Species at Risk Working Group

October 2026

Species at Risk Working Group - Sea Turtle Meetings

- Nov 2023 SAR WG meeting focused on fisheries interactions with leatherbacks
- Since March 2024, NOAA/DFO staff have met ~quarterly to discuss fishing gear details and leatherback conservation
  - Focusing on pelagic longlines, gillnets, pot/traps, and trawls
  - Next meeting October 20
  - Effective collaborative partnership
  - End products:
    - Table with details on each fishery
    - Summary document with mitigation, handling and monitoring measures, and opportunities for additional conservation

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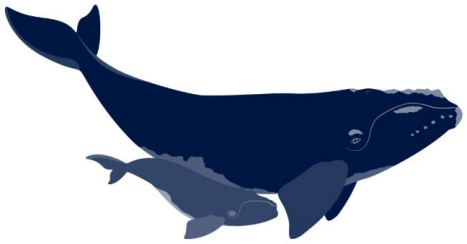
Species at Risk Working Group

U.S. Updates - October 16, 2026



Right Whale Updates

Southeast (NC-FL)

- 23 identified mom/calf pairs this season
  - 20 returning moms
  - 3 first time moms
- 83 other animals sighted
  - 20 adult females
  - 38 adult males
  - 25 yearlings/juveniles

Mid-Atlantic (VA-NY)*

- ~30 animals sighted
  - 8 adult females
  - 16 adult males
  - 3 yearlings/juveniles



Right whale #4610 her first calf. Credit: CMARI, taken under NOAA permit #26919. Aerial survey funded by the Army Corps of Engineers.

**SE and MidA not additive as animals might have been sighted in both areas*

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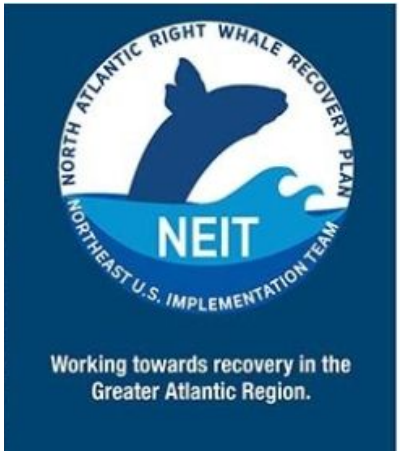

ESA Recovery Plan Northeast U.S. Implementation Team (NEIT)

Multi-disciplinary team - advises on right whale issues surrounding status and conservation, includes DFO and Transport Canada members*

Updates

- April meeting - focused on updates on NARW status and recovery, and reviewed the status of NEIT activities as well as priorities to identify next steps; final meeting summary available on the website
- Population Evaluation Tool/PET Subgroup disbanded after meeting its objective - PVA Update Released resulting in a living tool for management

Next Steps

- NEIT – team meetings (November and December 2026)

*At Canada's request they are non-voting members of the NEIT

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Right Whale Vessel Speed Rule

- NMFS announced an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) on March 4, 2026.
  - Public comment period closed on June 2, 2026
  - Received over 130,000 submissions, ~30,000 individual comments
  - Requested comments on the following topics:
    - The effectiveness of technologies to reduce vessel strikes with whales (included MITRE TRL report)
    - Vessel-size specific risk assessment
    - Alternative management areas
    - Safety deviation provision improvements
    - Efficacy of the speed rule
    - Economic impacts on industry
    - Outreach

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Marine Mammal Protection Act

MMPA prohibits take of marine mammals, but provides conditional exception for incidental take in commercial fisheries

Take Reduction Planning (TRP)

- Required if incidental mortality and serious injury exceeds Potential Biological Removal (PBR)
- Develop consensus-based recommendations
- Goal=Reduce incidental mortality & serious injury below PBR

(NMFS has ultimate responsibility to meet that goal)

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Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP)

ALWTRP includes:

- 60 member team
- Covers right, humpback, and fin whales
- 10 fixed-gear gillnet & trap/pot fisheries

Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 (12/29/2022):

- Lobster and Jonah crab fishery compliant with the ESA/MMPA until December 31, 2028
- Requires new regulations for Lobster and Jonah crab to be in place by December 31, 2028

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ESA Petition Response Updates

- NMFS released a negative 90-day finding on the petition to revise the designated critical habitat of North Atlantic right whales in July of 2026.

- NMFS received a petition to list cusk under the Endangered Species Act on july 23, 2025.

Next Steps:

- Develop a 90-day finding to determine whether the petition presents substantial scientific or commercial information indicating that the petitioned action may be warranted.

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