



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

DMF Lifts Seasonal Trap Gear Closure and Seasonal Speed Limit for Waters North and East of Cape Cod

Effective Friday, May 14, 2021, the Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries is lifting the seasonal trap gear closure and small vessel speed limit restrictions ([Notice of Declaration](#)) north and east of Cape Cod. These rules were previously in place through May 15 with the potential to be extended further into May if right whales remained in state waters. This action was taken in response to today's aerial survey by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies. This survey showed that no right whales remained in Massachusetts' state waters.

Beginning tomorrow, commercial trap fishermen may set their gear in those waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth east and north of Cape Cod up to the New Hampshire border. These waters have been closed to trap gear fishing since February 1. Additionally, mariners operating vessels less than 65' overall length may run them at speeds greater than 10 knots. Operators of vessels with an overall length of 65' or greater are reminded the federal 10 knot speed limit remains in effect in Cape Cod Bay Seasonal Management Area through May 15.

Commercial trap fishermen are reminded of the new requirement that all vertical buoy lines must have a breaking strength of 1,700 pounds or less. Fishermen are encouraged to visit our [buoy line modification webpage](#) to learn more about how to comply with this new regulation. DMF appreciates the accommodations made by trap fishermen for abiding by the trap gear closure and for re-rigging their gear over the winter to meet the new buoy line breaking strength requirements. These actions are designed to reduce the risk of right whales becoming entangled in trap gear and to prevent serious injury and mortality to right whales should an entanglement occur.

Right whales are a critically endangered species. Their population has been decreasing since 2010 due to continued mortality and low birth rates. These whales seasonally migrate into Massachusetts' waters and aggregate to feed on zooplankton. In recent years, more than 50% of the known population has been observed in our waters during the late winter and early spring. The state's seasonal trap gear closures and speed limit restrictions protect these endangered whales from entanglements in trap gear and vessel collisions, which are major sources of mortality for these animals.

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