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Marine Fisheries Advisory

VOLUNTARY SPEED LIMIT TO PROTECT RIGHT WHALES

The Division of Marine Fisheries is requesting all boaters abide by a 10 knot vessel speed limit when transiting the waters of Cape Cod Bay. The most recent aerial survey conducted by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies on April 22, 2018 showed more than 100 right whales aggregated in the Bay; this is about 25% of the known population. These whales are feeding at the surface and are susceptible to ship strikes.

Ship strikes are one of the leading causes of mortality to right whales. Research has demonstrated that the risk of ship strikes, and the injury and mortality caused by ship strikes is dramatically reduced when vessels are operated at 10 knots or less.

Right whales are a critically endangered species. They seasonally migrate into Massachusetts waters and aggregate in Cape Cod Bay to feed on zooplankton. In recent years more than 50% of the known right whale population is observed in our waters during late winter/early spring. The right whale population has been decreasing since 2010 due to continued mortality and low birth rates. The most persistent sources of human-caused mortality are ship strikes and entanglements with fishing gear.

For more information about the management of protected species in Massachusetts, contact DMF at 617-626-1520 or visit our website at www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.