population has never fully recovered. Today their numbers are believed to be at or less than 300 which makes it one of the most critically endangered large whale species in the world.
- According to the Ocean Life Institute (OLI) at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) the Right Whale suffers what is called the urban whale syndrome. The North Atlantic Right Whale live along the US East Coast where they deal with high amounts of shipping and fishing traffic as well as noise and chemical pollution (WHOI.edu). Most die from ship strikes or from becoming entangled in equipment used for fishing.
- There have been 41 documented right whale deaths from 1970 to 1997 with at least 29 attributed to human activities. In the period 1997 to 2001, human-caused mortality and serious injury to North Atlantic right whales from ship strikes and fishery entanglements was an estimated average of 2.0 per year (Waring et al., 2004).
- Deaths from human-related activities are believed to be the principal reason for a declining adult survival rate (Caswell et al., 1999) and the lack of recovery in the species. The greatest known cause of human-related deaths is ship strikes (Kraus, 1990; Knowlton and Kraus, 2001; NMFS, 2005). These are only the deaths we know about, many go undetected or unreported.
- Since 2000, calf production has averaged more than 20 calves per year. The recent calf production is encouraging; however the number of births still is not sufficient to compensate for the number of adult deaths over the past two decades (Kraus et al., 2005). Of particular significance is the recent loss of breeding females, the most important demographic component of the population.
- Numerous measures have been taken to aid in the recovery of the right whale; however, this delicate species still succumbs to human-related deaths. NMFS believes that existing measures have not been sufficient to reduce the threat of ship strikes or improve chances for recovery.
- A study of mariner compliance with NOAA-issued speed advisories in the Great South Channel reported that 95 percent of ships tracked (38 out of 40) did not slow down or route around areas in which right whale sightings occurred (Moller et al., 2005). Accordingly, NMFS determined that further action was required. This led to the development of NMFS Ship Strike Reduction Strategy.

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**What the National Marine Fisheries Service is proposing:**

- Reducing the speed of vessels 65 feet in length or greater to 10 knots (11.5 miles per hour) or less on a seasonal basis, tied to the right whales' seasonal migration pattern. The proposal would apply to right whale habitat off the New England, Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern coasts. Federal agency vessels, such as those of the Navy and Coast Guard, are exempted. The proposals also allow for "dynamic management" of vessel speeds if right whales appear in an area when seasonal restrictions are not in effect.
- Proposed Dynamic Management Areas: For all areas of the Atlantic, the agency proposes to establish temporary "dynamic management areas" when right whales occur outside the three subareas, or during such times both within as well as outside these areas when the seasonal management measures are not in effect. In the designated area, mariners will have the option to traverse at a speed no greater than 10 knots, or route around the area. The size of the area would depend on the number and distribution of animals sighted, and last for at least 15 days. It could be extended if the whale aggregation persists.
- The purpose of this proposed rule is to reduce the likelihood of deaths and serious injuries to endangered North Atlantic right whales that result from collisions with ships. These measures are part of NMFS' Ship Strike Reduction Strategy to help recover the North Atlantic right whale.
- For more information, go to: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike/>

**Suggested Comments:**

*Mailing Address:*

Chief, Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Conservation Division  
Attn: Right Whale Ship Strike Reduction Strategy DEIS  
Office of Protected Resources, NMFS  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

The Sierra Club commends the National Marine Fisheries Service for taking this vital step to protect North Atlantic right whales with the proposed ship strike reduction strategy. We strongly support the lowest (10 knots) proposed speed restriction in order to provide the greatest protection to the whales.

We request that U.S. government vessels and vessels under US contract also be required to observe speed restrictions. Exceptions should only be allowed under extreme circumstances, such as human safety missions, times of warfare or national disaster, or when the Federal vessels are already operating under mitigation measures . under the Endangered Species Act.

If federal vessels are exempted, we encourage NMFS to immediately re-initiate consultation to ensure that federal agency vessels and activities are not jeopardizing North Atlantic right whales. Vessels exempt from the speed restriction should be required to have two on-board trained marine mammal lookouts at all times and use either aerial spotters or passive sonar, and should travel at the slowest speed possible at night and during times of inclement weather, when whales are most difficult to detect.

We support alternative 5, which would provide a higher level of protection for the species than the preferred alternative (6), by expanding the times and areas in which speed restrictions apply.

The Sierra Club encourages that flexibility will be retained to modify the proposed regulations as new data is collected in the future as to the location and timing of whale distributions. We also urge that these regulations be implemented by this November to protect mothers and calves as they migrate to their winter waters.

[Add your name and mailing address and send this letter.]

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\*\*\*\*\*You may e-mail your comments to [ShipStrike.EIS@noaa.gov](mailto:ShipStrike.EIS@noaa.gov)

**Let us know you are out there!** To stay informed on efforts to save the North Atlantic Right Whale, send your contact information to **Sierra Club-Atlantic Coast Ecoregion Task Force**—contact Tyla Matteson at [tmatteson1@mindspring.com](mailto:tmatteson1@mindspring.com) or call 804-275-6476.

*BEACON – The Bi-National Early Alert Coastal Network-- is a program of the Sierra Club's Atlantic Coast Ecoregion Task Force*