

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

The Newsletter of the Southeastern United States Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale

Volume 4, Number 1 February, 1997

RIGHT WHALE NEWS EXPANDS TO COVER ENTIRE RANGE OF SPECIES

Thanks to a grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust's Endangered Species Fund, Right Whale News will expand its scope to include more comprehensive coverage of right whale recovery efforts throughout the range of the species, including New England and Canada. Previous issues have focused on the northern right whale's calving ground off the coast of Georgia and northeast Florida. Right Whale News will also expand its distribution to include more people active in right whale work in the northeast. So if you know of colleagues or friends who should be on the mailing list for Right Whale News, please contact the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, Georgia 30601; telephone 706-546-7507 (voice mailbox 2); fax 706-613-7775. The support of the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, the Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary and the National Marine Fisheries Service allows us to offer subscriptions to Right Whale News free of charge. The purpose of the newsletter is to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of recovery efforts for the world's most endangered large whale, the northern right whale.

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST MAKES RIGHT WHALE GRANTS

In addition to the grant for Right Whale News noted above, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust has also awarded six more grants for right whale projects under their FY97 Endangered Species Fund Program and one grant under their FY97 Emergency Surveillance, Reporting and Management Program. The titles and a brief description of each of these projects follow. For additional information on a specific project, write or call the contact person listed. From time to time, Right Whale News will be reporting on the progress of these projects and listing publications derived from them in the Scientific Literature and Reports section of this newsletter.

The funds awarded by the Massachusetts Environmental Trust come primarily from three sources: environmental settlements initiated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or by private citizen environmental organizations, fees from the sale of environmental license plates featuring a right whale and roseate tern, and private donations. For information on the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, contact Ms. Robbin Peach, Executive Director, 33 Union Street, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02108; tel. 617-727-0249; fax 617-367-1616.

FY97 Endangered Species Grant Program:

Project: To implement a plankton monitoring system which will employ new technology for monitoring and analyzing the plankton resources on which the whales depend. This project will implement a plankton monitoring system which, with other data, will permit an understanding of the impact which changes in the food resources of Cape Cod Bay's Critical Habitat might have. Contact person: Peter Borrelli, Center for Coastal Studies, 59 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657; tel. 508-487-3622, fax 508-487-4495.

Project: The development and operational testing of snag-free fishing gear for use in reducing right whale entanglement and mortality. The goal of the project is to develop and evaluate innovative gear modifications to reduce the likelihood of whales snagging in the lines and mesh of lobster pots and gill nets. Contact person: David Wiley, International Wildlife Coalition, 70 East Falmouth Highway, East Falmouth, MA 02536; tel. 508-548-8328; fax 508-548-8542.

Project: To evaluate avenues to educate the shipping community about right whales. The project will examine what information about right whales and the potential mortality due to ship strikes the shipping industry lacks. The project also seeks the most effective way to disseminate such information. Contact person: Amy Knowlton, New England Aquarium, Central Wharf, Boston, MA 02110; tel. 617-973-5253; fax 617-367-6615.

Project: Massachusetts right whale matching and data integration. All right whale photographs taken in Massachusetts waters during 1997 and collected by the New England Aquarium will be integrated into the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog curated at the Aquarium. Resulting information on such topics as demographics, migration, reproduction, entanglements and ship strikes will be crucial to the development of effective management strategies and to providing some indication of the effectiveness of implemented management plans. Contact person: Phillip Hamilton, New England Aquarium, Central Wharf, Boston, MA 02110; tel. 617-973-5253; fax 617-367-6615.

Project: Analysis of birthing intervals in northern right whales. Recently developed statistical techniques will be applied to the New England Aquarium's photo-identification catalog and database to estimate calving intervals in females. New methods of mark-recapture analysis will be used to test the hypothesis that the calving interval has been increasing. The analysis will also provide estimates for variability in fertility among females and among years of observation. Contact person: Dr. Solange Brault, Department of Biology, University of Massachusetts, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393; tel. 617-287-6600; fax 617-287-6650.

Project: Nutritional and genetic aspects of Northern right whale survival. The project will measure blubber thickness in selected animals as an indicator of body condition. It will also examine the relatedness of animals frequenting Cape Cod Bay in the context of the population as a whole. The genetic data will then be correlated with the body condition data to look for familial trends in altered body condition. Contact person: Dr. Michael Moore, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole, MA 02543; tel. 508-289-3228; fax 508-457-2169.

FY 97 Emergency Surveillance, Reporting and Monitoring Program:

Project: Surface surveillance and modeling. This project has two inextricably-linked goals: (1) to create and test a model system to track right whales and communicate their location and (2) using the model, to create regulations and policies that protect the species. The project seeks to provide better surveillance for right whales in Massachusetts waters during their primary period of residence. Regular overflights, combined with surface surveillance and enhanced real-time communications regarding the locality of whales to those most able to reduce or eliminate mortality, should greatly reduce or eliminate mortality due to ship strikes and fishing gear entanglements. The data should also give researchers and government agencies better insight into the location of the whales so that appropriate management measures can be taken. The first stage of the project, extensive dedicated surveillance of Cape Cod Bay and the development of a mathematical model, will be carried out by the Center for Coastal Studies; the contact person is Peter Borrelli, CCS, 59 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657; tel. 508-487-3622, fax 508-487-4495. Collaborating in the development of the model will be Dr. Robert Kenney, Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, Box 41, Bay Campus, Narragansett, RI 02882-1197; tel. 401-874-6664; fax 401-874-6497.

ATLANTIC OFFSHORE CETACEANS TAKE REDUCTION PLAN SUBMITTED

After a series of six meetings, the Atlantic Offshore Cetaceans Take Reduction Team reached consensus on a plan for reducing the take of offshore Cetaceans by the U.S. pelagic longline fishery, the swordfish driftnet fishery and the pair trawl for tuna fishery. The Atlantic Offshore Cetaceans Take Reduction Plan was submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on November 22, 1996.

Recommendations to reduce the take of right whales included closure of right whale Critical Habitats at times when right whales are expected to be present. The Georgia - Florida coastline Critical Habitat were recommended for closure from December 1 through March 31. The Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay Critical Habitat was recommended for closure from February 1 through April 30. The Great South Channel Critical Habitat would be closed from March 1 through June 30. The NMFS is currently reviewing the plan. In the near future, NMFS will publish proposed regulations in the Federal Register to implement the plan including any changes that may be necessary. Category I. Vessels or gear owners participating in Category I or II fisheries must register with regional offices of the NMFS (or through an integrated state/federal permitting process), they must pay a registration fee, they must report all incidental mortality and injury of marine mammals (a requirement for all categories), and they may be required to accommodate an observer aboard their vessels if requested.

Because of its impact on right whales, humpback whales and minke whales, the NMFS has designated the Gulf of Maine and U.S. Mid-Atlantic lobster trap and pot fishery as a Category I fishery for 1997. Two records of serious injury or mortality for right whales were reported in this fishery from 1990 through 1994. One animal, a juvenile, was first sighted on July 9, 1993, in Georges Bank with lobster gear cutting into its tail and entangled in swordfish driftnet. The whale was eventually disentangled; the animal was seen later but in poor condition. The other right whale, another juvenile, was first sighted off Georgia on December 21, 1993, entangled in lobster gear. When the animal stranded in Rhode Island in July, 1995, the lobster line had imbedded 3 inches into the bone of the right flipper. There was also line in the baleen and 6 to 8 wraps around the flipper. These two serious injuries or mortalities to right whales by themselves justify the classification of lobster pots and traps as a Category I fishery. In addition, this fishery was implicated in the serious injury or mortality of 10 humpback whales and 7 minke whales during the 1990 - 94 period.

The NMFS also classified the New England multi-species sink gillnet fishery as a Category I fishery because the monkfish fishery uses bottom gillnet gear that has been observed to cause mortality of marine mammals and several of the areas where bottom gillnet gear is used to target monkfish are known to be high-use areas for marine mammals.

For a copy of the complete 1997 List of Fisheries or for further information, contact the regional NMFS office nearest you. In the northeast, contact Doug Beech, NMFS, Northeast Region, One Blackburn Drive, Gloucester, MA 01930-2298; tel. 508-281-9254. In the southeast, contact Chuck Oravetz, NMFS, Southeast Region, 9721 Executive Center Drive North, St. Petersburg, FL 33703; tel. 813-570-5301.

NMFS ISSUES JEOPARDY OPINIONS FOR LOBSTER AND MULTI-SPECIES FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS

On December 13, 1996, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued two Biological Opinions. The opinions concluded that continued fishing under the current American Lobster Fishery Management Plan and the Multi-species Fishery Management Plan were likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the northern right whale. Neither fishery was deemed to jeopardize the right whale's critical habitat or other endangered species.

The NMFS has provided a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative for each fishery, which if implemented fully and in a timely manner, will reduce the potential for entanglement of right whales in lobster and multi-species gear and therefore avoid the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of right whales. For the lobster fishery, the alternative includes the prohibition of the deployment of lobster trap/pot gear and lobster bait gillnet gear in the Great South Channel Critical Habitat from April 1 to June 30 of each year unless gear or alternative fishing practices are developed that eliminate the likelihood of entanglement. For the multi-species fishery, the alternative includes the prohibition of the deployment of all sink gillnet gear in the Great South Channel Critical Habitat east of the Loran line 13710 from April 1 to June 30 of each year unless gear or alternative fishing practices are developed that eliminate the likelihood of entanglement.

The NMFS's Reasonable and Prudent Alternative may be replaced by the plan being developed by the Large Whale Take Reduction Team. (A report on the Large Whale TRT's plan will be included in the next issue of Right Whale News.)

MASSACHUSETTS ISSUES PLAN TO REDUCE ENTANGLEMENT RISK

Max Strahan likes to be known as the Prince of Whales. The Boston Globe refers to him as Boston's most quixotic activist, an acidic gadfly, and the devil doing angels work. Even some of his friends think of him as a classic example of an environmental radical. Whatever your opinion of him, he has managed to get the close attention of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the U. S. Coast Guard, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, lobster fishermen, scientific and conservation organizations and at least one federal court judge.

As a result of litigation brought by Max Strahan against Trudy Coxe, the Secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and others, U.S. District Court Judge Douglas P. Woodlock issued a set of orders on September 24, 1996, that, among other things, required the defendants (essentially Massachusetts) to apply for an incidental take permit for northern right whales, to develop a proposal to restrict, eliminate or modify the use of fixed fishing gear in coastal waters of Massachusetts listed as critical habitat for the northern right whale, and to convene a right whale working group to discuss measures to minimize actual harm to northern right whales.

The Endangered Whale Working Group was convened under the chairmanship of Dan McKiernan, a marine fisheries biologist with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. Other participants were Dr. Charles Stormy Mayo (Center for Coastal Studies), Dr. Scott Kraus (New England Aquarium), Eleanor Dorsey (Conservation Law Foundation), William Adler (Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association), Bob MacKinnon (Massachusetts Gillnetters Association), Sharon Young (U.S. Humane Society), Dr. Tom French (Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program), James McCaffrey (Sierra Club) and Dr. Les Kaufman (Boston University). On December 16, the group issued its report and submitted it to Judge Woodlock. The Judge responded on January 7, 1997, neither accepting nor rejecting the proposal.

The Conservation Plan for Massachusetts Waters to Minimize Entanglement Risk of Right Whales proposes a number of actions including (1) restricting the use of certain gear types to reduce risk of entanglement in Critical Habitat during the times of expected whale occurrences, (2) modify certain fixed fishing gears, (3) control future increases in fishing effort, (4) support future gear research and modifications of fixed gear for future deployment in the Critical Habitat, (5) in conjunction with other agencies and private research groups, develop a surveillance based management plan to protect right whales, (6) conduct a yearly review of modifications and restrictions, (7) establish an educational

program for fishermen and other impacted users and (8) enhance disentanglement efforts by amending the current 500 yard buffer zone regulations.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts will proceed to implement the plan, first with emergency regulations (effective February 1) and then by permanent rules. Public hearings on the permanent rules are expected in March. All expect the adoption and implementation of these measures to be under the watchful eye of Judge Woodlock.

For additional information on the plan and the proposed rules, contact Dan McKiernan, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, 100 Cambridge Street, Boston MA 02202; tel. 617-727-3193; e-mail: dmckiernan@state.ma.us

CANADIAN COMMITMENT TO RIGHT WHALE PROTECTION INCREASES

Several years ago, the Canadian government established three east coast whale sanctuaries. Two of them were for right whales: the Grand Manan Basin at the mouth of the Bay of Fundy and the Roseway Basin off the southeastern coast of Nova Scotia. The third sanctuary, off Sable Island, is for Northern Bottlenose Whales. While the designations do not impose any special legal restrictions for the sanctuaries, Canada's Fisheries Act prohibits any form of harassment of whales. Like the critical habitat designations in U.S. waters, the Canadian sanctuary designations help to alert mariners and other to the importance of the areas for the species. General guidelines and guidelines specific for each sanctuary are published and distributed through the Canadian Coast Guard's annual Notice to Mariners and other outlets.

The protection for whales and especially right whales is expected to increase significantly in the near future. The Canadian Parliament is expected to adopt the Canadian Endangered Species Protection Act by the end of March. Motivation for the passage of this landmark legislation comes from various international agreements and the recognition that one in 25 of Canada's terrestrial mammals are endangered and one in 33 of its bird species are endangered.

The Canadian Department of the Environment will have overall responsibility for the administration of the Act. The responsibility for all aquatic species, including the right whale and other marine mammals, will be delegated to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The responsibility for identifying species at risk will rest with the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Obvious candidates include the right whale, humpback whale and harbor porpoise.

Once a species has been placed on the official list of endangered species, recovery plans will need to be developed within one year. Plans for threatened species will take longer to develop. Recovery plans must be based on science but require consideration of impacts on people such as fishermen who are affected by the plan. Plans can also be developed jointly with other nations (but not with states such as Maine). The process of plan development is open to the public. If the government fails to carry out the plan, it is subject to citizen suit.

Canadian attitude is also changing as a result of observing the deliberations of the Large Whale Take Reduction Team (LWTRT). Until final recovery plans are prepared, Canada will establish a consultive program to develop within the existing regulatory and management framework, programs that are compatible with and complementary to the recommendations of the LWTRT.

This will include the exchange and collaboration of research programs and scientific information, consultation with fishing industry interests and other interested parties, the education of fishers and the development of a disentanglement response ability in cooperation with interests in the United States. Continued dialog between interested parties in Canada and the U.S. will be encouraged in an effort to see that common goals will be realized.

Jerry Conway
Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Halifax, Nova Scotia

RIGHT WHALE SIGHTED IN MEDITERRANEAN!

The latest issue of the Marine Mammal Society Newsletter (Winter, 1996, Vol. 4, no. 4, page 2) includes a report submitted by Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara of a sighting of a right whale in the Mediterranean Sea, about 13 kilometers off the island of Sant Antioco (southwestern Sardinia). The animal was photographed in May, 1991, by Fiorenzo Mogno of the Italian Navy. This is the first known right whale sighting in the Mediterranean in the 20th century. Earlier records include an 1877 stranding of a juvenile near Taranto, southeastern Italy, and an 1888 sighting of two animals in the bay of Castiglione, Algiers.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM REPORT FROM SOUTHEASTERN WATERS

The New England Aquarium's Early Warning System (EWS) team headed by Chris Slay and Lisa Conger has been flying off Georgia and Florida since early December. On December 24, the team sighted a single right whale off the St. Johns River entrance. In their December 27 report, Lisa Conger and Chris Slay wrote:

This third sighting deserves special mention because it illustrates the promise and the shortcomings of the EWS surveys. At 1108 hours, on 12/24, we sighted a single right whale as it surfaced briefly and dove. We spent the next 20 minutes trying to relocate the animal. At 1130 hours we saw that a car carrier, which had been anchored north of the St. Johns River entrance at 1100 hours, had weighed anchor, accelerated and was steaming eastbound. We tried, unsuccessfully, to contact the ship directly on VHF radio in order to inform the captain of the ship's close proximity to a right whale. We could not give an exact bearing of the whale from the ship as we had not yet relocated the animal. We contacted the Jacksonville harbor pilots and explained the situation. They responded immediately, successfully contacting the ship and relaying all of the information that we had given them. The ship's captain indicated that he understood and would keep a lookout.

To this point the EWS system worked beautifully, with the survey team and the local harbor pilots doing their part to make the system work. We caught a glimpse of the whale as it surfaced again - approximately 200 meters in front of the ship and less than 300 meters north of the ship's course. We watched as the ship passed by the mud plumes that the whale was kicking up in the relatively shallow water. The whale made no apparent effort to distance itself from the ship and it is fair to say there was an audible sigh of relief in our plane when the ship had passed...at what appeared to be an alarming rate of speed. It is disturbing to us that the vessel's acceleration after weighing anchor was not made more slowly until it had cleared the area, or its speed reduced for a mile or two as it passed the position at which the whale had just been sighted. Such situations the EWS surveys do not fully address.

By January 27, the EWS team had seen 8 - 10 calves and five moms who calved for the first time this season.

DEAD CALF AT FLAGLER BEACH

A calf right whale washed ashore dead at Flagler Beach, Florida, on January 9, 1997. Bill Brooks and Blair Mase of the Florida Department of the Environment quickly responded and made arrangements to get the calf off the beach - a difficult feat - and to Marineland of Florida where space was generously made available in a refrigerated tractor/trailer. On January 10, the necropsy team went to work. Dr. Bob Bonde of the Sirenian Laboratory in Gainseville, Florida, led the team; he was assisted by veterinary pathologist Dr. Claus Buergelt of the University of Florida, Dr. Tom Lipscomb of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and others.

The calf was very young, 4.1 meters long, with foetal folds still evident along its body. There were no outward signs of trauma. There was no milk in the gastro-intestinal tract (suggesting that the animal had never fed) but the lungs floated (suggesting that the calf took some breaths before death). All indications at this time are that this was a perinatal mortality. With the help of the pathologists we may learn more...

Chris Slay
New England Aquarium

FACSFACJAX

The Early Warning System communications system is working like a well-oiled machine according to Chris Slay of the New England Aquarium. A key component of this system, helping to transmit sightings of right whales in the southeast to those who need the information right away, is FACSFACJAX (pronounced fass fac Jax). As one might suspect, this is a U. S. Navy acronym that stands for Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility, Jacksonville (Florida). Under the command of Captain Robert D. Parlet, FACSFACJAX is designated as the primary conduit for whale sightings to and from the U.S. Navy fleet. Sighting information comes from Navy vessels and aircraft, from the U. S. Coast Guard, from air surveillance conducted by the Early Warning System team, from reports from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The latter forwards the real time reports from the Marine Resources Council public sighting network. Both state agencies also forward public sightings information to the facility. FACSFACJAX then notifies Naval vessels operating in the area. The ship's commanding officer is to consider the recommendations from FACSFACJAX before proceeding, modifying or canceling operations. Ships crews have been trained in avoidance techniques including lookouts being trained in identification and reporting and bridge crews trained in ship's maneuvering and reporting to FACSFACJAX. Navy ships also treat the critical habitat area as though it were a minefield or a submarine had been sighted, requiring greater caution and changes in the way lookouts react.

NAVY MOVES TO PROTECT WHALES

Despite posting vigilant lookouts and watchstanders aboard ships, Mayport-based Afloat Training Group and other Navy activities in the area have adjusted their schedules and manoeuvres to accommodate whale activity. During the winter, for example, gunnery exercises have been moved farther off the coast - away from the critical habitat. There, weapons are aimed only in an easterly direction. Also, ships transit at slow speeds, cruising eastward or westward to decrease their time near the whales.

In support of the goals of the Southeastern U. S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale, and to comply with a federal mandate to protect whales, the Commander in Chief of the U. S. Atlantic Fleet recently issued new whale protection measures for ships and aircraft operating in the area. The following components of that guidance, below, was crafted to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

- FACSFACJAX shall coordinate ship/aircraft clearance into the operating area.

- Ships/submarines transiting the critical habitat and adjacent waters shall contact FACSFACJAX to obtain the latest sighting information.

- by the Office of Naval Research and several Naval activities in the southeast, sailors and marine biologists who track the whales may soon have some powerful new stewardship tools.

Stepping up its support for right whale monitoring in the critical habitat near Jacksonville, Florida, the Navy is testing the concept of using both fixed and towed underwater listening cables and infrared detection devices mounted on ships.

A fixed or stationary array, with almost nine miles of armored cable and 20 hydrophone.

In addition, the Navy funds one-third of the Early Warning System aerial surveillance flights and supports the study of whales and other marine life from Charleston, SC, to Cape Canaveral, FL. That research is funded by the Commander in Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet, through Southern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command.

Stuart Johnston

COMNAVBASE JAX UNDERWATER CABLES MAY BOOST WHALE PROTECTION

It is no secret endangered marine mammals command the respect of even the largest Navy warships and vessels; especially rare northern right whales. During the winter season, when the gentle giants migrate to the Florida-Georgia coast to bear their young, Navy's ships crews and watchstanders work in a state of almost constant vigilance to maintain a safe distance from the animals.

Protecting whales, however, often requires knowing their exact whereabouts. And that can present a challenge in times of reduced visibility, high seas or for avoiding submerged whales. Now, thanks to a joint initiative by the Office of Naval Research and several Naval activities in the southeast, sailors and marine biologists who track the whales may soon have some powerful new stewardship tools.

Stepping up its support for right whale monitoring in the critical habitat near Jacksonville, Florida, the Navy is testing the concept of using both fixed and towed underwater listening cables and infrared detection devices mounted on ships.

A fixed or stationary array, with almost nine miles of armored cable and 20 hydrophones extending along the ocean bottom southeast of Naval Station Mayport, FL, has operated successfully since being installed in mid-December. The cable is tethered to a nearby fishing pier where the acoustic signals are relayed via the Internet to antisubmarine warfare technicians at Naval Air Station Jacksonville. There, analysts from Naval Command Control and Ocean Surveillance Command's Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation Division (NRAD) are evaluating sonar and other devices as a method to detect and track whales. Whenever NRAD analysts identify signals produced by marine mammals, exact times and locations are passed to FACSFACJAX operators.

The Naval Atlantic Meteorology and Oceanographic Facility at Naval Air Station Jacksonville is providing real time oceanographic data to decision-makers and planners at FACSFACJAX. State-of-the-art graphic depictions of sea surface temperatures, ocean currents and wave heights are constructed from continuous satellite observations of the ocean. Using these products, with corresponding sea floor bathymetry (bottom topography), FACSFACJAX specialists determine areas which exhibit the highest probability of accommodating right whales (usually colder, shallow waters outside the Gulf Stream) and

guide naval operations accordingly.

A towed array of hydrophones is also being evaluated. R/V Sea Diver, a 113-foot research vessel owned by Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution, has been leased to tow the cable for four 10- to 11-day periods through March. Researchers expect that device to generate useful data relating to applications for antisubmarine warfare technologies.

Commander Dale Liechty of the Office of Naval Research noted that officials are planning to evaluate possible applications for AN-KAS-1A, a ship-mounted infrared detection device, to look for whale exhalations from ships on which the Naval Station Mayport-based Afloat Training Group is conducting training. He explained that right whale exhalations create a unique V-shaped signature when viewed in the infrared mode.

Already contributing financial and operational support of an aerial whale spotting and reporting system, and despite having provided ships and utility vessels to assess injured or sick whales, Navy officials opted to begin testing after receiving requests from Rear Admiral Kevin F. Delaney, Commander of Naval Base Jacksonville, on behalf of the Southeastern U. S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. The admiral, who serves as the Regional Environmental Coordinator, was a driving force in focusing proved defense technologies to protect whales.

That is why the Navy continues to be so important to the Implementation Team said Bill Brooks, a marine biologist with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. In the past, the Navy has paid each year to support monitoring flights and it has supplied a sea tractor to help assess an injured whale calf, said Brooks. Support like that warrants some appreciation. With this new research, we can expect even more progress.

Stuart Johnston
COMNAVBASE JAX

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION ADVICE TO NMFS: ESTABLISH TRUST FUND FOR RIGHT WHALES

The Marine Mammal Commission (MMC) has made a series of recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regarding needed improvements in its right whale recovery program. The recommendations were developed as a result of the November 12-14 annual meeting of the MMC and its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, and are contained in a December 12 letter from MMC's Executive Director, John Twiss, to Rolland Schmitten, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries with NMFS.

In summary, the MMC found that there is good reason to believe that continuation of the current level of right whale mortality from ship strikes and entanglements in fishing gear over the next 10 to 20 years will precipitate extinction of northern right whales in the next century. To prevent this, a properly supported right whale recovery program will require at least \$3 million per year over the next 20 years. Given budget constraints, the MMC recommends that the NMFS pursue an innovative funding strategy such as a legislatively established right whale trust fund, with the principal revenue source coming from those user groups most responsible for known right whale mortalities.

For the immediate future, the MMC recommends that NMFS request \$650,000 in supplemental or other funds to (1) hire a right whale recovery coordinator, (2) expand right whale telemetry studies, (3) support aerial surveys of known high-use right whale habitats, (4) design and test fishing gear

modification alternatives to reduce entanglement risks, (5) compile and analyze data on vessel traffic patterns in the southeast U. S. calving grounds, and (6) develop a population model to improve understanding of northern right whale population trends.

NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM PLANS SHIP STRIKE MEETING

According to Marine Mammal Commission figures, since 1991, human causes have been implicated in 56% of recorded right whale deaths (9 out of 16 animals). Of these, seven were due to ship strikes, one was due to entanglement in fishing gear and one was due to both entanglement and a ship strike. In an effort to reduce ship strike mortalities, the New England Aquarium is planning a two-day workshop in early April to examine what is being done now and what could be done in the future. The by-invitation meeting will bring together shipping industry representatives, government policy makers, acoustic researchers and right whale scientists to examine a variety of strategies including regulations, early warning systems and acoustic deterrents. A report of the workshop results is planned. For further information, contact Amy Knowlton at the New England Aquarium, Central Wharf, Boston, MA 02110; tel. 617-973-5253; fax 617-367-6615.

CALLING CONDO WATCHERS

For a second year, Floridians will be playing a vital role in the protection of the right whale. Volunteers from Palm Beach to Jacksonville are being recruited to watch for and report sightings of right whales, particularly from the vantage points of beachfront condominiums and hotels and life guard stations. Observers make reports to the Volunteer Northern Right Whale Monitoring Hot Line (1-888-97WHALE) maintained by the Marine Resources Council. The Council then relays the sighting report to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, who in turn verify the sightings by airplane. The whale's position is then radioed to nearby ports and shipping interests. These volunteer sightings can have a significant effect in reducing ship strikes and other human impacts that threaten whales while in the calving ground.

The Whale Monitoring Program is operated by the Marine Resources Council of East Florida. The Canaveral Port Authority is a sponsor. Supporting funds come from the Florida Advisory Council on Environmental Education through a portion of the proceeds from the sale of manatee and panther license plates. The Cocoa Beach Women's Club initiated the sighting network during the 1994 - 95 calving season. Last year, the network expanded to 130 volunteers who reported 53 whales in 35 sightings.

To volunteer or for more information on the observer program, contact the Marine Resources Council at P. O. Box 22892, Melbourne, FL 32902-2892; tel. 407-952-0102; fax 407-952-0103

THE EDGE OF EXTINCTION GA DNR'S NEW FILM INCLUDES RIGHT WHALES

The Film and Video Unit of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources has recently released a new video entitled The Edge of Extinction. The 55 minute film explores the plight of endangered wildlife in Georgia. About five and a half minutes are devoted to the northern right whale, with film footage of surface active groups and comments by Scott Kraus of the New England Aquarium. Other species featured in the film are the loggerhead turtle, eastern brown pelican, ivory billed woodpecker, bald eagle, manatee, robust redhorse, alligator, woodstorks, red cockaded woodpecker and the gopher tortoise. Several other species are shown in passing. The video is strong on photography and its emphasis on habitat loss. It is not as strong on what the viewer can do to improve the condition of

endangered species. Invertebrates and plants are hardly mentioned at all. The film can be borrowed free of charge or can be purchased for \$20 plus \$3 shipping and handling. Contact DNR/Film & Video, 205 Butler Street, SE, Suite 1354, Atlanta, GA 30334; tel. 404-657-9851; fax 404-651-5871.

FROM WHALING TO WATCHING

The second edition of the educational handbook, *From Whaling to Watching*, is now available. The 40-page book was written by Sarah Mitchell, Education Coordinator at the Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary, and Ann Smrcina, her counterpart at the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. The target audience is students in grades 6 through 8. The handbook contains chapters on whales great and small, hunting the right whale, conservation, anatomy and physiology and migration. It also contains Will Hon's right whale poster (which folds out to 11 by 33 inches), five student activities to enhance learning about anatomy and physiology, a map of the eastern seaboard, resources, a glossary, assessment activities and answers. The second edition adds to the earlier edition and corrects the few errors it contained, so even if you have a first edition, you should get the second. An accompanying video is in production now and is expected to be released this spring. Copies of *From Whaling to Watching* are available free from either Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary (10 Ocean Science Circle, Savannah, GA 31411) or Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary (14 Union Street, Plymouth, MA 02360).

GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT MARINE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED

According to the Marine Mammal Society Newsletter (Vol. 4, no. 4, page 3), the government of South Australia has created the 124,732-hectare Great Australian Bight Marine National Park (also see Right Whale News, October, 1996, page 7). The park includes important breeding grounds for the southern right whale and habitats for endangered Australian sea lions. The new park will complement other already protected areas including the 19,633-hectare whale sanctuary. Fishing and mineral exploration will be allowed for six months each year but will be excluded during the breeding season and whenever whales are in the region.

SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE AND REPORTS

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Brooks, W. B. Jr., and B. Zoodsma. 1996. Protecting right whales in the critical habitat calving area, a community effort. Report to the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 1996. Conservation Plan for Massachusetts Waters to Minimize Entanglement Risk of Right Whales. Proposal submitted to U.S. District Court, Boston, MA. December 16, 1996. (See article starting on page 4.)

Notarbartolo di Sciara, G. 1996. Right whale sighting in the Mediterranean Sea. Marine Mammal Society Newsletter, Vol. 4, no. 4, page 2. Winter, 1996. (See article on page 6.)

Slay, C. K., S. D. Kraus, L. A. Conger, P. K. Hamilton and A. R. Knowlton. 1996. Aerial surveys to reduce ship collisions with right whales in the nearshore coastal waters of Georgia and northeast Florida

- Early Warning System Surveys - 1995/1996. Final Report submitted to National Marine Fisheries Service, Contract No. 50WCNF506012. August 30, 1996.

U. S. Coast Guard and Battelle Ocean Sciences. 1996. National Environmental Policy Act Final Environmental Impact Statement for the U. S. Coast Guard Atlantic Protected Living Marine Resources (APLMR) Initiative. U. S. Coast Guard, Washington, DC.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 6, 1997. Meeting of the Marine Technology Society, New England Section, at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, Woods Hole, MA. The topic for the program will be Technological solutions needed for right whale recovery, and will be presented by David Wiley (International Wildlife Coalition), William Adler (Massachusetts Lobstermen s Association), Robert MacKinnon (Massachusetts Gillnetters Association) and Ronald Smolowitz (Coonamesett Farm). Cost: \$10 members, \$12 non-members. To register or for more information, call Hartley Hoskins at 508-457-2001 (fax 508-457-2195).

February or March: Anticipated next meeting of the New England Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team. Location to be determined. For more information, call Dr. Sal Testaverde at 508-281-9368.

March 1, 1997: Deadline for abstract submission for the American Society of Mammalogists 1997 Annual Meeting, Stillwater, OK, June 14 - 18, 1997. A marine mammal session is planned.

May 1 - 2: Next meeting of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale, Brunswick, GA. For more information, contact Barb Zoodsma at 912-264-7218.

June 6 - 10, 1997: Society for Conservation Biology Annual Meeting, Victoria, British Columbia. Several sessions on marine mammal issues are planned.

June 30, 1997: Deadline for abstract submission for the World Marine Mammal Science Conference (a combination of the 12th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals and the 12th Annual Conference of the European Cetacean Society) to be held in Monaco, January 20 - 25, 1998.

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

Right Whale News is the newsletter of the Southeastern United States Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. The editor is Hans Neuhauser. The editorial board consists of Bill Brooks, Lorraine Guise, Scott Kraus, Mike Payne, Jerry Wallmeyer and Barb Zoodsma. To subscribe or submit news or articles for publication, contact the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, GA 30601. Please note that this is a new mailing address. Telephone 706-546-7507; fax 706-613-7775.

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust has underwritten production costs of this issue of Right Whale News. The Gray s Reef National Marine Sanctuary has underwritten the printing and mailing costs. Thanks!