



David E. Pierce
Acting Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

251 Causeway Street, Suite 400

Boston, Massachusetts 02114

(617) 626-1520

fax (617) 626-1509



Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn E. Polito
Lieutenant Governor

Matthew A. Beaton
Secretary

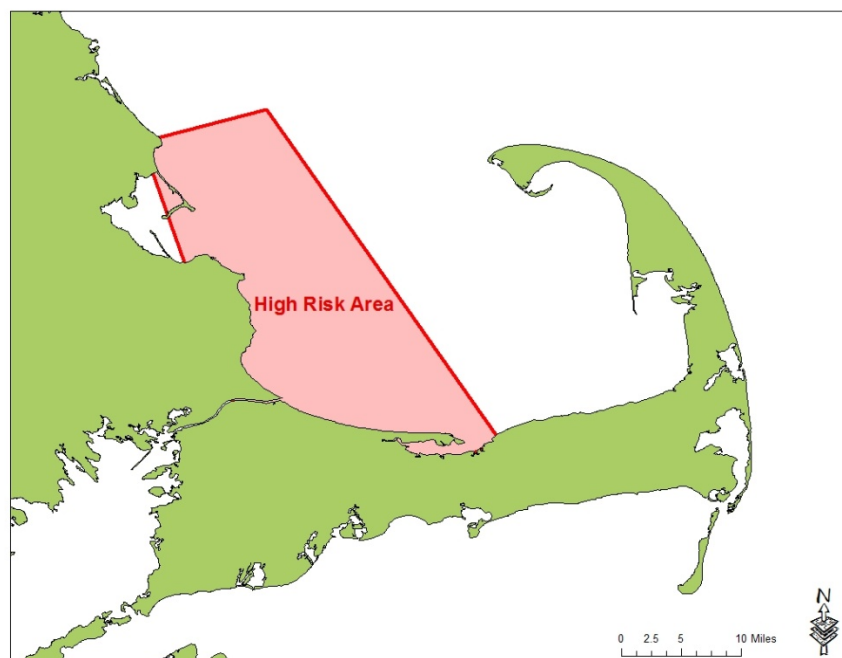
George N. Peterson, Jr.
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Mary-Lee King
Deputy Commissioner

APRIL 22, 2016 - ADVISORY TO MARINERS

HIGH RISK AREA FOR MOTHER/CALF PAIRS IN WESTERN CAPE COD BAY

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) is issuing this High Risk Advisory about the serious risk of vessel collision with a group of North Atlantic right whale mother and calf pairs that were recently observed in western Cape Cod Bay. On April 21, 2016, the Center for Coastal Studies aerial survey team documented 5 right whale mother/calf pairs between Plymouth and Sandwich approximately 2 miles from shore. The mothers were subsurface feeding on dense patches of zooplankton with calves nearby. Given their behavior and the proximity to vessel traffic, the situation presents a high risk of vessel collision to a sensitive and important segment of the right whale population. Based on zooplankton sampling in area, conditions are favorable for the food resource (plankton) to prevail for several more days. For the safety of both mariners and whales, **vessel operators in this area are strongly urged to proceed with caution, reduce speed (less than 10 knots), and post lookouts to avoid colliding with these highly endangered whales.**



Federal law prohibits vessels greater than 65 feet in length from exceeding speeds of 10 knots in Cape Cod Bay during this time of year; however, right whales are still vulnerable to collision with smaller vessels. Vessel traffic is expected to increase in this area over the next few weeks with seasonal increases in recreational and commercial fishing, as well as whale watching and passenger ship activity. Right whales are the most endangered large whale in the North Atlantic, with a population of approximately 550 animals.

Vessels are also prohibited by state and federal law from approaching within 500 yards of a right whale. Massachusetts Environmental Police and U.S. Coast Guard are authorized to enforce the 500-yard rule. Vessels that find themselves within 500 yards of a right whale should slowly and cautiously exit the area.

Management of maritime activities near right whales is part of *Marine Fisheries'* Right Whale Conservation Program. The Right Whale Conservation Program is a cooperative effort between *Marine Fisheries*, the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), and the National Marine Fisheries Service to study and protect right whales in Cape Cod Bay. Federal funding for the program comes from the National Marine Fisheries Service and state funding comes from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) issues notices to mariners via the Northern Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (SAS). Participating agencies in the SAS include *Marine Fisheries* and the Massachusetts Environmental Police, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), CCS, and other research groups. Advisories can be viewed at the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region web site (<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/surveys/>) and are broadcast over NOAA weather radio (<http://205.156.54.206/nwr/>).

For more information, visit the *Marine Fisheries* website at <http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries> or contact Erin Burke (Erin.Burke@state.ma.us, (919) 824-3114) or Dan McKiernan (dan.mckiernan@state.ma.us, (617) 626-1536). Center for Coastal Studies (www.coastalstudies.org) right whale researcher Dr. Charles (Stormy) Mayo can be reached at (508) 487-3623.

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