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NORTHEAST MARINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION HONORED AS ENVIRONMENTAL HEROES

Gloucester, MA -- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an agency of the Department of Commerce, has selected the Northeast Marine Pilots Association (NEMP) of Newport, Rhode Island as Environmental Heroes for 2004. NEMP is being recognized for outstanding efforts to educate ship masters about the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale, in support of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northeast Regional Office, Gloucester, MA.

Awards are made in conjunction with Earth Day, and honor NOAA volunteers for their "tireless efforts to preserve and protect our nation's environment."

"NOAA and the nation are fortunate to have such dedicated people volunteer so much of their time," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph. D., undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "They set a perfect example for others to follow in their communities. America needs many more Environmental Heroes like them."

NOAA officials will present the award on Monday, May 24th, during the Propeller Club meeting at The Crowne Plaza at the Crossings located on Greenwich Avenue in Warwick, Rhode Island. The NEMP presentation will be made during May Maritime Month when U.S. Senator Jack Reed is also scheduled to be honored as Maritime Man of the Year.

Strong supporters of the NOAA Fisheries right whale education efforts with the shipping industry, the pilots began carrying right whale placards, videos, and information on board vessels in 2002 to help masters understand the vulnerability of these endangered whales to collisions with ships, and to increase awareness of their endangered status. The NE Marine Pilots also provide masters with recent right whale locations and guidance on the Right Whale Mandatory Reporting Ship (MSR) System requirements.

"On behalf of the 12,500 men and women working for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, I am pleased to present you with this 2004 Environmental Hero Award," Lautenbacher wrote in a letter to the recipients. "Your dedicated efforts and outstanding accomplishments greatly benefit the environment and make our nation a better place for all Americans."

NOAA named 33 Environmental Heros for 2004 -- thirty individuals and three organizations. Visit the NOAA Earth Day Web site at <http://www.noaa.gov/earthday> to read more about this year's award winners.