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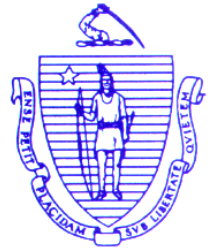
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April 29, 2016

Marine Fisheries Advisory

Right Whales Departing Cape Cod Bay

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) is updating mariners about the right whales previously aggregated in western Cape Cod Bay. The aggregations, which at one point included five mother/calf pairs, have largely broken up, although low numbers of scattered individuals remain at disparate locations in the Bay. The resource of zooplankton is declining and we expect these scattered whales to leave the area in the coming days. Given the extremely low numbers of right whales and their widely scattered distribution, the seasonal fixed gear closure in the Massachusetts Bay Restricted Area will be lifted, per schedule on May 1. **However, all vessels are prohibited by state and federal law from approaching within 500 yards of a right whale. Given the May 1 opening of the MA Restricted Area, we anticipate an increase in fixed gear fishing. Accordingly, we remind fixed gear fishermen to exercise caution when tending their gear and that they are prohibited from setting and hauling fixed gear within 500 yards of a right whale.**

Right whales are the most endangered large whale in the North Atlantic, with a population of approximately 550 animals. 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 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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