



## NEWS FROM NOAA

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### **NOAA CONFIRMS 28th RIGHT WHALE MOTHER-CALF PAIR** *Good News for Critically Endangered Species*

NOAA Fisheries Service biologists have confirmed the year's 28<sup>th</sup> unique sighting of a North Atlantic right whale mother-calf pair, making this one of the best calving years on record for these rare and endangered animals.

In recent days, NOAA Fisheries Service scientists viewed recently obtained video footage of the pair off the coast of South Carolina, and moving north. The New England Aquarium verified that the mother/calf pair observed off South Carolina were the same pair observed by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida.

"With so few of these right whales left—approximately 300—we are very excited about sighting another mother-calf pair," said Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries Service director. "Although this latest calf is small, it looks healthy and strong at this point." In 2001, researchers confirmed 31 new right whale calves.

Although the calf seems small for this time of year, NOAA biologist Barb Zoodsma says she is optimistic about its overall condition, based on the calf's behavior and interaction with its mother.

"On the surface, it looks like we might have good news for right whales this year," said Zoodsma. "Twenty eight right whale mother-calf pairs makes this one of the best years in a long time for right whales. But a lot can happen to right whale calves before they reach maturity. Not all of these calves will survive to adulthood, when they can reproduce and contribute back to the population." Zoodsma said the most important segment of the right whale population are reproducing adults—particularly females. She said a number of reproducing females died in 2004 and 2005.

NOAA Fisheries Service is the lead federal agency for right whale study and recovery. The agency works in partnership with states such as Florida and with private organizations, such as the New England Aquarium, to track distribution, abundance, births, and deaths among these animals.

The North Atlantic right whale primarily lives in coastal or shelf waters. Their migratory patterns range from winter calving and nursery areas in coastal waters off the southeastern United States to summer feeding grounds in New England waters and north to the Bay of Fundy and Scotian Shelf. This whale population was depleted by commercial whaling. Recovery has been hindered due to injuries and mortalities caused through collisions with vessels or entanglement in fishing gear.

NOAA Fisheries Service is working on a number of fronts to help right whales. The North Atlantic Right Whale Recovery Plan promotes recovery of the species through a framework of management and research efforts. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 requires recovery plans to serve as guidelines for action to promote the conservation and recovery of listed species.

The agency is also working to reduce risks to large whales posed by vessel traffic and fishing off the East Coast. Sighting surveys are an important part of this work, and serve several purposes. These include not only identifying new calves, but also determining when and where right whales are likely to congregate along the U.S. East Coast, and documenting dead, injured or entangled whales.

“Right whales are critically endangered,” Hogarth said. “NOAA Fisheries Service is working in a number of different ways to try to stop their decline, and to help find ways to help them survive, but we have a lot of very tough challenges. Our oceans are busy places, and the right whale faces many dangers.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand atmospheric and climate variability and to manage wisely our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

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Editor’s note: High resolution aerial photos of whales with their calves can be found at the following links. Please credit “NOAA” and the appropriate organizations listed with each photo.

Whale with calve off the coast of Florida in February 2005. Please credit “Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission / NOAA.”

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2005/images/whale-calve-fwc-0213-2005.jpg>

Whale with calve off the coast of New England several years ago. Please credit “New England Aquarium / NOAA.”

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2005/images/whale-calve-nea.jpg>

Whale with calve off the coast of Georgia several years ago. Please credit “Georgia Department of Natural Resources / NOAA.”

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2005/images/whale-calve-gadnr.jpg>

On the Web:

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

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

Also, visit us on the web for more on NOAA's right whale sighting surveys and efforts along the U.S. East Coast to recover these animals:

<http://rwhalesightings.nefsc.noaa.gov/>

<http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/read/protssp/RightWhale/>

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/>

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike/>