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“Whale Alert” iPhone, iPad app does National with Updated Version to let Public Report Whale Sightings

NEFSC Researchers, Databases contribute to effort

The free mobile application, **Whale Alert**, developed in 2012 to help protect endangered North Atlantic right whales by reducing the risk of injury or death from ship strikes on the East Coast, has been updated to **Whale Alert 2.0** for use on all whale species on the East Coast, West Coast, and off Canada.

The app uses Global Positioning System (GPS), Automatic Identification System (AIS), Internet, and NOAA nautical charts to provide mariners with a single source of information about whale locations and the conservation measures active in these locations.

Researchers Christin Khan, Timothy Cole, and Elizabeth Josephson of the NEFSC's Protected Species Branch were part of the team that developed both the original and updated app. Most of their efforts focused on how the app would work and how it would be applied. Cole and Khan are members of the large whale research team, and Josephson works on databases and web applications. Allison Henry and Peter Duley of the large whale research team were also part of the early discussions.

“We were involved mainly in the thought processes that went into managing the system for the new version, and the beta testing,” said Khan, who served as the primary NEFSC contact. “We thought about how to access the data and allow people to report directly into the system, as well as how the data would be displayed.”

“All the reporting features are new in **Whale Alert 2.0**. Mariners want as much available information as possible, and this updated version provides them with that situational awareness,” said David Wiley, research coordinator at the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary who also coordinated Whale Alert. “The app has all the original features plus many more.”

The original **Whale Alert** app took existing North Atlantic right whale sightings and vocalization data and made it visible. Information from acoustic buoys in the shipping lanes around

Stellwagen Bank that listen for right whale calls are displayed on an iPad or iPhone on a ship's bridge, alerting mariners to the presence of the endangered whales. The display also includes information on management measures, such as speed restrictions, and other data from the interactive Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (link to <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/surveys/>).

“Right whale sightings information is available to the public on the interactive Google Map, and people can continue to report right whale sightings by calling the NOAA hotline 1-866-755-NOAA (6622),” said Christin Khan, a member of the app development team. “But anyone can now report sightings directly through the **Whale Alert** app, which makes the process very simple. The caller has the options to automatically include their geographic position for an accurate latitude and longitude of the whale sighting, and to upload a photograph to help verify the species seen.”

“Sightings data reported directly from the app can be entered into our existing reporting system, verified, archived in our database, and displayed online via the interactive Google map in the Right Whale Sighting Advisory System,” Khan said.

Other additions to **Whale Alert 2.0** include real-time reports on oceanographic conditions, access to tide and weather data, standard and satellite maps that can be overlaid with nautical charts, recommended shipping routes, new regulatory and management areas, and whale watching guidelines. It can also be used to report dead, stranded, or entangled whales directly to databases that NOAA and whale biologists use to map habitats and migration patterns.

Whale Alert was developed by a collaboration of government agencies, academic institutions, non-profit conservation groups, shipping industry representatives, and private sector industries. NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries led the effort. Other collaborating organizations include the Bioacoustics Research Program at Cornell University, the Cape Cod National Seashore, the Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping at the University of New Hampshire, Conserve I.O., Excelerate Energy, EOM Offshore, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Massachusetts Port Authority, NOAA Fisheries, the National Park Service, Point Blue Conservation Science, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution.

Whale Alert 2.0 is available for download free of charge from the App store: (link: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/whale-alert-reducing-ship/id911035973?ls=1&mt=8>)

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Related links:

Updated “**Whale Alert**” iPad™, iPhone™ app invites public to contribute to protection of West Coast whales: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/news/press/2014/pr091114.html>
Whale Alert: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov/protect/whalealert.html>
Sanctuary Integrated Monitoring Network (SIMoN):
<http://sanctuarysimon.org/news/2014/09/whale-alert-app-available-and-free/>