

State Officials Lift Advisory Regarding Right Whales in Massachusetts Coastal Waters

Record numbers were discovered in Cape Cod Bay this spring

[Click here for photos of right whales](#)

BOSTON - May 18, 2011 - The Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is lifting the advisory issued last month that urged boaters to avoid the endangered North Atlantic right whales, which had congregated in large numbers in Cape Cod Bay.

An aerial survey conducted of the bay on May 13 by the Center for Coastal Studies and the DFG's Division of Marine Fisheries have revealed that the right whales have left the area. With the departure of these animals from the bay and nearby Race Point, the Commonwealth is lifting the April 15th advisory to mariners in this area.

Though no whales were sighted in the bay, boaters should remain on the lookout for right whales as they may still be present on the backside of Cape Cod and in the Great South Channel.

On April 25, the Right Whale Conservation Program - a joint project between the Division of Marine Fisheries and the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies - documented a recording-breaking 124 whales in an aerial survey of the bay and adjacent waters. Last year, the most right whales seen during a single aerial survey was 70.

Marine officials estimated that over 50 percent of the known population of North Atlantic right whales gathered in the area around Cape Cod. Right whales congregate annually in the spring in waters off the cape to feed on the local abundance of zooplankton, tiny marine creatures that make up the whales' primary food source.

Due to the number of whales, their behavior, their proximity to the shore, the Division of Marine Fisheries issued a high risk advisory last month.

Right whales are the most endangered large whale in the North Atlantic, with a population of approximately 450 animals. Adult right whales average from 45 to 55 feet in length and can weigh up to seventy tons - the largest measured specimens have been measured at 60 feet long, weighing 117 tons. Females are larger than males.

Right whales engage in surface and subsurface feeding and are often difficult to see, putting them at great risk to be struck by vessels - the major cause of human-induced mortality for right whales.

Vessels are prohibited by state and federal law from approaching within 500 yards of a right whale. Massachusetts Environmental Police and U.S. Coast Guard are authorized to enforce the 500-yard rule. Vessels that find themselves within 500 yards of a right whale should slowly and cautiously exit the area.

Management of maritime activities near right whales is part of the DMF Right Whale Conservation Program. The Right Whale Conservation Program is a cooperative effort between DMF, the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), and the National

Marine Fisheries Service to study and protect right whales in Cape Cod Bay.

For more information, visit the DMF website at www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.

###