

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) Update on North Atlantic Right Whale Recovery Planning and Management Activities

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In light of the deaths of 12 north Atlantic right whales in Canadian waters in 2017, the Canadian government and many partners mounted a significant response to try to understand the causes of those deaths, and to reduce the immediate risk of additional deaths and entanglements. Several carcasses were towed ashore so that necropsies could be conducted, and carcasses that washed ashore were sampled. New measures were put in place including a mandatory slowdown zone for large vessels in areas where right whale aggregations had been observed. Fishery measures put in place included closing some seasons early, and restricting some activities to shallower waters. Surveillance for right whales was increased in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to reduce vessel collision and entanglement risk. The government of Canada (Transport Canada and Fisheries & Oceans Canada) continue to engage with industry and other partners to identify, develop and implement measures to prevent right whale injury and mortality.



Recovery Planning and Management Actions

for North Atlantic
Right Whales
in Canadian waters

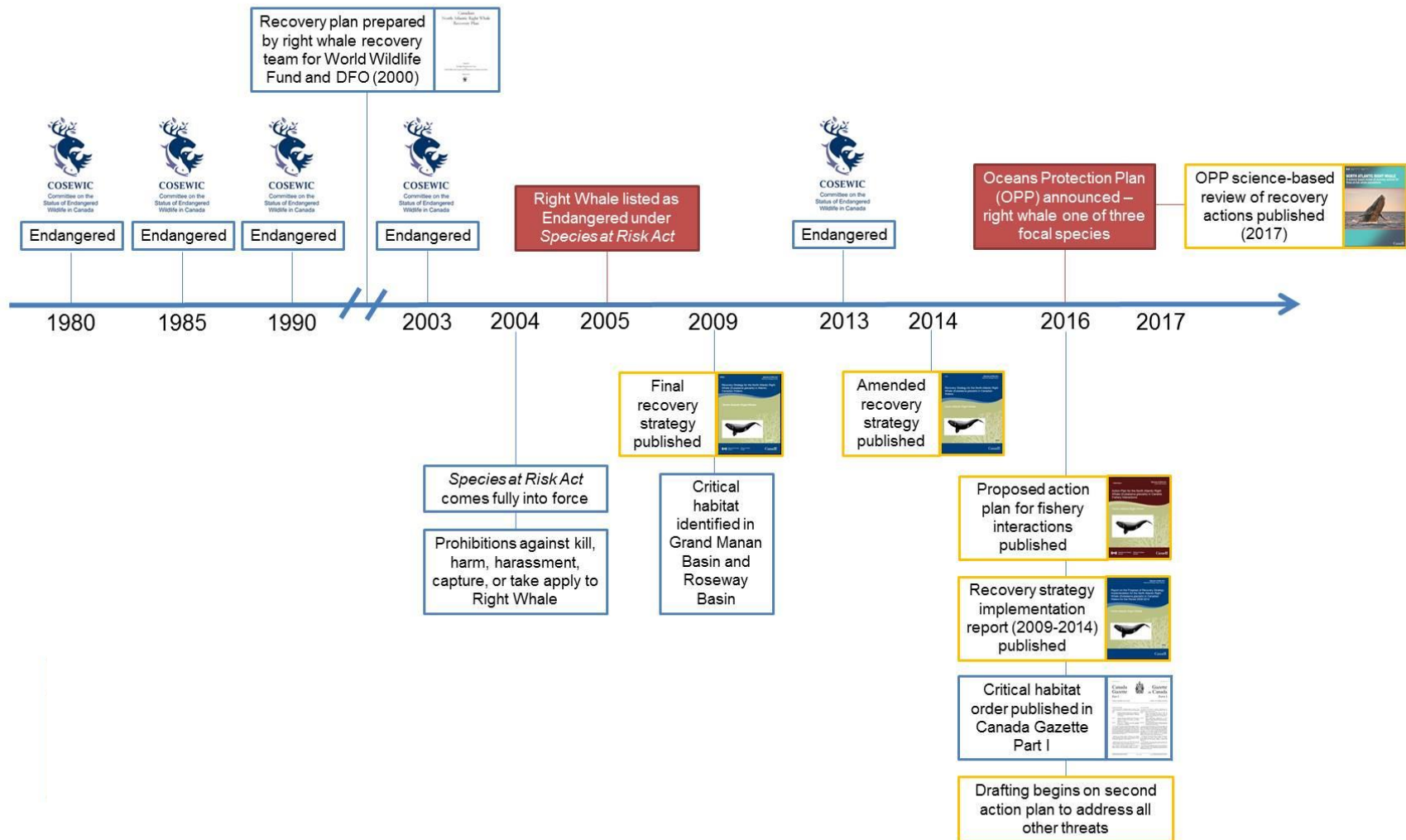


Photo credit: Jolinne Surette

Overview

- Species at Risk Act documents guide NARW recovery in Canada
- Oceans Protection Plan
- Measures to respond to 2017 incidents and reduce further risk to right whales
- Looking forward: understand and mitigate threats to NARW

North Atlantic Right Whale Recovery Planning Timeline



Oceans Protection Plan November 2016

- DFO scientists have completed a review of current recovery activities for 3 endangered whale species including NARW
 - identified areas for immediate improvement in recovery efforts and priorities for new or enhanced action efforts, with specific recommendations
- Summer 2017: Gov't of Canada engaged stakeholders, First Nations and the public on how to best implement recovery actions for NARW
 - in-person meetings, online & written submissions
- The scientific assessment, and feedback will inform further discussions and action planning for enhanced recovery efforts for these whale populations. A report will be available this fall.

Right Whale Incidents 2017

- Mortalities and other entanglement incidents correspond with known threats to the species
- More NARW than usual in this part of their range
- Government of Canada's response this year, and activities looking ahead, reflect existing priorities:
 - Necropsies and sampling
 - Disentanglement
 - Research and monitoring
 - Preventing vessel collisions
 - Preventing, mitigating entanglements, through temporary, seasonal, or long-term methods.

Management Responses: Fishing

- Area 12 closed early due to right whale presence
- Area 19 season closed early; increased monitoring for right whale presence.
- Halibut longline fishery, and sentinel groundfish fishery in Gulf: new requirement to tend gear
- Fixed gear trap fisheries restriction to shallow water (less than 20 fathoms) meant some fisheries were limited & others didn't open
- DFO removed lost-abandoned traps (~250), increased surveillance



Management & Mitigation: Fishery Interactions

DFO engaging directly with fishing industry

- Engage fishery groups in GoSL and Scotia-Fundy to identify practical measures, to develop and implement management strategies and measures to reduce NARW entanglement risk
 - DFO staff meeting with fishery associations and umbrella groups – existing program and in response to 2017 deaths
 - collect information on gear configuration, effort
 - Voluntary Standard Practices (VSPs) – adopted by several fixed-gear fisheries
- Minister's roundtable 9 Nov 2017, to meet with representatives of several industry sectors and right whale scientists.

US/Canada Bilateral Working Group

- DFO and NOAA engagement on management and science
- Objective to collaborate on way forward for right whale recovery

Management Responses:

Vessel traffic speed restriction zone



- Notice to Shipping (NOTSHIP): voluntary (12 July)
- Revised 11 Aug: Mandatory rule until further notice, with authority to issue Administrative Monetary Penalties for non-compliance
- Reduce speed to max of 10 knots, vessels 20 meters or more.
- High level of compliance

Management & Mitigation: Vessel Collisions

Summer 2017 onward:

- Government of Canada is engaging in discussions with all maritime vessel operators, including cruise lines, ferries and the shipping industry, to assess the 2017 response and to plan for future mitigation measures.
- Government of Canada is looking at ways to reduce collision risk in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Incident Response

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada has paused responses to entangled North Atlantic right whales
- Currently reviewing policies and practices regarding response to whale entanglements: human safety as first objective
- The pause will be in effect until the review is completed
- In the interim, DFO is working with expert entanglement responders in each region to assess each case of entanglement for other whale species through a heightened consultation process

Next Steps:

- Completion of Comprehensive SARA Action Plans
- Review final necropsy results and incorporate relevant information into management activities
- Engage with stakeholders/partners to reduce risk to NARW from known threats: immediate and long term
- Right Whale Recovery Network meeting late 2017 or early 2018
- Regular engagement with, & reporting to, the Minister on monitoring, planning, progress, results