



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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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 April 20, 2021 through May 3, 2021 aerial and acoustic surveillance conducted by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and New England Aquarium detected moderate to high densities of right whales in Massachusetts’ waters, primarily in Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay (Figure 1). Most recently, on May 3, 2021 aerial surveillance team detected 39 right whales in Massachusetts coastal waters, including 4 mother/calf pairs (Figure 2).

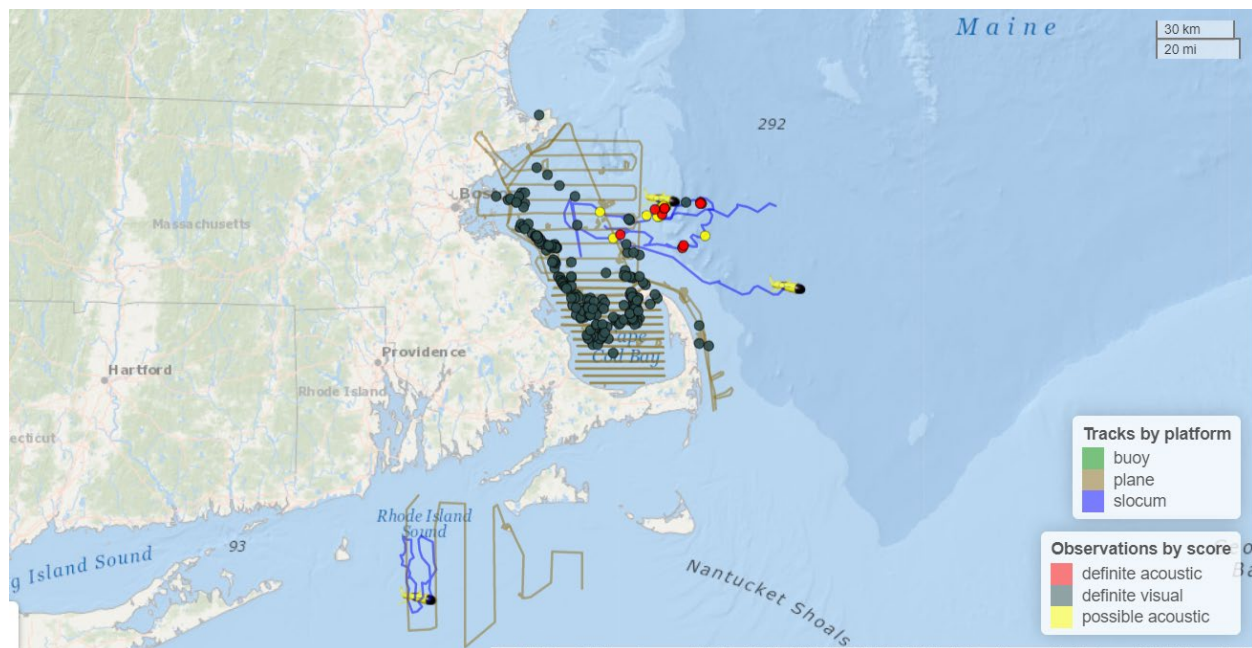


Figure 1. Aerial and acoustic detections of North Atlantic Right Whales from April 20, 2021 through May 3, 2021. (Tan lines are aerial surveillance tracks and blue lines represent acoustic surveillance tracks of the Slocum glider).



Figure 2. PCCS large whale detections from aerial surveillance conducted on May 3, 2021. Yellow dots indicate right whales.

Considering this most recent surveillance, lobstermen authorized to fish in Lobster Management Area 1 and the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Management Area are reminded that the state waters portion of these areas remain closed to lobster trap fishing through May 15 or as long as the aggregations remain (see [Advisory](#)). PCCS is conducting routine aerial surveillance throughout coastal waters and adjacent federal waters, as the weather allows. DMF will continue to monitor surveillance information and could open portions or all of state waters prior to May 15 if less than 3 right whales are detected in an area. 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.

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