

RIGHT WHALE NEWS

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CANADIANS FORM RIGHT WHALE RECOVERY PLAN TEAM

The Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans and World Wildlife Fund - Canada are creating a team to develop a recovery plan for the northern right whale in Canadian waters. The formation of the team is one of the results of a meeting held in Halifax last October (see *Right Whale News* 4 (4): 4 - 5).

The first meeting of the Canadian Right Whale Recovery Plan Team will be held February 10 and 11, 1998, in Halifax. The team is co-chaired by Jerry Conway of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (tel. 902-426-9609) and Cathy Merriman of the World Wildlife Fund - Canada (tel. 416-489-8800). Team membership is being finalized now, and will include representatives from shipping, fisheries and conservation interests as well as from both federal and provincial governments.

In the meantime, the Canadian Endangered Species legislation is being reviewed and estimates are being prepared on the cost of implementing recovery plans including one for the northern right whale. Reportedly, issues that stalled the legislation last year have been addressed. The legislation is expected to be tabled (i.e., introduced) in Parliament later in the spring.

Jerry Conway

Marine Mammal Coordinator

Department of Fisheries and Oceans

Halifax

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR RIGHT WHALE WORK

On November 26, 1997, President Clinton signed into law the U.S. Department of Commerce's Fiscal Year 1998 budget of \$31 billion. Of that, \$400,000 will be for right whale work. The National Marine

Fisheries Service (NMFS) will add \$650,000 to that to raise the amount to be spent on right whales to \$1 million, the amount that the NMFS had originally requested for FY '98.

President Clinton's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 1999, released on February 2, 1998, includes a request for \$10.3 million for NMFS' endangered species-related activities. Of that, \$7.3 million would go to salmon recovery and \$3 million would go to marine mammal activities. Right whale activities will get \$1 million plus an additional \$200,000 for the Northeast Fisheries Center's right whale work.

MANDATORY SHIP REPORTING SYSTEM PROPOSED

At the January 29, 1998, meeting of the Northeast Whale Implementation Team, Dr. Greg Silber presented information on a draft action paper that would require all ships of 300 gross tons or more that enter right whale habitat to report to a shore base by satellite. The return message will provide information on right whales and precautions that should be taken to avoid ship strikes.

The proposal is being drafted jointly by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Ocean Service (NOS) and the U.S. Coast Guard. After inter-agency clearance, the paper will be submitted to the International Maritime Organization (IMO). If the action plan is accepted by the IMO, implementation could be in place as early as early to mid 1999.

A public meeting on the proposal is being planned tentatively for March 2, 1998 in Washington, DC. An announcement will be published soon in the *Federal Register*. To confirm date, time and location of the meeting, and for more information on the action paper, contact Dr. Greg Silber at NMFS, telephone 301-713-2322.

FISHING GEAR ENTANGLEMENT SUMMARY

In response to a question raised at the Serious Injury Workshop last April, Scott Kraus of the New England Aquarium provided a summary of right whale entanglements. "Based on preliminary analyses of right whale data, the following seems to be true in general:

(1) more than 60% of the individually recognizable animals show evidence of past or current entanglement in line or net material,

(2) most of these entanglements occur when the animals are juveniles (e.g., between ages 2 and 5),

(3) entanglement, while not always the immediate cause of death, may substantially increase the likelihood of mortality (e.g., 50% of entangled animals are infected on their head with a white fungus and some of these animals have not been resighted recently, while only a small percentage of non-entangled animals have been reported to have this type of infection), although predicting the survivability of individual animals that are entangled is unreliable (note: some animals have been observed to carry gear for over five years with no apparent ill effects),

(4) it is not possible to reliably predict whether an animal will free itself of gear in which it is entangled (note: given the high rate of scarring among apparently healthy animals, a high proportion of animals must be able to lose or extricate themselves from the gear), and

(5) an animal is likely at risk if it is a young/growing animal and the entangling gear is tightly wrapped."

Quoted from Angliss and DeMaster (1998, pages 13 & 14). See Scientific Literature and Reports, page 8, for complete citation.

TO PROTECT RIGHT WHALES

NMFS CLOSES MID-ATLANTIC AND NORTHEAST

TO PELAGIC DRIFT GILLNETS

On December 1, 1997, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a final rule to close the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast Coastal segments of the Atlantic pelagic drift gillnet fishery for swordfish, tuna and shark through July 31, 1998 (*Federal Register* 62 (230): 63467 - 63470). The swordfish portion of the fishery has been closed since December, 1996. The new action continues and expands the closure until more long-term regulatory measures are issued. The action is being taken to avoid the likelihood that this fishery will jeopardize the continued existence of the northern right whale.

Copies of the rule, the Biological Opinions and the Environmental Assessment of this action may be obtained from Dr. Greg Silber at the Marine Mammal Division, Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910; tel. 301-713-2322.

EARLY RESULTS FROM THE CALVING GROUND

The weather has not cooperated with Team Right Whale this season. Flying when the surface of the sea is shredded by winds of Beaufort Force 4 and 5 (12 - 24 mph) and not flying during worse weather have resulted in fewer sightings than might have been expected.

The first cow-calf pair was sighted and reported by a Savannah harbor pilot on December 10. Not only did the report herald the arrival of new calves, it indicates that mariners up and down the coast are well informed and interested.

One sighting, on January 13, was of five animals swimming slowly at the surface, side by side, about 15 NM southeast of the St. Johns River entrance channel to Jacksonville. Laura Morse noticed a large container ship approaching rapidly from several miles away. She contacted the ship directly on a VHF-marine radio and relayed the position of the whales to the helmsman. A voice came back through the crackling speaker of the radio acknowledging that he understood and would adjust course and speed as necessary. In the not-too-distant past, the person on the bridge of a foreign flagged ship wouldn't have had a clue about what we were trying to convey during such a radio contact. But NAVTEX transmissions and informative Coast Guard broadcasts have gone a long way to educate mariners about right whales in this region.

Philip Hamilton, the photo-ID expert with the New England Aquarium, recently identified photos of a cow-calf pair seen off Jeffrey's Ledge (~25 NM off the coast of New Hampshire) this past October. The mother, #1412, is a big, heavily scarred animal that has only been seen twice before the October

sighting. Both of those earlier sightings were in the fall of 1984, when she was photographed with a calf, again off Jeffrey's Ledge. It is amazing that with all the planes buzzing around here last year, a whale and her calf could have gone undetected for the entire season. Then again, #1412 went undetected for 13 years. Perhaps she has strange haunts and peculiar habits. Maybe the combined efforts of two state agencies, the Navy, the Early Warning Surveys, and all the other eyeballs out there will never find every whale using this area.

Chris Slay

New England Aquarium

ANOTHER NEONATE MORTALITY

On January 10, 1998, Lisa Conger and her crew with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection were flying surveys east of the Early Warning Survey area when they spotted a right whale calf about 35 NM east of Brunswick, Georgia. Although the animal appeared to be resting at the surface, it became apparent after circling a couple of times that it hadn't moved and was dead. Mike Harris of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) soon arrived on a 41' Coast Guard cutter from Brunswick and looped a line around the flukes of the 15 foot long, 2600 pound calf. They began the long process of towing the dead calf to shore. Barb Zoodsma (GA DNR) enlisted the help of the University of Georgia's research vessel, *Bulldog*, to take over the towing operations from the Coast Guard. The calf was brought ashore in Brunswick and put on a large flatbed trailer for a trip to Gainesville, Florida. Dr. Claus Buergelt was kind enough to secure the University of Florida's veterinary medicine facility for a first rate necropsy. Dr. Bob Bonde led the necropsy team. He was assisted by Cathy Bonde and their daughter, Julie. All indications are that the calf died of natural complications at birth.

Chris Slay

New England Aquarium

MASSACHUSETTS ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST ANNOUNCES RIGHT WHALE INITIATIVE AWARDS FOR FY 1998

The Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET) recently announced that its Right Whale Initiative will provide \$149,145 in funding for seven projects in fiscal year 1998. Project titles, principal investigators, their institutions and a brief description of the projects follow.

Assessing the role of inbreeding in the lack of recovery of northern right whales: Howard Rosenbaum and Rob DeSalle, Ph.D., American Museum of Natural History.

Inbreeding (due to the loss of genetic variation) has often been suggested as a contributing factor in the lack of recovery of the northern right whale. These claims, however, are scientifically unsubstantiated, and cannot be properly assessed without knowledge of the historic genetic diversity that possibly once existed in this species. The American Museum of Natural History has developed a method that enables them to readily extract DNA from baleen and bone from museum specimens of northern right whales that were killed between the 16th and early 20th centuries. This technique and analysis will demonstrate the extent to which reduced genetic variability has spanned three centuries and whether inbreeding can be eliminated from the list of potential causes inhibiting recovery of northern right whales.

Critical habitat indicators of the North Atlantic right whale: Charles Mayo, Ph.D., Center for Coastal Studies.

This study will investigate the use of satellite products (principally thermal imagery) to determine the relationship between whale distribution and water body characteristics in the coastal waters of Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay. The goal is to provide a synoptic basis for determining likely indicators both of habitat quality and of the presence of whales. The information available will be useful for making management decisions and for determining the likely distribution of whales for management under a dynamic management system.

Determining the feasibility of using passive detection techniques as a means of identifying and localizing northern right whales: Clifford A. Goudey, Ph.D., Center for Fisheries Engineering Research, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sea Grant College Program.

This research would provide the data needed to specify and predict the performance of a passive listening array designed for tracking whales in Cape Cod Bay or the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and assess the relative potential of such an array compared to techniques explored by others with previous support from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. The project's objectives include designing a prototype listening buoy system and shore-based receiving station aimed at detecting and localizing northern right whales in the Cape Cod Bay critical habitat.

An investigation into the movement patterns, habitat use, and subsurface behaviors of right whales in Cape Cod/Massachusetts Bays through the use of multi-sensor VHF radio tags and focal animal studies: David N. Wiley, International Wildlife Coalition.

Cape Cod Bay plays a critical role in right whale conservation because of its well-identified ecological importance to the animals, and because it hosts a number of human activities that are known to pose risk to the species. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts can take a lead role in designing proactive measures to enhance right whale recovery. To maximize the protective benefits and minimize the economic and social costs of such measures, managers must have key data that will allow them to make reasonable and prudent decisions. This project will provide data on right whale dive depths, swim speeds, fine-scaled short-term movements, temporal and geographic behavioral patterns, and amounts of human behavior in the vicinity of whales.

Analysis of photographs collected in Massachusetts waters during 1998, digitization of the Right Whale Catalog, and updating the published identification catalog: Philip Hamilton, New England Aquarium.

The New England Aquarium will (1) analyze all photographs collected in Massachusetts waters during 1998 that are submitted to the Aquarium and integrate them into the North Atlantic Right Whale Catalog curated at the Aquarium; and if matching funds can be secured, (2) digitize the main right whale photo archives and update the published catalog. Incorporating Massachusetts right whale sightings into the Catalog will provide a wealth of information on right whale demographics, migration, reproduction, and incidents of human interactions (entanglements and ship strikes). All of this information is crucial to the development of effective and responsible management strategies and will provide some indication of the effectiveness of implemented management plans. Digitizing of the Catalog images will insure survival of this important database and allow for dissemination of high quality catalog updates to the Aquarium's partners in right whale research.

Northern right whale health assessment: Michael Moore, Ph.D., Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

From 1998 to 2000, blubber thickness will be measured in northern right whales in Cape Cod Bay in March of each year (and in the Bay of Fundy in August of each year if funding is available from other sources). Data will be reduced and analyzed in the context of reproductive and sighting history of individuals.

Pilot test of an acoustic recording tag to measure right whale responses to an approaching vessel: Peter L. Tyack, Ph.D., Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

This project will provide pilot data to support future work using acoustic recording tags to study the precise behavioral problems that put right whales at risk for vessel collision. These data will be critical for developing management plans to reduce the injury and mortality to right whales from collision with vessels. Support is for the modification of an existing acoustic recording tag for attachment to right whales, and for field work to test Woods Hole's abilities to attach and recover these tags from right whales in Massachusetts waters. Acoustic data from successfully deployed tags will be analyzed to test Woods Hole's ability to measure whale responses such as vocalization, swim stroke, heart rate, etc.

The MET awards for FY '98 continue a tradition of generous support for right whale initiatives. Last year, MET provided more than \$210,000 in support of right whale work, including the publication of *Right Whale News*. Information on these grants may be found in MET's 1997 Annual Report, which may be obtained by contacting MET at 33 Union Street, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02108; telephone 617-727-0249.

RIGHT WHALE HABITAT MODEL PROPOSED

FOR WESTERN NORTH ATLANTIC

The Habitat Subgroup of the Northeast Whale Implementation Team, chaired by Dr. Romona Haebler of the Environmental Protection Agency, has recommended the development of a habitat model for the Northern Right Whale in the Western North Atlantic. Leading this long-term modeling effort will be Dr. Judy Pederson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sea Grant College Program.

Initially, the work will involve the development of several conceptual models that begin to put the picture together. Topics to be addressed include physical variables (example: where the 8° C line is and its relationship to *Calanus* development), life history of right whale food (*Calanus*), competition for food, how that competition changes over time and data gaps. It is hoped that funds can be found to map much of the data using GIS. It is also hoped that the modeling work can start in the northeast and then expand to include the entire range of the Western North Atlantic population of right whales, involving both the new Canadian Right Whale Recovery Plan Team (see article, page 1) and the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale.

For further information on the initiative, contact Dr. Pederson at 617-252-1741. Her e-mail address is: jpederso@mit.edu

AGENDA DRAFTED FOR IWC RIGHT WHALE SYMPOSIUM IN SOUTH AFRICA

As reported in the previous issue of *Right Whale News*, the International Whaling Commission is sponsoring a workshop on northern and southern right whales. The meetings will take place in Cape Town, South Africa, in March, 1998. The workshop is by invitation only and all invitations have been distributed. A draft agenda for the workshop has been prepared; the final agenda will be adopted at the meeting. The draft agenda is as follows:

1. Arrangements for meeting
2. Election of chairman
3. Appointment of rapporteurs
4. Adoption of agenda
5. Review of documents and available data
6. Status of regional populations
 - 6.1 - Distribution and population separation
 - 6.2 - Historical and modern catches by area/population
 - 6.3 - Trend of population by area/population
7. Biological parameters
 - 7.1 - Age and growth
 - 7.2 - Mortality rates
 - 7.3 - Reproductive parameters
 - 7.3.1 - Age at sexual maturity
 - 7.3.2 - Pregnancy rate and calf production
 - 7.3.3 - Reproductive cycle/seasonality
8. Human related mortality
9. Population genetics

- 9.1 - Genetic diversity
- 9.2 - Genetic problems in small populations (inbreeding depression)
10. Trophic relationships
11. Environmental factors potentially affecting recovery
12. Worldwide comparison of population status
13. Future research
14. Any other business
15. Conclusions/recommendations

Dr. Peter Best

South African Museum

Cape Town

South Africa

MINUTES OF NORTHEAST WHALE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM MEETING

Minutes from the September 19, 1997, meeting of the Northeast Team are available from the Team's secretary, Joe Pelczarski, at 617-727-9530. Minutes for the January 29, 1998, meeting are in preparation.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Mike Harris, the current chair of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale, has been promoted to be the manager of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Nongame - Natural Heritage Section of the Wildlife Management Division. He can be reached at N-NH Section, Wildlife Resources Division, GA DNR, 2070 U.S. Highway 278, SE, Social

Circle, GA 30279.

RIGHT WHALE EXHIBIT AT THE NEW BRUNSWICK MUSEUM

The New Brunswick Museum in Saint John has recently opened its "Hall of the Great Whales" which includes the largest collection of whale skeletal remains on public display in Canada and one of the most comprehensive museum galleries dealing with the biology of marine mammals on the continent. The gallery is still under development as components are being added as funds permit. Early in 1998, an articulated Beluga skeleton along with a model of female and calf by noted whale sculptor Paul Brodie will be unveiled. The centerpiece for this gallery is the articulated skeleton and life-sized fiberglass model of the 13 metre right whale known to researchers as Delilah. Delilah washed up dead on Grand Manan Island in the Bay of Fundy on 9 September, 1992. A necropsy determined that she died from a ship strike. She had been tracked by researchers since 1981, and at the time of her death was a first time mother. Miraculously, her calf (christened Calvin but now known to be a female) survived, in spite of not being fully weaned at the time of the mother's death, and has been sighted on a number of occasions since 1993. Although Delilah's death was tragic, her articulated skeleton and accompanying model have proven a valuable tool for highlighting the current plight of the North Atlantic right whale population. Numerous media pieces on the threats to right whales in the Bay of Fundy have used Delilah as a backdrop and a counterpoint for discussions on right whale conservation and her story has been told to thousands of school children since the gallery opened.

For additional information and for the Museum's hours of operation, call 506-643-2300.

Dr. Don McAlpine

Curator of Zoology

New Brunswick Museum

GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT MARINE PARK ESTABLISHED

TO PROTECT BREEDING AREA FOR THE SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE

According to Peter Shaughnessy (Marine Mammal Society News, 5 (4): 2), the Australian government

has announced its intention to proclaim a marine park in Commonwealth waters of the Great Australian Bight. The new park is intended to provide new protection for the endangered southern right whale and other species. The Commonwealth marine park will supplement the South Australian marine park (established in September, 1996) by extending protection out to the EEZ (200 miles). The breeding area for southern right whales will be closed to boat access from May 1 to October 31 annually, although the timing would be kept under review so that the closure coincides with the actual arrival and departure times for the whales.

The next step in the designation process is a three-month public consultation period.

SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE AND REPORTS

Angliss, R. P., and D. P. DeMaster. 1998. Differentiating serious and non-serious injury of marine mammals taken incidental to commercial fishing operations: Report of the Serious Injury Workshop 1-2 April, 1997, Silver Spring, MD. U.S. Department of Commerce NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-OPR-13, 48 pp.

Blaylock, R. A., B. G. Mase and C. P. Driscoll. 1997. Report on the workshops to coordinate large whale stranding response in the Southeast U. S. National Marine Fisheries Service. For a copy, contact Blair Mase at 305-361-4586.

Massachusetts Environmental Trust. 1997 Annual Report. Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Boston, MA. For a copy, contact MET at 617-727-0249.

National Marine Fisheries Service. 1997. Draft Environmental Assessment and regulatory impact review on alternatives for implementation of an Atlantic Offshore Cetacean Take Reduction Plan. Office of Protected Resources and Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, NOAA, U. S. Department of Commerce. iii & 94 pp. (The comment period on the draft ended January 4, 1998).

National Marine Fisheries Service. 1997. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 Annual Report, January 1, 1996 to December 31, 1996. Office of Protected Resources, NMFS, NOAA, U. S. Department of Commerce. ii & 87 pp & 5 appendices. (Contains more than 12 pages on the northern right whale).

Rowntree, V. J., P. McGuinness, K. Marshall, R. Payne, M. Sironi and J. Seger. 1998. Increased harassment of right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) by kelp gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) at Peninsula Valdes, Argentina. *Marine Mammal Science* 14 (1): 99 - 115.

Shaughnessy, P. 1998. Great Australian Bight Marine Park. *Marine Mammal Society News*, 5 (4): 2.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 10 - 11, 1998: First meeting of the Canadian Right Whale Recovery Plan Team. Halifax, Nova Scotia. For more information, see article on page 1.

March 2, 1998: Tentative date for public meeting on the proposed mandatory ship reporting system. See article on page 1.

March 12 - 13, 1998: Southeast Region marine mammal stranding meeting and training workshop. St. Petersburg, Florida. For more information, contact Blair Mase at 305-361-4586.

March 16 - 17 and March 19 - 25, 1998: International Whaling Commission meetings on northern and southern rights whales. Cape Town, South Africa. For further information, see article on page 6.

March 27 - 29, 1998: Northeast Region marine mammal stranding conference and meeting. Virginia Beach, Virginia. For further information, contact the Virginia Marine Science Museum at 757-437-6159.

May 7 - 8, 1998: Next meeting of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. Brunswick, Georgia. For further information, contact Mike Harris at 912-264-7218.

May 12, 1998: Next meeting of the Northeast Whale Implementation Team. The meeting will be held at

the office of the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, 14 Union Street, Plymouth, Massachusetts. For further information, contact Dr. Sal Testaverde at 978-281-9368.

May 15, 1998: Deadline for submitting articles or news items for publication in the next issue of *Right Whale News*.

October 22 - 23, 1998: Fall meeting of the Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale. Location to be determined. For further information, contact Mike Harris at 912-264-7218.

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, Moe Brown, Scott Kraus, Mike Payne and Jerry Wallmeyer.

Current and back issues of *Right Whale News* are available on the Internet, thanks to Alex Score and the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Visit their web site at:
<http://www.skio.peachnet.edu/noaa/grnms.html>

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To subscribe (free!) or to submit news or articles for publication, contact the editor, Hans Neuhauser, at the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, 380 Meigs Street, Athens, GA 30601. Telephone 706-546-7507. Fax 706-613-7775. E-mail: gepi@ix.netcom.com