



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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April 28, 2023

Marine Fisheries Advisory

DMF Monitoring Presence of Right Whales in Coastal Waters

DMF is closely monitoring the presence of North Atlantic right whales in our coastal waters. From April 18, 2023 through April 28, 2023 aerial and acoustic surveillance conducted by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the National Marine Fisheries Service detected high densities of right whales in Cape Cod Bay (Figure 1). On April 26, 2023 the aerial surveillance team detected 20 right whales in Cape Cod Bay, including 3 mother/calf pairs (Figure 2). A subsequent flight in Massachusetts Bay on April 27, 2023 detected one right whale on the southeast corner of Stellwagen Bank (Figure 3).

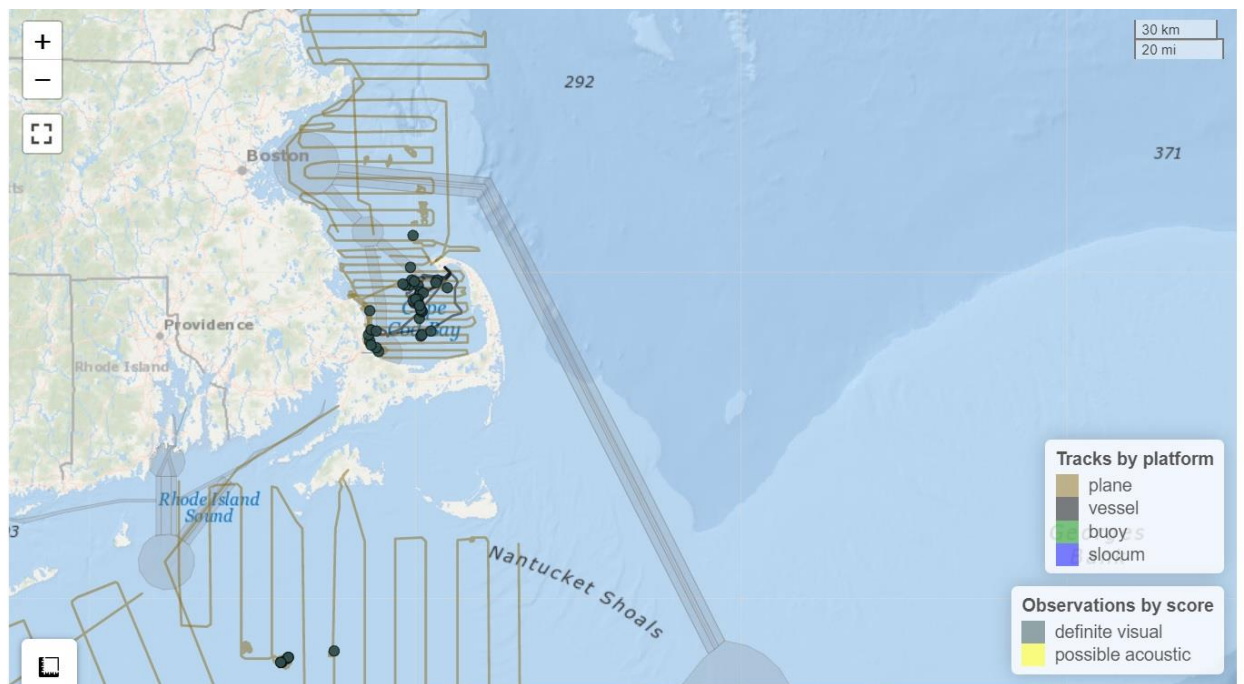


Figure 1. Aerial and acoustic detections of North Atlantic right whales from April 18, 2023 through April 28, 2023. (Tan lines are aerial surveillance tracks).

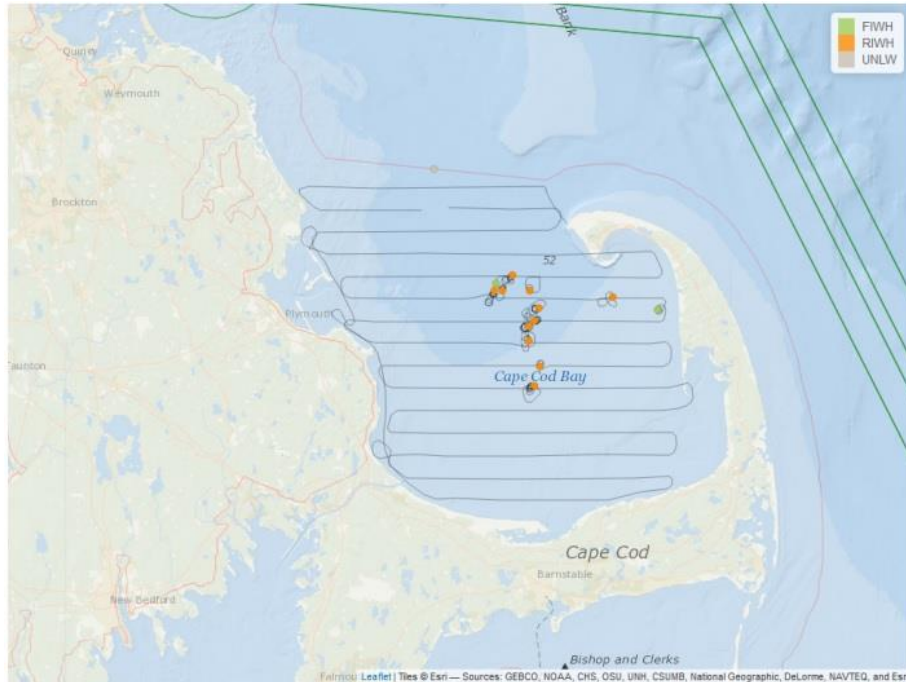


Figure 2. PCCS large whale detections from aerial surveillance conducted on April 26, 2023. Orange dots indicate right whales.

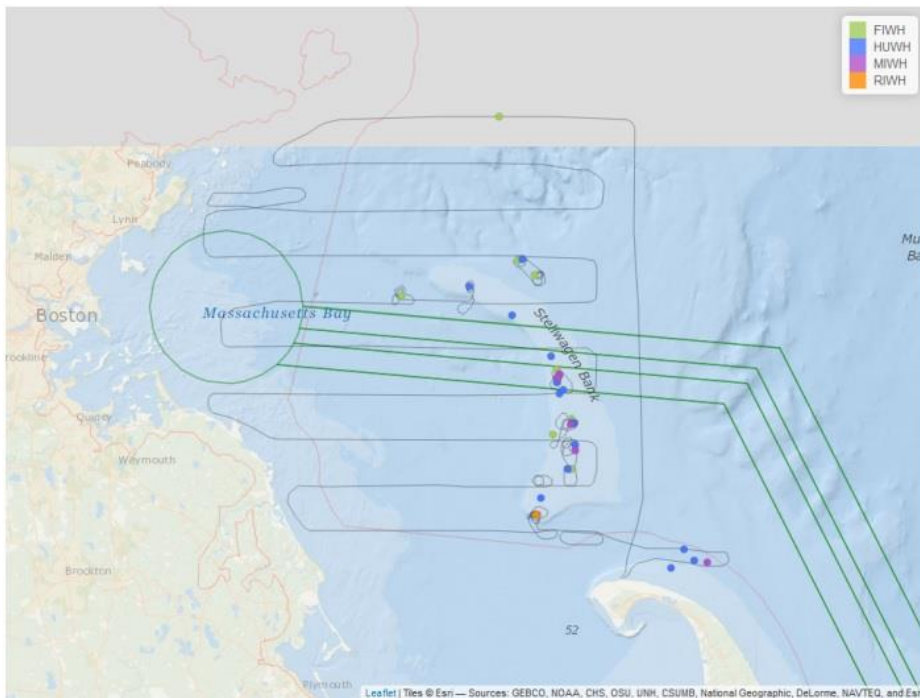


Figure 3. PCCS large whale detections from aerial surveillance conducted on April 27, 2023. Orange dots indicate right whales.

Given the continued presence of right whales, including sensitive mother/calf pairs, and the unpredictable nature of their movements, the state waters portions of Lobster Management Area

1 and the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Management Area will remain closed to trap/pot fishing through May 15 (see [Advisory and Map](#)). This closure is designed to prevent right whales from becoming entangled in trap gear, as entanglements can cause injury and mortality to the whale. CCS will be conducting another aerial surveillance flight as soon as the weather allows. DMF will continue to monitor surveillance information and could open state waters prior to May 15 if right whales leave the area. The number of right whales recently observed is substantially lower than the number of whales observed in mid-April. This decline is typical of the pattern seen toward the end of the right whale season, as zooplankton dwindles, and whales move on to other habitats.

Additionally, mariners are reminded the 10-knot small vessel (less than 65' overall) speed limit in Cape Cod Bay south of 42°08' north latitude has been extended through May 15 (see [Advisory](#)). This speed limit is designed to protect right whales from the threat of ship strikes. During the late winter and early spring, right whales migrate into and aggregate in Cape Cod Bay where they feed on zooplankton. As we move into spring, these whales begin to feed closer to the surface and become more susceptible to ship strikes. Ship strikes are a significant source of anthropogenic mortality to these endangered whales. However, the lethality of ship strikes is greatly reduced when vessels are operating at less than 10-knots speed.

For more information regarding the management of protected species in Massachusetts, please visit our website: www.mass.gov/marinefisheries