



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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May 10, 2021

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 May 3, 2021 through May 10, 2021 aerial and acoustic surveillance conducted by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and New England Aquarium detected moderate densities of right whales in Massachusetts' waters, primarily in Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay (Figure 1). On May 7, 2021 the aerial surveillance team detected 34 right whales in Massachusetts coastal waters, including 6 mother/calf pairs.

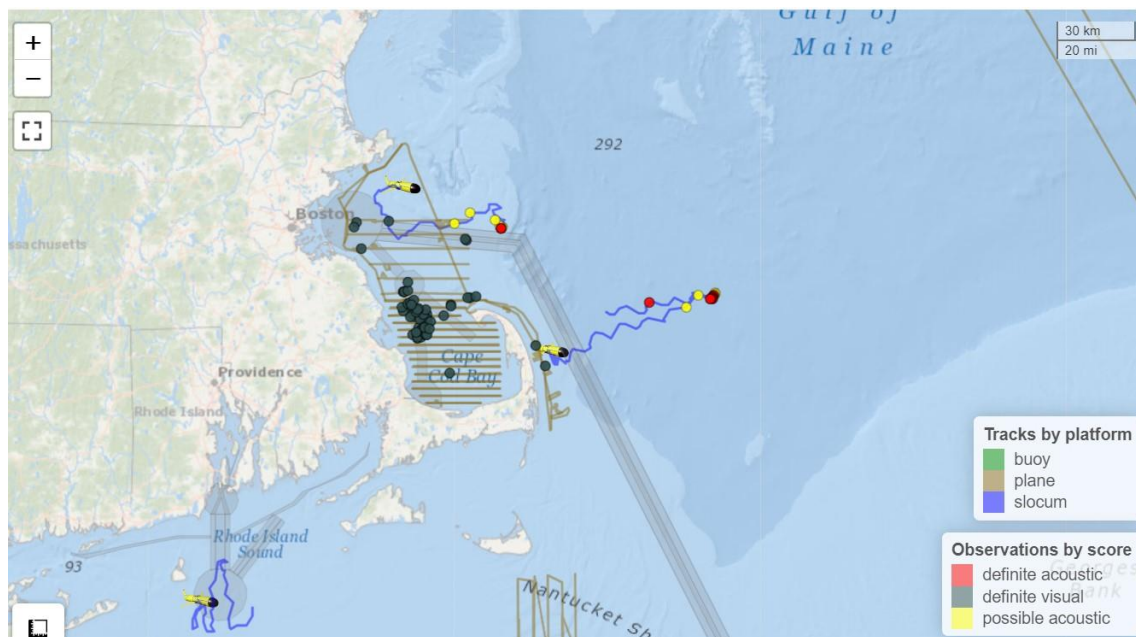


Figure 1. Aerial and acoustic detections of North Atlantic Right Whales from May 3, 2021 through May 10, 2021. (Tan lines are aerial surveillance tracks and blue lines represent acoustic surveillance tracks of the Slocum glider).

The next aerial survey is expected to occur on Thursday May 13, 2021 and based on the results of that survey, DMF will make a determination about the fixed gear closure and will announce any actions on Friday, May 15 to open areas or extend the closure around aggregations if necessary. This closure is designed to prevent right whales from becoming entangled in vertical

lines tied to trap gear. Since DMF has overseen surveillance and monitoring of right whales since 1998, aggregations of right whales have left state waters by mid-May in every year. DMF is aware that many in the fishing industry are anticipating the results of these surveys to make plans to resume fishing after the 3 ½ month closure.

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