

Life as a North Atlantic Right Whale

Background Information

The hunting of North Atlantic right whales in the 15th-17th centuries was the original reason why right whales became endangered. Even though they've received protection under the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#) and the [Endangered Species Act](#) since the early 1970's, they still face a number of unintentional threats and, unfortunately, their population is decreasing.

Conservation groups are working hard to make sure whales receive sufficient protection from these threats. The two main threats are:

Vessel collisions



Entanglements in fishing gear



Credit: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Because whales and humans use the same parts of the ocean, **collisions and entanglements happen by accident**. Humans have an important job in making sure we are keeping an eye out for whales while in their ocean homes.

North Atlantic right whales are a **migratory species**, meaning that each year they travel a far distance to get to and from different habitats. When whales are born, they do not yet have a thick layer of blubber (fat) to keep them warm. For this reason, it is beneficial for whale moms to give birth to their calves (babies) in warmer water so that they can better maintain their body temperature. The food that they like to eat, however, is found in colder climates. In order to have everything they need, right whales take on an annual migration to move from one habitat for giving birth to the other for finding food.

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Certain parts of these two right whales habitats are known as **critical habitat**. When a particular area of the ocean is known to be important for the survival of an endangered species, it may receive extra protection. Declaring these areas as critical habitat means that we need to protect the features in the ocean that make the habitat helpful for endangered species. Whales need protection in all the parts of the ocean through which they travel. Currently, most of the migratory route between the whales' critical habitat offers little protection for them. Right whales are **nicknamed the "urban whale"** because they travel close to the coastline, where humans also use the water for things like boating and fishing.

Activity Objective

In this activity we are going to use a map that looks at the full range of the right whale's habitat and protections that are in place in different areas.

Materials

- Printed map and answer sheet
- Pen or pencil

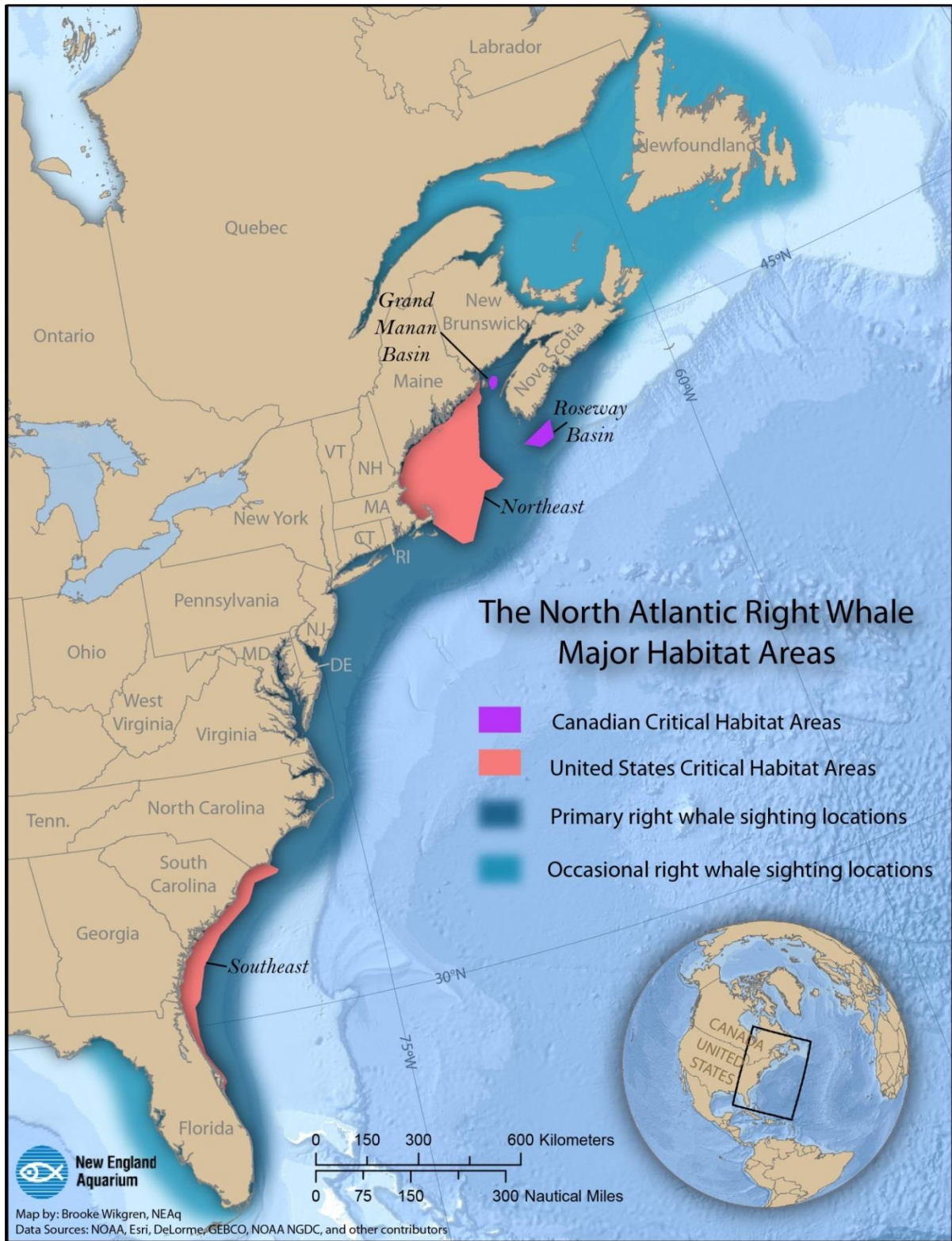
Activity

Print the following two pages containing the map and question sheet. Use the map and the background information provided to answer the questions. Draw or write directly on the map where indicated.

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Questions

1. On the map above, notice the purple and peach shaded areas that are designated as critical habitat. In your own words, what is critical habitat?
2. Which of the peach shaded areas do you think is their breeding grounds? Write in “breeding” just to the right of this shaded area.
3. Next, follow the same procedure from question 2 for their feeding grounds.
4. Draw arrows on the map where you believe their migration takes place. Try to keep in mind the approximate distance from the coast that the migration usually takes place. HINT: They are nicknamed the “urban whale”.
5. List three major cities along the US East Coast. How might daily human activities in these cities impact North Atlantic right whales?
6. Do you think enough of the North Atlantic right whales’ habitat is protected? Why or why not?

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