

# RIGHT WHALE NEWS

The Publication of the Southeast United States Right Whale Recovery Plan  
Implementation Team and the Northeast Implementation Team

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## **Twenty-eight Calves: A Banner Year!**

The 2004-2005 calving season resulted in the birth of 28 calves, the second-highest number on record. Since 1980, this number has been exceeded only once, in 2000-2001, when 31 calves were born. The number of calves produced each season varies considerably. In 1999-2000, only one calf was seen. The average is 12.8.

Dr. Charles “Stormy” Mayo of the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies speculates that calf production is related to food supply in Cape Cod Bay. A year with abundant supplies of *Calanus* is followed two years later with abundant calves. A cause for concern is the very low *Calanus* crop this year. Will it be followed two years from now with very few right whale calves?

As reported by Monica Zani of the New England Aquarium at the May 5 Southeast Implementation Team meeting, this season’s first cow/calf pair was sighted December 4, and the last was sighted April 19 (the latter animals, including cow #3010, had not been seen by other surveys during the 2004-2005 season). Five of the cows were first-time mothers. The calving interval averaged 3.65 years, with a range of between 3 and 8 years.

Preliminary data indicate that a total of 109 right whales were seen in southeastern waters this season. This included 28 mothers, 28 calves, 41 other identified whales and at least 12 unidentified right whales. There were 18 males and 13 females (not including cow/calf pairs). Over half the males were adults. Most of the unidentified whales were juveniles or yearlings. This year, biopsy samples were collected from 11 calves and four mothers.

## **Eight Dead Whales in Sixteen Months**

There has been no letup in the number of right whales killed in recent weeks by ship strikes and entanglements.

The necropsy of *Lucky* (#2143) by Bill McLellan of the University of North Carolina-Wilmington and colleagues revealed that the 14-year old female died of septicemia, which resulted from the opening of old propeller scars during *Lucky*’s first pregnancy.

On March 3, a severely entangled right whale (#2301) was found on Wreak Island, Virginia. A necropsy was performed under the leadership of Dr. Michael Moore of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and assisted by staff from the Virginia Aquarium.

On April 28, a 14.7 meter long female right whale (#2617) was found on South Monomoy Island off Cape Cod, Massachusetts. A necropsy by Michael Moore and colleagues showed a substantial blubber bruise in the right flank and numerous broken bones. It is hoped that histology analyses will determine whether the blunt trauma occurred before or after death.

These deaths bring the number of confirmed right whale carcasses to 17 for the period between 2000 and 2005, and eight during the last 16 months. Sixty-six carcasses have been recorded from 1970 to the present. Twenty-three were ship-strike deaths and six were entanglement mortalities. Seventeen calves died, most probably due to birth defects and/or other natural causes. The cause of death for 20 right whales is unknown.

The relatively high number of calves born this season has led NOAA Fisheries' leadership to abandon their earlier call for a summit meeting to address right whale ship strikes or to seriously consider the recommendation from the Marine Mammal Commission for emergency regulations to reduce ship speeds near U.S. east coast ports.

## **Ship Strikes by Small Boats Increase**

Until recently, efforts to reduce ship strikes of right whales focused on large ships. It is now becoming apparent that boats less than 65 feet in length pose a risk to right whales as well, and should be an important management concern. February 16, an injured eight-year-old female (#2753) was sighted off St. Augustine. March 10, an eleven-year-old female (#2425) was hit by a 43-foot yacht traveling at 20 knots off Cumberland Island, Georgia. A total of 14 instances of small boat interactions – involving 20 boats – have been observed this season. Jim Hain with the Associated Scientists at Woods Hole observed that eight of the interactions occurred on February 13, a clear, calm day.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the National Marine Fisheries Service have collaborated on the production of three region-specific educational placards to educate small boat operators about right whales and the need for caution. The placards include regional maps, photographs, instructions (for example, move slowly, steer clear of whales, report dead or injured whales), warnings (for example, “It is illegal to approach a right whale within 500 yards”) and other information.

Anyone who observes any vessel (including a kayak or a surfboard!) in close proximity to a right whale should contact the U.S. Coast Guard and/or state natural resource agencies. If a violation of the 500-yard rule is suspected, NOAA Fisheries' Office for Law Enforcement should be notified. For the Florida to Brunswick, Georgia region, contact Special Agent Richard Chesler at 321-269-0004. North of Brunswick to the North Carolina border with Virginia, contact Special Agent Barylski at 252-449-0456. For

Virginia to Maine, contact 978-281-9213. In Canada, call Jerry Conway at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, 902-426-6947. Information they will need in order to initiate an investigation includes identification of the vessel, its position, the position of the observer, photographs, and a signed written statement.

Demonstrating that this is not only a southeastern U.S. coastal problem, the America's Cup racing yacht *Shosholozza* struck a southern right whale in Table Bay, South Africa February 14, doing structural damage to the boat, injuring several crew members, and having an unknown effect on the whale.

## **President Proposes to Cut Right Whale Recovery Budget in Half**

President Bush has proposed reducing the right whale recovery budget from \$12.5 million in FY 2005 to \$5.9 million in FY 2006. The President's budget for FY2006 does not specify which programs would be cut or eliminated. These decisions would have to be made by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

To illustrate how seriously such budget cuts could affect right whale recovery, consider that NMFS currently spends about a quarter of its right whale budget on reducing ship strikes (aerial surveys, Mandatory Ship Reporting, ship strike strategy implementation, and other efforts). About one-sixth of the funds are used to reduce entanglements (disentanglement programs, Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, fishing gear grants). Support of state programs and biology and population monitoring each take another one-sixth. Administration, travel and general recovery also take one-sixth.

President Bush has previously recommended reduced funding for right whale initiatives, but Congress has resisted. Will the Congress do the same for 2006? Citizens can help them decide. (For security reasons, mail to Capitol Hill can take weeks to be delivered. Phone calls are more effective. The Capitol switchboard number is 202-224-3121.)

## **Max Files Suit**

*Editor's note: Many observers had speculated – and indeed hoped – that Richard “Max” Strahan had abandoned his litigious actions promoting right whale conservation, in order to pursue graduate studies in astrophysics in California. Now he's back, and he's suing the U.S. Navy and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Here's the story in his own words:*

### **Law Suits Filed against U. S. Navy and Massachusetts to Stop Their Killing of Endangered Whales**

In January 2005 environmental hero Richard Max Strahan — “the Prince of Whales” — commenced separate civil actions against the U. S. Navy and Massachusetts in U. S.

District Court in Boston to stop them from killing any more Humpback Whales, Northern Right Whales and other endangered whales. Strahan is acting as a “citizen attorney general” and literally prosecuting these “environmental criminals” for killing whales in violation of the Section 9 take prohibitions of the Endangered Species Act. Prior to filing these law suits Strahan spent months negotiating with both parties with but one single demand — that they would go “whale safe” and ban their own employees from killing whales. He also asked Massachusetts to start enforcing its own wildlife laws and fine fishermen whose gear entangles whales. For example, if a Navy ship hit a whale the Navy would prosecute the captain. If a commercial fisherman’s gear entangled a whale, Massachusetts would fine the fisherman and/or revoke its license to fish. The state of Massachusetts made it clear to Strahan that it did not consider the entanglement of a whale a violation of any law, that “a few dead whales is acceptable” and refused to enforce its own laws that protect whales.

The Navy refused to even enter a formal Section 7 consultation over its fleet’s repeated striking of whales. “The extinction of whales in U. S. coastal waters is a certainty as long as NMFS and Massachusetts protect fishermen and the Navy from the ESA and the whales,” Strahan laments. Strahan is asking the court to not just enjoin Massachusetts and the Navy from future killings of individual whales. Strahan is asking the court to rule that Massachusetts and the Navy’s past takings have destroyed the ability of these species to recover from their endangered status and to order them to pay potentially millions of dollars to rehabilitate the populations of these endangered whale species. “This issue is all about the foxes guarding the chicken coop,” says Strahan.

## **Keep Up to Date on Ship Strike Issues**

A new web site can help interested citizens, as well as the right whale community, keep up to date on ship strike issues and the work of NMFS’s Ship Strike Reduction Strategy Working Group: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike/>

Currently on the web site is a summary of the eleven industry and stakeholder meetings on the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for right whale ship strike reduction. The summary notes are under “Right whale ship strike ANPR stakeholder meetings,” then under “what’s new.” If you would like to be on the Working Group’s distribution list, please contact Kristen Koyama at 978-281-9300, ext. 6531 or [Kristen.Koyama@noaa.gov](mailto:Kristen.Koyama@noaa.gov)

## **Port Access Route Studies Underway**

As part of its ship strike reduction strategy, the U.S. Coast Guard is conducting a study of east coast port access routes to see how they might be impacted by right whale recovery needs as proposed in the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (see *Right Whale News* 11(2):1, May 2004). Notice of the study appeared in the *Federal Register* February 18, 2005 (Vol. 70, no. 33, pages 8312-8314.) As explained by the USCG’s George

Detweiller at the recent NEIT and SEIT meetings, PARS studies are normally conducted in USCG regional offices. For right whales the PARS will be done in headquarters. To pass internal review, the document will be completed in September 2005. The PARS will be submitted to Congress in January 2006 and then published in the *Federal Register*. Depending on the report, the next step(s) could involve rulemaking and/or recommendations to the International Maritime Organization.

Among the possible recommendations from the PARS are: (1) vessel routing changes as proposed in the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking; (2) new routing measures not in the ANPR; (3) a validation of existing measures or status quo, or (4) changes to existing measures. The recommendations are not likely to include mandated ship speeds.

The Coast Guard's Detweiller claims that since a PARS study is not a rule-making initiative, it is not subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service on its proposed rulemaking will describe the impacts of changing port access routes. (A Notice of Intent to Prepare a Draft EIS is expected to be published in the *Federal Register* this or next month. The Draft EIS and the proposed rule may be ready for release in late summer or early fall.)

## **Coastal Developments Threaten Right Whales**

Two Texas companies are proposing to build liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals off Gloucester, Massachusetts. The terminals would require placing underwater buoys southeast of Gloucester in an area bordered by the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, the Massachusetts Bay ocean disposal site, and shipping lanes into Boston. The National Marine Fisheries Service has raised some questions about the first proposal to be submitted by the Tractebel North America corporation. Its questions include the effect of cooling water discharges on plankton production and how the terminal would impact endangered animals such as right whales. The Whale Center of New England also has expressed concern over the potential effects on plankton production, on which right whales depend. The location of the terminals may also reduce the options available for shifting the Boston shipping lanes to reduce the likelihood of ship strikes.

In the Southeast, a residential community is being developed at Cumberland Harbor east of St. Marys, Georgia, and west of the right whale's only known calving ground and critical habitat. The development will include two marinas, three community docks, up to 92 additional private docks, dry stack boat storage, and a yacht club – large enough for some 850 vessels and the largest complex of docks and marinas on the Georgia coast. The 43-foot boat that struck a right whale in March is the kind of boat that would be moored at Cumberland Harbor. Advocates for the development say that residents will be educated about right whales and the need to avoid them. The Southern Environmental Law Center, the Satilla Riverkeeper and the Center for a Sustainable Coast have appealed the issuance of the state's permit.

## **Any Day Now**

The release of the *Recovery Plan for the North Atlantic Right Whale* (*Eubalaena glacialis*) *Revision* is expected “any day now.” The document, in preparation since 1997 (see *Right Whale News* 4 (4):4, November 1997), is in the final stages of clearance within the National Marine Fisheries Service.

One topic may bog down the release of the *Revision*: taxonomy. In January, NMFS published a notice in the *Federal Register* [70 (7): 1830-1832] revoking its determination that there are three different species of right whales (North Atlantic, North Pacific and Southern) and reinstating the two species view (Northern and Southern right whales). The *Revision* assumes three species. Will the document have to be revised to be the recovery plan for the North Atlantic population of the Northern right whale, when scientists are continuing to provide evidence of the three-species view? (See, for example, Gaines et al, 2005, cited in this issue’s Scientific Literature and Reports section, page 13.)

## **Review Will Examine Status and Cost Effectiveness Of Protection Programs for Marine Mammals**

As part of the 2004 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, the Senate Appropriations Committee directed the Marine Mammal Commission to: “*review the biological viability of the most endangered marine mammal populations and make recommendations regarding the cost-effectiveness of current protection programs.*” The MMC has determined that an adequate response to this directive will require thorough analysis of several important questions, including the following:

- (1) What are the most endangered marine mammal populations?
  - a) How well do current national and international lists of species at risk characterize levels of endangerment for marine mammals?
  - b) What is the best way to assess “population status” or “levels of endangerment” of marine mammals?
  
- (2) What is the biological viability of the most endangered marine mammal populations?
  - a) What has been done to date to assess the population viability of marine mammal species and populations?
  - b) What are the most promising ways to assess population viability and what information is needed to do so?
  
- (3) What is the biological effectiveness of current protection programs?
  - a) What are the major conservation threats faced by marine mammal species and populations?
  - b) What research and management actions are being undertaken to address those threats?

- c) How is the biological effectiveness of management actions measured and how effective have mitigation measures been in reducing those threats?
  - d) Can methods to assess population viability be used to better assess the potential long-term effectiveness of management actions?
  - e) What actions are needed to improve assessments of the biological effectiveness of management actions?
- (4) What is the cost-effectiveness of marine mammal management actions relative to direct costs to agencies, commercial enterprises, and other affected entities?
- a) What information is needed to assess the costs of management actions?
  - b) To what extent can cost-effectiveness analyses be conducted given available information on biological effectiveness and the costs of management actions?
  - c) What actions are necessary to improve assessments of the cost effectiveness of marine mammal protection?

To address these questions, the Marine Mammal Commission will convene a series of workshops and arrange for the preparation of reports and workshop presentations by appropriate experts. These efforts will be aimed at compiling information and examining the key questions listed above. Based on results of workshops and reports, the Commission will prepare a report to Congress presenting its findings and recommendations.

The Marine Mammal Commission intends to focus on the 19 marine mammal species and populations listed under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act as endangered, threatened, and depleted that occur substantially in U.S. waters. This includes the North Atlantic right whale, North Pacific right whale, and 17 other species of whales, dolphins, seals, sea lions, sea otters and the manatee.

The objectives of the Commission's overall approach include:

- 1) Reviewing analyses undertaken to date to assess the biological viability of listed marine mammal populations and making recommendations for improving or expanding the use of those methods for management purposes;
- 2) Reviewing available information on the status, threats, population structure and population dynamics of the above listed marine mammal species and populations to identify which face the greatest risk of extinction and to recommend steps to improve the listing process;
- 3) Reviewing and summarizing the extent and status of protection programs for the listed marine mammal species and populations;
- 4) Identifying opportunities to improve the biological and cost effectiveness of protection programs for the listed marine mammals through review of the current activities, approaches, and impacts of these programs; and
- 5) Preparing a summary report of findings and recommendations.

To meet these objectives, the Commission envisions a three phase project including: (1) a review of information on the population viability, current status, and, protection programs for all 19 listed marine mammals in U.S. waters, (2) more detailed examination of selected species-specific protection programs, and (3) preparation of a summary report to Congress with findings and recommendations.

## **Gear Modifications Proposed for Take Reduction Plan**

Sometimes the National Marine Fisheries Service can move with uncharacteristic rapidity. Since the last issue of *Right Whale News* in February, NMFS has published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for amending the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, held twelve public hearings from Maine to Florida, and closed the comment period.

The Draft EIS identifies two preferred broad-based gear modification strategies to replace the Dynamic Area Management (DAM) and Seasonal Area Management (SAM) programs. NMFS proposes to adopt one of the two strategies. Both strategies include the requirement that groundlines must be composed of sinking and/or neutrally buoyant line; additional weak link requirements for net panels and buoy lines; and a requirement for expanded gear marking. Some exemptions would be allowed (for example, landward of the COLREGS line or in waters deeper than 280 fathoms). Some new trap/pot fisheries would be added to the fisheries regulated under the ALWTRP. The requirements would apply year-round in northern waters (Maine to the Connecticut/Rhode Island border) and seasonally in southern waters.

The main differences between the two preferred strategies are (1) when the DAM system will be replaced; and (2) what the time-area restrictions and gear modifications requirements would be for the SAM program.

Although the comment period closed May 16, the Draft EIS is available on the web at <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/> Hard copies of the 1 ¾ inch thick document may be obtained from NMFS (contact Marcia Hobbs at 978-281-9300, ext. 6505 or [Marcia.Hobbs@noaa.gov](mailto:Marcia.Hobbs@noaa.gov)).

### *Editor's Note:*

Sharon Young of the Humane Society of the U.S. and a member of the ALWTR Team has provided a Cliff Notes version of what will happen in the continuing saga.

*Fishermen:* We need more time to convert gear, 2008 is too soon. Sinking/neutrally buoyant rope won't work where I fish. We need more exempted areas. Lots of calves were born this year, why the big rush when things are looking up for right whales?

*Enviros:* None of the alternatives is sufficient. Waiting until 2008 is too long. Weak links are not good enough as a solution for vertical lines. There are too many inappropriately exempted areas. Right whales are going down the tubes while NMFS does virtually nothing to protect them. *NMFS:* Studiously take notes. Nod sympathetically and crease brow to all comments. Pop headache remedies and stomach acid reducers during the breaks.



## **Implementation Teams' Role Relegated To Ship Strike Education and Outreach**

The members of the first Right Whale Recovery Team recognized that the cooperation and support of many federal, state, local and private organizations would be needed to implement the objectives of the right whale recovery plan. Their recommendation to establish a team to help the National Marine Fisheries Service implement right whale recovery was published in the *Final Recovery Plan for the Northern Right Whale, Eubalaena glacialis*, in 1991 (Objective 6, page 43). Within several years, two teams were in existence, one for the southeast (1993) and one for the northeast (1994). Canada also created a recovery team in September 2000 to help implement its right whale recovery plan.

In the intervening years, the roles and the names of the two U.S. teams evolved. For instance, for a while the Northeast Whale Implementation Team aided in the recovery of not just right whales but also humpback whales and other endangered large whales in the northeast region. The Southeastern U.S. Implementation Team for the Recovery of the Northern Right Whale focused on the potential for ship strikes in the right whale's calving ground and critical habitat in southern Georgia and northern Florida.

As the threat of entanglement in fishing gear became more critical, a new team was assembled in 1996 to address those issues coast-wide. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team developed a Take Reduction Plan, some of which the NMFS has now implemented. Other than serving as an independent ombudsman role for fisheries issues, the Northeast Implementation Team then focused on ship strike issues.

Now, the National Marine Fisheries Service has decided that the appropriate role for both the Northeast Implementation Team (NEIT) and the Southeast U.S. Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team (SEIT) is to promote education and outreach for the agency's National Ship Strike Working Group and its proposed ship strike reduction strategy. Missing from the teams' purposes are the implementation of recovery actions for other threats identified in the *Revised Recovery Plan*, including habitat degradation, noise, contaminants, underwater explosive activities, climate and ecosystem change, and commercial exploitation.

### **NE Implementation Team Meets in Mid Atlantic**

For the first time, the Northeast Implementation Team met in the mid-Atlantic region, at the Maritime Institute for Technical and Graduate Studies in Linthicum, Maryland. The reorganized NEIT was co-chaired by Bruce Russell and Amy Knowlton. At the end of the session, Bruce Russell resigned to pursue other interests. Two additional members were nominated by the group: Mason Weinrich of the Whale Center of New England and Don O'Hare of the World Shipping Council. Currently, the members of the NEIT are:

**CDR Andrew Beaver**, NOAA, NOS, Office of Coast Survey; 401-782-3252

[Andrew.L.Beaver@noaa.gov](mailto:Andrew.L.Beaver@noaa.gov)

**Richard Corley**, US Department of Transportation; Maritime Administration; 202-366-1838 [Richard.Corley@marad.dot.gov](mailto:Richard.Corley@marad.dot.gov)

**Tom Fetherston**, United States Navy, Naval Undersea Warfare Center; 401-832-5857  
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**Amy Knowlton**, New England Aquarium; 617-973-0210 [aknowlton@neaq.org](mailto:aknowlton@neaq.org)

**Kristen Koyama**, NOAA Fisheries; 978-281-9328 ext. 6531 [Kristen.Koyama@noaa.gov](mailto:Kristen.Koyama@noaa.gov)

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## **Holland America Develops Interactive Training Program**

The Holland America Line is developing a computer-based interactive training program to inform captains and crews of their cruise lines about how to avoid ship strikes with right whales (as well as informing them about other marine environment issues). The innovative training module allows individuals to learn at their own pace and test their learning along the way and in a final exam. The program is easily updatable and can be evaluated by management for effectiveness. When the program is complete this summer, Holland America plans to make it available to other cruise lines through the International Council of Cruise Lines and other cruise line associations they belong to. They will also make it available to the National Marine Fisheries Service for distribution to other shipping lines. For additional information, contact Captain Christian Volkle at HAL, 206-298-3856.

## **Right Whale Specialist Wanted**

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries is seeking a protected species specialist to execute the state's Right Whale Conservation Program and to participate in other projects to protect Federally-endangered or threatened marine species. The application deadline is June 1. For further information, contact Dan McKiernan at 617-626-1536 or [dan.mckiernan@state.ma.us](mailto:dan.mckiernan@state.ma.us)

## Changes

**Laurie Allen**, the Director of NOAA Fisheries' Office of Protected Resources, will be leaving NOAA shortly. **Mike Payne**, a veteran of right whale issues, will serve as Acting Director of the Office until a replacement is named. **The Center for Coastal Studies**, the only organization permitted to disentangle right whales, changed its name in February to the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies. **Dr. Nathalie Jaquet** has joined the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies as Senior Scientist and Director of the Right Whale Aerial Survey Program. She can be reached at 508-487-3622. **Vicki Cornish** and the **National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office** have moved downtown to 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, S., St. Petersburg, FL 33701. She can be reached at 727-551-5771 or [Vicki.Cornish@noaa.gov](mailto:Vicki.Cornish@noaa.gov) **Hans Neuhauser**, the editor of *Right Whale News*, has a new e-mail address: [hansneuhauser@bellsouth.net](mailto:hansneuhauser@bellsouth.net) **Tom Pitchford** is the new co-chair of the Southeast Implementation Team; he is with the Marine Mammal Pathobiology Laboratory of the Florida Marine Research Institute; he can be reached at 727-893-2905 or [pitchftd@eckerd.edu](mailto:pitchftd@eckerd.edu)

## New Exhibit Features Very Lifelike Sculpture Of Right Whale Cow and Calf

Members of the Southeast Implementation Team had a preview of a spectacular new exhibit of a right whale cow and calf and other marine animals at the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve's new Environmental Education Center in Ponta Vedra Beach, Florida. So lifelike were the animals that Amy Knowlton thought that if her friends lifted her up so she could see the top of the cow's head, she could identify the animal by name and catalog number. The grand opening of the 20,000 square foot Environmental Education Center will be held September 24, 2005, which is also National Estuaries Day. The Research Reserve encompasses more than 60,000 acres of salt marsh, mangrove tidal wetlands (the northernmost on the east coast), estuarine lagoons, uplands and offshore waters including part of the critical habitat for the North Atlantic right whale. For additional information, see [www.gtmnerr.org](http://www.gtmnerr.org) or contact Katie Flynn at 904-823-4500 or [Katie.flynn@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Katie.flynn@dep.state.fl.us)

## Georgia Aquarium Will Include A "Right Whale Theatre"

Investigative reporters at the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* had to use Georgia's Open Records Act to learn that one of the features of the Georgia Aquarium now under construction in Atlanta will be a "right whale theatre" (*AJC*, March 27, 2005). No details are available as to what this will be.

## **Oil Spills and Rope May Contribute to Right Whale Decline**

Studies of the morphology of the mouth of bowhead whales suggest that right whales (the closest living relatives to bowhead whales) may be far more vulnerable to the effects of oil spills and non-biodegradable marine debris, including rope, than traditionally thought. The research, conducted by Dr. Richard Lambertsen of the University of Florida and his colleagues, was published in the current issue of the *Journal of Mammalogy*. (See Scientific Literature and Reports, page 13, for complete citation.)

The researchers conclude that “previous research on the ‘physiologic’ effects of fouling of baleen with oil is judged to be inadequate” for bowheads and right whales. Of even greater potential lethal consequence is marine debris such as fishing gear caught in the baleen plates. The debris can break the mouth’s hydrostatic seal and “can lead to impaired swimming performance, depletion of energy reserves, reproductive failure, and death.”

The authors recommend that “funding of the specialized technical capacity needed to [disentangle right whales] should be given highest priority in the whale conservation programs of both Canada and the United States. . . . research and regulations designed to diminish the probability of fishing gear entanglement in critically endangered balaenids [bowheads and right whales] should be strongly encouraged, and afforded highest funding priority.”

## ***Right Whale News* Receives Grants**

The Georgia Environmental Policy Institute has received two grants to support the continued publication of *Right Whale News*. The first grant is from the Southeast U.S. Right Whale Recovery Plan Implementation Team. We are grateful to the SEIT, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institution and particularly Leslie Ward, acting chair of the SEIT, for their active support. We have also received continued funding from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. The MET funds come from the sale of three specialty license plates depicting, respectively, the northern right whale, leaping brook trout, and Blackstone Valley Mill. We are thankful for MET’s generosity and for the support of Executive Director Robbin Peach and MET’s Board of Trustees.

## **Scientific Literature and Reports**

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## Calendar of Events

June 3-17: Summer course in satellite remote sensing for biological oceanographers offered by Bruce Monger, Cornell University. For details, see [www.eas.cornell.edu/ocean/rs\\_course](http://www.eas.cornell.edu/ocean/rs_course)

September 1: Deadline for submitting fishing gear mini-grant applications to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. See *Right Whale News* November 2004:5 and [www.nfwf.org/programs/WhaleFund.htm](http://www.nfwf.org/programs/WhaleFund.htm) for details.

September 24: Grand opening of the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve’s Environmental Education Center in Ponta Vedra Beach, Florida. See article on page 11.

November 2-3: North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium annual meeting. New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts. For further information, contact Consortium secretary Heather Pettis at [hpettis@neaq.org](mailto:hpettis@neaq.org)

December 11-16: 16<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, San Diego, California. Sponsored by the Society for Marine Mammalogy. For more information, visit the Society's web site: <http://www.marinemammalogy.org/>

## ***Right Whale News***

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