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North Atlantic Right Whale Sighting Survey (NARWSS) and Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (RWSAS)

2007 Results Summary

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March 2008

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Overview: The North Atlantic Right Whale Sighting Survey (NARWSS) is a NOAA Fisheries program which locates and records the seasonal distribution of right whales off the northeastern United States. The Right Whale Sighting Advisory System (RWSAS) is designed to reduce collisions between ships and right whales by alerting mariners to the presence of the right whales via fax, email, the Internet, Broadcast Notice to Mariners (BNM), NOAA Weather Radio, and the Mandatory Ship Reporting system (MSR). These reports are obtained from a variety of sources including the NARWSS, whale research organizations, automated acoustic buoys, whale watch vessels, Coast Guard, fishing vessels, commercial ships, and the general public. The results from both the NARWSS and the RWSAS programs in 2007 are summarized in the following tables and figures.

Table 1. Summarizes the NARWSS flight hours, the number of the NARWSS flights conducted, survey type, and the total number of right whales sighted on all the NARWSS flights during each month in 2007. There were four types of surveys flown: broadscale; sawtooth; focused surveys in the Great South Channel (GSC) Critical Habitat; and focused surveys over potential and realized Dynamic Area Management (DAM) closure zones. Broadscale surveys were flown along systematic east-west track lines that covered all Federal waters west of the Hague Line from south of Long Island, New York, to Eastport, Maine. These surveys were flown to provide a synoptic view of the distribution of right whales off the northeastern Atlantic coast; a completed series indicates coverage of the entire area. Sawtooth surveys began in May 2007 and were flown along systematic track lines within 9 survey blocks. These flights were conducted to obtain increased photographic capture data of individual right whales to support vital rate modeling and monitoring of right whale aggregations. Surveys focused in the GSC provided commercial shipping traffic with the current locations of right whale aggregations. DAM confirmation flights included flights made to investigate reported sightings of right whale aggregations outside existing closures and monitor the duration of residence of aggregations within established DAM zones. Additional focused flights not categorized in the table were flights to relocate reported whale carcasses, entangled whales or provide support for disentanglement efforts.

Month in 2007	Flight hours	Systematic broadscale flights *	Systematic broadscale series completed	Systematic sawtooth surveys	Critical habitat surveys	DAM surveys	# Right whales sighted **
January	29	0	0	0	0	4	47
February	28	3	0	0	0	3	38
March	49	5	0	0	0	3	39
April	37	1	1	0	4	0	113
May	63	0	0	4	7	1	205
June	66	0	0	3	9	0	258
July	17	0	0	0	1	1	34
August	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
September	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
October	30	0	0	3	0	2	21
November	23	0	0	4	0	0	24
December	32	0	0	4	0	0	62
Totals	374	9	1	18	21	14	841

* Flights that included both systematic broadscale or sawtooth and management survey time were counted as broadscale or sawtooth flights.

** The number of right whales sighted is a tally of estimated group sizes, not the number of unique individuals identified from photographs.

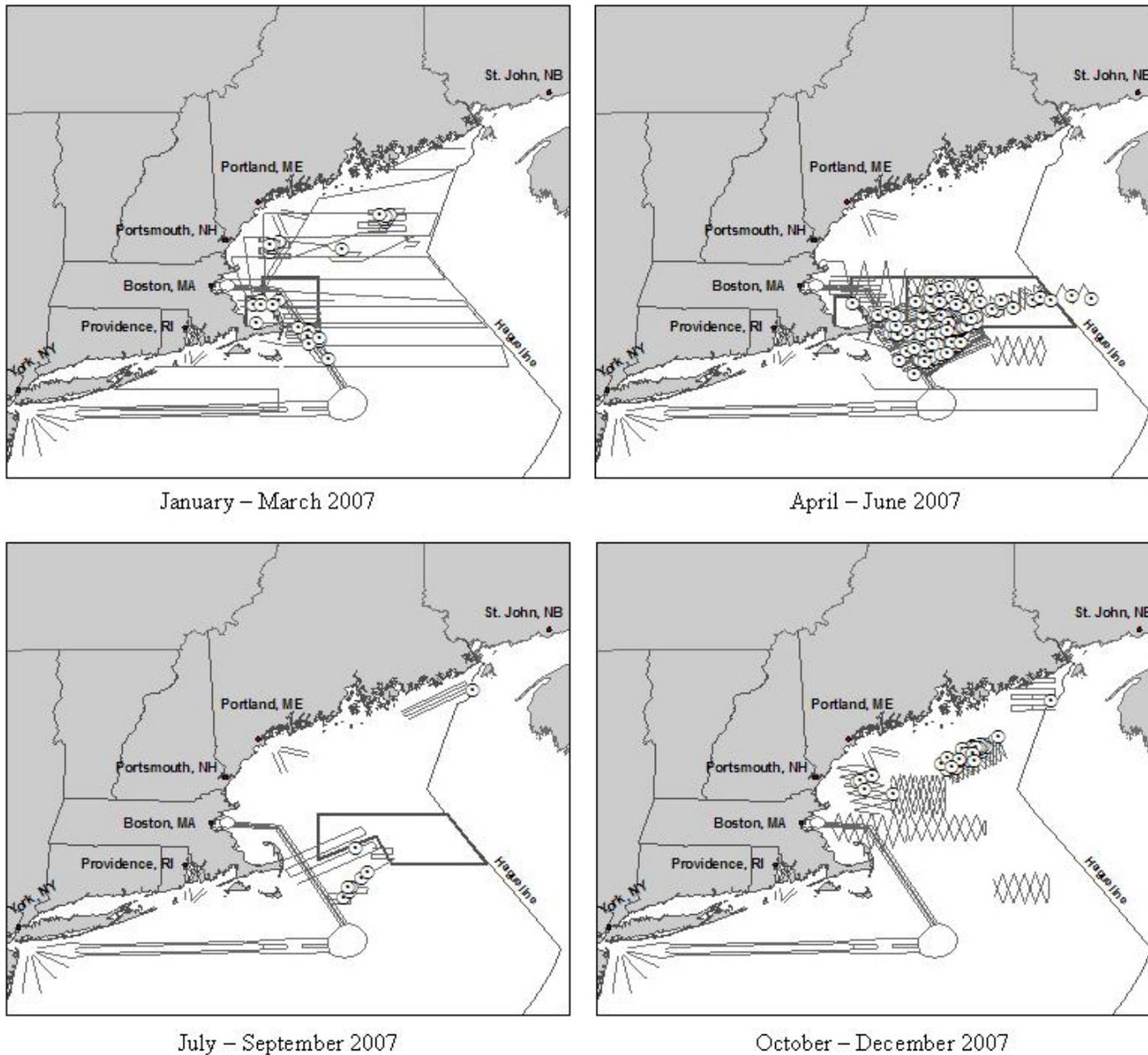


Figure 1. NARWSS survey track lines and right whale sighting locations by season for 2007. Thin lines represent track lines and bull's-eyes represent right whale sighting locations. Seasonal right whale closure areas in effect during each period are shown as bold lines. The closure area include: Cape Cod Bay (Jan 1 - May 15); Great South Channel (April 1 - June 30); Seasonal Area Management (SAM) West (March 1 - April 30); Seasonal Area Management (SAM) East (May 1 - July 31).

Table 2. The number of right whale sightings reported to the RWSAS in 2007 by reporting source, and the number of unconfirmed and late reports. Unconfirmed reports and duplicate reports did not produce an alert. Reports of 1-2 right whales were not broadcast if the report was received more than one day after the sighting. Late reports of greater than 2 whales did generate an alert since it was likely the location would continue to be occupied by right whales. Multiple sightings received on the same day were typically combined into a single alert. A total of 144 alerts were broadcast in 2007.

Platform	# of Reports	Unconfirmed	Late
Aerial Survey	86	0	3
Shipboard Survey	44	0	16
Acoustic	1	0	1
Whale Watch	54	1	5
Coast Guard	21	1	5
Commercial Ship	11	1	1
Fishing Vessel	1	0	1
Opportunistic	42	5	7
Totals	260	8	39

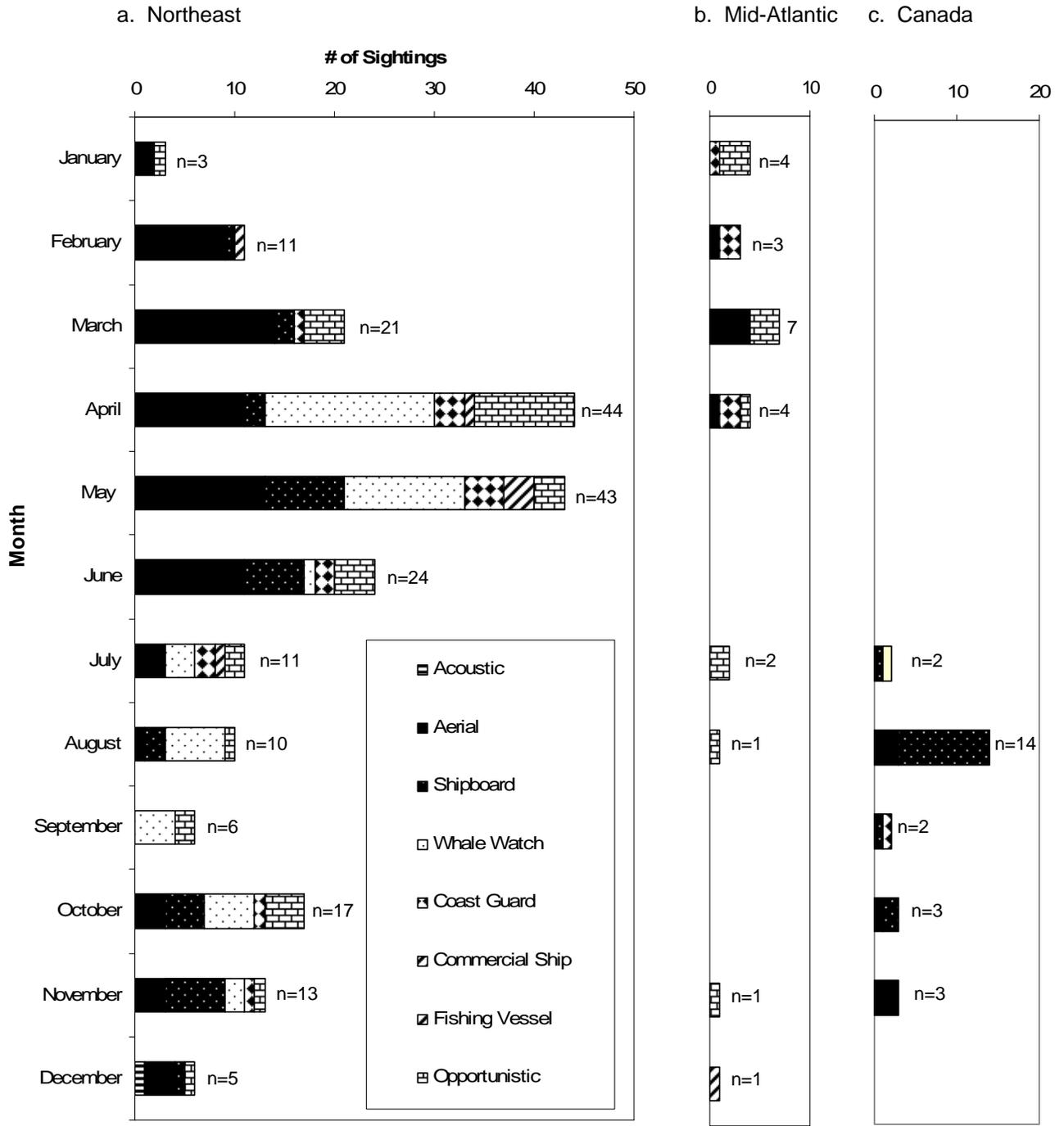


Figure 2a. Number, month and source of reported right whale sightings within the Northeast region (Maine through New York) in 2007.

Figure 2b. Number, month and source of reported right whale sightings within the Mid-Atlantic region (New Jersey through North Carolina) in 2007.

Figure 2c. Number, month and source of reported right whale sightings within Canadian waters in 2007.

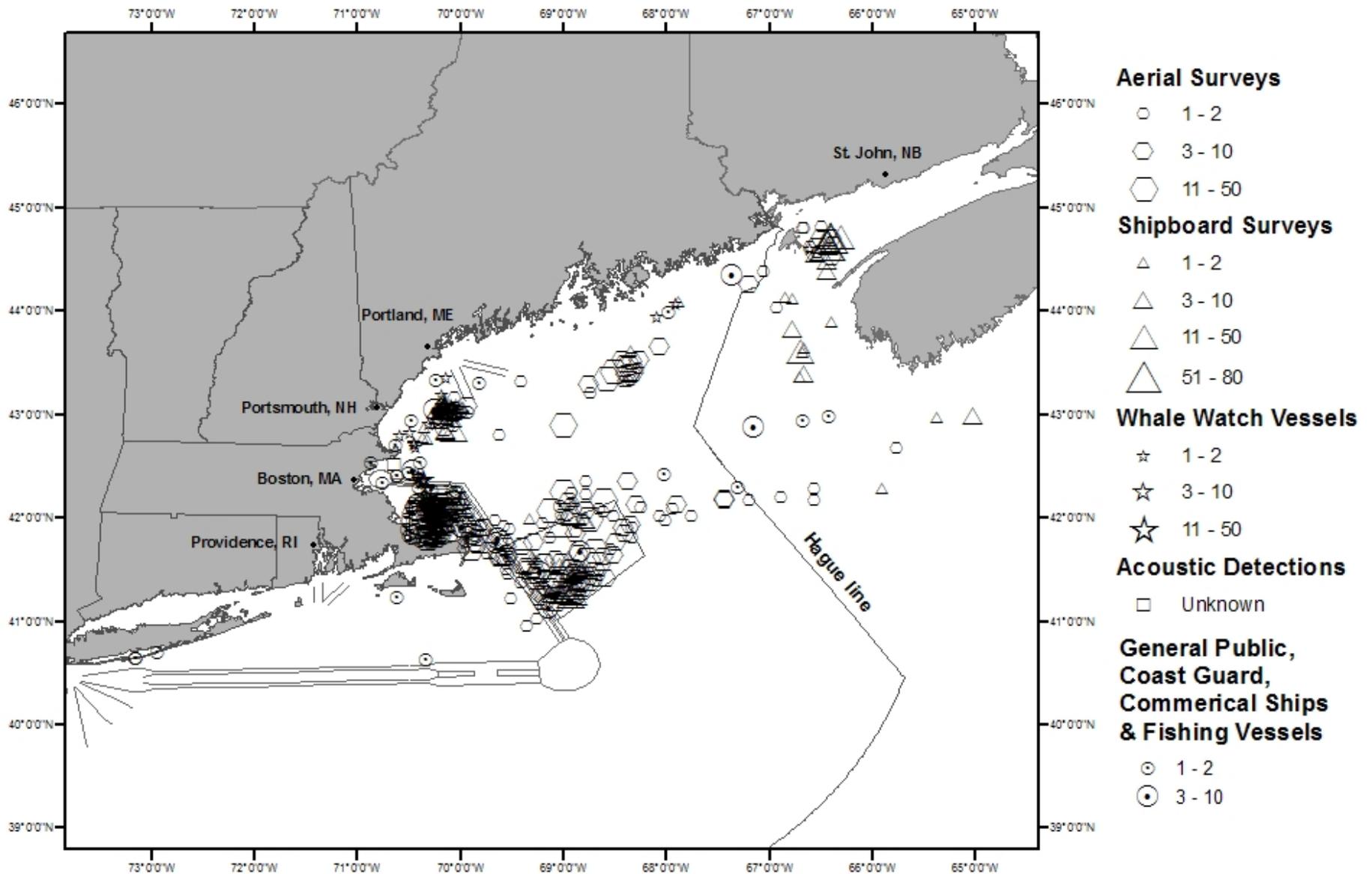


Figure 3. Locations of right whale sightings reported within in the Northeast and Canada region in 2007. Unconfirmed reports were excluded. Graduated symbols indicate reporting source and number of whales for each sighting.

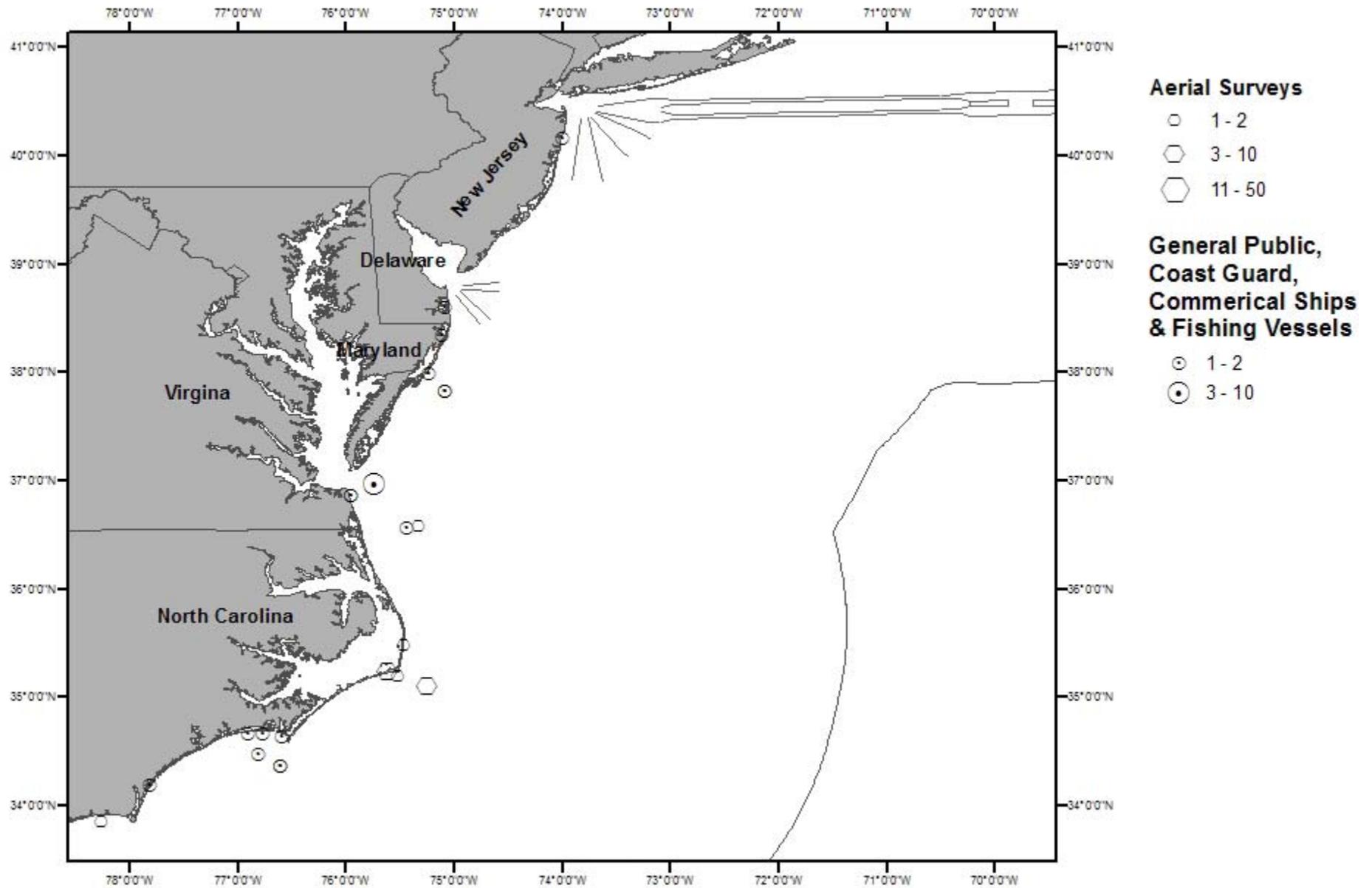


Figure 4. Locations of right whale sightings reported within the Mid-Atlantic region in 2007. Unconfirmed reports were excluded. Graduated symbols indicate reporting source and number of whales for each sighting.

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