



# NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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## **FISHING GEAR THAT COULD HARM WHALES TO BE CLEARED FROM CAPE COD CRITICAL HABITAT**

NOAA Fisheries Service is partnering with the Massachusetts division of marine fisheries, the Massachusetts environmental police, and the nonprofit Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies to locate and remove lost or illegal fishing gear in the Cape Cod Bay and adjacent waters. Northern right whales use these waters for feeding until the late spring and could become entangled in this gear. Operations started in January and will continue through May.

The effort is funded by NOAA's Marine Debris Program, through a grant administered by NOAA Fisheries Service. "We are pleased to be collaborating with state and private organizations for such a good cause," said Patricia Kurkul, NOAA Fisheries Service northeast regional administrator. "Northern right whales can be seriously injured or die because of entanglements and this joint effort can reduce risks to these rare animals," she said.

The Provincetown Center regularly conducts sighting surveys for the whales in the Cape Cod Bay critical habitat area. This year, they also will report sightings of lost gear that they encounter. A gear removal project team will then use a vessel operated by the Massachusetts environmental police to haul such gear out of the water. State marine fisheries biologists, including one former lobsterman, will be onboard to provide advice on how to safely haul the gear.

This team also will remove any other gear found to be illegally set, stored, or abandoned in the area. For example, floating groundline is prohibited in Massachusetts waters because it is more likely to entangle large whales. The vessel is equipped with a multi-beam sonar array that can acoustically see the groundlines used to connect lobster traps. Any gear found with floating groundline will be hauled.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program works with NOAA offices, as well as other federal, state, and local agencies and private sector partners to support national, state, local, and international efforts to protect and conserve our nation's natural resources and coastal waterways from the impacts of marine debris.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts, and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov/>

NOAA National Ocean Service: <http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Marine Debris Program - <http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

NOAA Fisheries Service Office of Protected Resources- <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/>

NOAA Fisheries Service northeast region: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/>