



# NEWS FROM NOAA

## NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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Contact: Laura Walko/Connie Barclay  
(301) 713-2370

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### **NOAA RECOMMENDS NEW EAST COAST SHIP TRAFFIC ROUTES TO REDUCE COLLISIONS WITH ENDANGERED WHALES**

NOAA this week urged ship captains to use new recommended routes when entering or leaving the Florida ports of Jacksonville and Fernandina, and Brunswick, Ga., as well as in Cape Cod Bay off Massachusetts. These new routes are expected to reduce the chances of ship strikes with endangered right whales.

The recommended routes take into account safety and economic impact to the mariner. Although the routes are voluntary, they will appear on both electronic and paper NOAA nautical charts no later than November 30. The new designations will help mariners decrease whale strikes by reducing vessel activity in areas frequented by ships and whales.

"This is an important part of our ship strike reduction strategy for critically endangered right whales," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. "Mariners need to be aware of these voluntary routes before the winter calving season when pregnant females and females with calves migrate to waters off of Florida and Georgia. With a population so low, even one whale death can set back recovery efforts dramatically."

North Atlantic right whales are among the most endangered marine mammal populations in the world, and are highly vulnerable to ship collisions. Pregnant females and females with calves are known to have been struck by ships along the east coast in recent years. The right whale population is small--around 300--and many scientists believe recovery has stalled, making the few reproductively active females even more important to population recovery.

Right whales typically travel south from waters off Canada and New England to calving and nursery areas off Florida and Georgia in winter, traversing areas frequented by large ships. Females and their calves then return to more northerly feeding grounds, aggregating in Cape Cod Bay during the spring, also an area with substantial ship traffic.

NOAA scientists have been working to better understand the year-round distribution of right whales along the east coast. The agency has also studied ship traffic, particularly around large east coast ports. Combining these results, and working with the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA scientists placed the recommended routes where vessels would be less likely to encounter right whales, in addition to minimizing economic impacts and insuring safety of navigation.

"One of NOAA's primary missions is to support the nation's commerce with information for safe, efficient and environmentally sound transportation," said John H. Dunnigan, assistant administrator for NOAA Ocean Service, "The integration of these recommended routes to our suite of chart products is part of our effort to provide up-to-date navigation information vital to our economy as well as to help protect the nation's living marine resources."

In this latest effort to provide recommended ship traffic routes, mariners will be alerted to the routes in a U.S. Coast Guard *Local Notice to Mariners*. The routes can be found on updated electronic versions of the Massachusetts Bay nautical charts that can be downloaded at <http://www.noaa.gov/charts.html>.

NOAA Fisheries Service urges those traversing the areas to use the routes, and reminds mariners about the mandatory ship reporting systems, which are also designed to help reduce the threat of collisions between whales and ships. NOAA also reminds mariners that right whale alerts, whale locations and ship speed advisories are provided through various maritime media. Information about avoiding ship strikes can be found at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/shipstrike).

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires recovery plans to serve as guides to promote the conservation and recovery of listed species. In 2005, NOAA Fisheries Service released a revised North Atlantic right whale recovery plan that provides an overall framework for promoting recovery of the whale. Measures to reduce risks posed by entanglement in fishing gear are contained in the agency's Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA Office of Coast Survey is part of the NOAA Ocean Service. Today, the Office of Coast Survey is known for its useful and necessary navigational products that are required for the safe and efficient maritime commerce in and out of our nation's ports.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

The agency is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA National Ocean Service: <http://www.nos.noaa.gov>

NOAA Office of Coast Survey: <http://chartmaker.ncd.noaa.gov>

NOAA Ship Strike Reduction: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike>