



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## Division of Marine Fisheries

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May 9, 2022  
Marine Fisheries Advisory

### DMF Monitoring Presence of Right Whales in Coastal Waters

DMF is closely monitoring the presence of North Atlantic Right Whales (“right whales”) in our coastal waters. From May 1, 2022 through May 9, 2022 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 Massachusetts’ waters, primarily in Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts Bay and the North Shore (Figure 1). Most recently, on May 5, 2021 the aerial surveillance team detected 42 right whales in Massachusetts coastal waters, including 4 mother/calf pairs (Figure 2).

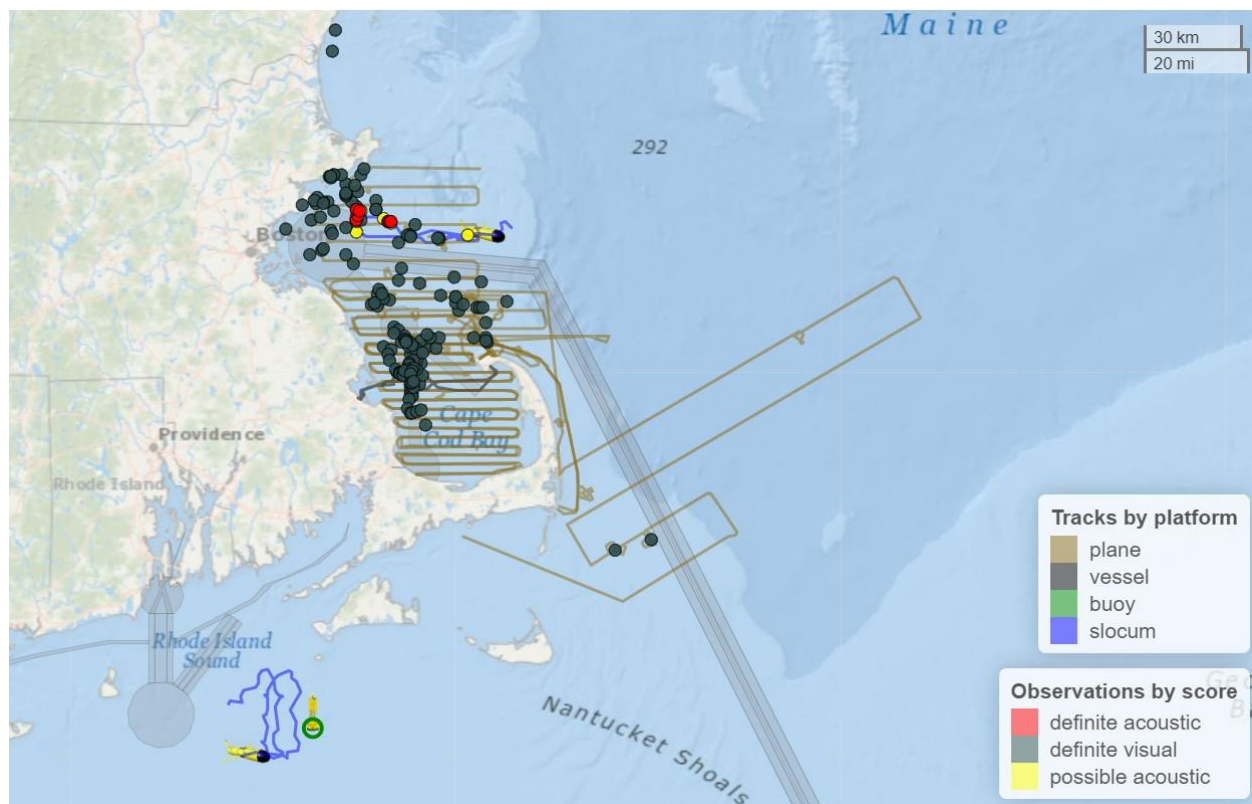
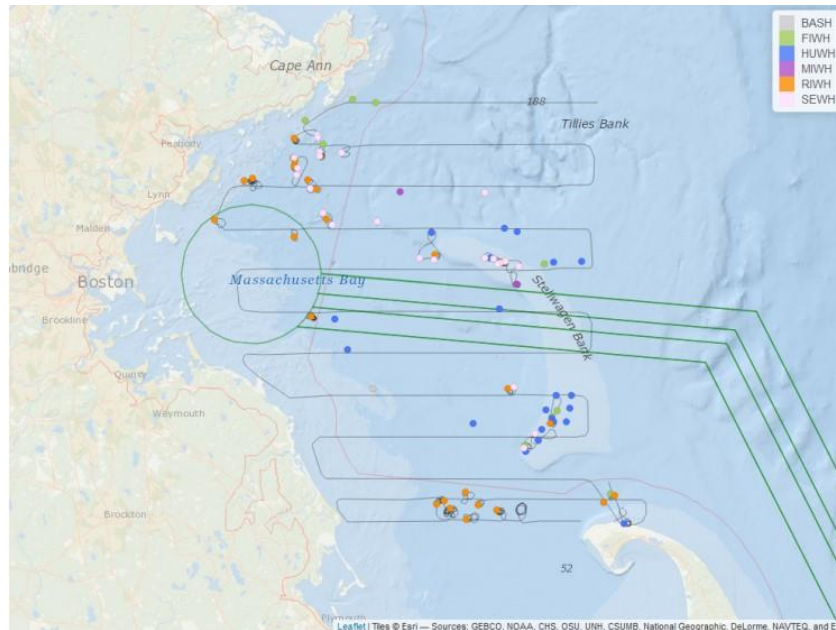


Figure 1. Aerial and acoustic detections of North Atlantic Right Whales from May 1, 2022 through May 9, 2021. (Tan lines are aerial surveillance tracks and blue lines represent acoustic surveillance tracks of the Slocum glider).



**Figure 2. PCCS large whale detections from aerial surveillance conducted on May 5, 2021. Orange dots indicate right whales.**

After months of dense whale aggregations in Cape Cod Bay, the last flight on May 5 suggests the right whales are shifting to the north into Massachusetts Bay and beyond. This is a pattern we have observed commonly at the end of the right whale season in Massachusetts waters at this time of year when right whales depart for northern waters such as the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Canada.

What remains to be seen is the impact on whale distribution of the ongoing 5-day long weather event with strong northeast winds and elevated sea states. DMF is making every effort to use surveillance information to make informed decisions. Due to inclement weather and unfavorable sea state (that reduces sight-ability of whales), aerial surveillance is not expected to resume until later this week (Thursday or Friday). DMF will continue to monitor surveillance information and could open portions or all of state waters prior to May 16 if surveillance reveals that whales have departed. Alternatively, if this weather event results in right whales returning to Cape Cod Bay, and other Massachusetts state waters, the closure may need to be extended. This closure is designed to prevent right whales from becoming entangled in trap gear, as entanglements can cause injury and mortality to the whale.

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.

DMF appreciates the cooperation and patience of all the fishing industry participants and stakeholders. We are sensitive to the stress these issues can have on fishers who are unable to make plans to begin their trap fishing season. It is critical to announce any decision with sufficient time to inform all the fishery participants. DMF will issue a new Advisory before the close of business on Friday May 13<sup>th</sup>.

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