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RIGHT WHALE AGGREGATION DEPARTS CAPE COD BAY – ADVISORY LIFTED

Recent survey and monitoring activity by the Commonwealth's Right Whale Conservation Program has determined that the large aggregation of right whales observed in Cape Cod Bay (CCB) over the last several weeks have departed. Plankton densities measured by the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) Habitat Monitoring Program also indicate a great decline in the right whales' food resource suggesting that right whale aggregations are not likely to return in the near future. With the departure of these animals the state is lifting the April 13th advisory warning mariners operating in Cape Cod Bay to be on the lookout for this highly endangered species. *Marine Fisheries* would like to thank fishermen and other mariners for their assistance and compliance with measures to protect this highly endangered animal.

During the last several weeks an aggregation of right whales, including at least four mother/calf pairs have been monitored in CCB by the Commonwealth's Right Whale Monitoring Program, a combination of habitat monitoring, aerial surveys, and real-time passive acoustic monitoring. The presence of these especially vulnerable mother/ calf pairs feeding on a rich food resource in the Bay resulted in the state taking action to protect this highly endangered species. Scientists believe feeding right whales may be oblivious to their surroundings, and thus vulnerable to vessel traffic. Ship strikes, believed to be the primary cause of human-induced mortality in right whales, have attributed to four right whale deaths along the U.S. East Coast over the last year. Of additional concern was the number of mother and calves documented in the Bay. Right whales calves are only 15 – 20 feet long this time of year and can be especially difficult to spot.

The Right Whale Conservation Program is a cooperative effort between *Marine Fisheries*, CCS, and Cornell University's Bio-acoustic Research Program to study and protect right whales in Cape Cod Bay. Use of vessel/aerial-based surveillance, passive acoustic monitoring, and forecasting of right whale presence through habitat analysis has resulted in the most comprehensive conservation program throughout the species' range. CCS has conducted bay-wide whale surveys two to three times per week in Cape Cod Bay and adjacent waters since mid-December. A cooperative venture between Cornell University and *Marine Fisheries* that uses real-time passive acoustic buoys has been listening for right whale vocalizations in the Bay since

November of 2004. Hydrophones mounted on the buoys detect right whales through their vocalizations that are then reported in updates every few hours using cell phone technology.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) issues warnings to mariners and others via the Northern Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (SAS). Advisories regarding Cape Cod Bay and surrounding waters can be viewed at the NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region web site (<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/ro/doc/whale.htm>) and are broadcast over NOAA weather radio (<http://205.156.54.206/nwr/>).

For more information, visit the *Marine Fisheries* website at <http://www.mass.gov/marinefisheries> or the Center for Coastal Studies at www.coastalstudies.org.

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