

PROPOSED ACTION & ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action

- Issue permits to qualified individuals and institutions to conduct those research activities determined critical or essential to NMFS' conservation and recovery of right whales
- No permits would be issued for lower priority research activities until the highest priority tasks were completed or unless there was sufficient information to determine that the cumulative impacts of allowing additional takes for research would not disadvantage or jeopardize the continued existence of the species.
- *Research required for conservation and recovery of right whales (or minimum take level)*
 - Use research techniques that are the most humane, as defined under MMPA.
 - Define research and data needs to manage/recover right whales based on recovery plan and scoping.
 - Identify appropriate sampling protocols to attain data based on past permits, recovery plan, and scoping.

Key points for permits

- Amend existing permits as needed.
- Future permits issued up to, but not over, take levels determined appropriate for recovery data needs.

Purpose and Need

Purpose: To provide an exemption to MMPA and ESA prohibition on "takes" through issuance of permits for scientific purposes related to recovery

Need: To facilitate research activities likely to result in collection of information needed by NMFS to recover northern right whales

Photo: C. Johnson



Alternatives

Alternative 1: Maximum allowable take level

- Based on past and current permits and on future needs identified from the scoping process
- An upper limit would be set directly below the jeopardy threshold.

Key points for permits

- Permits would be issued until the threshold limit is met.

No Action Alternative:

- Only allow conduct of research on right whales already authorized under existing permits.
- No new permits would be issued to replace the expired permits.
- Existing permits would not be amended to allow modifications in research activities, sample sizes, or objectives.

Key points for permits

- Upon expiration of current permits in 2010, authorizations for research would not be renewed.
- NMFS would not facilitate some actions critical for recovery and management.

Photo: C. Johnson



Alternatives Considered That May Not be Carried Forward

Permit Moratorium

- Does not meet the purpose of the Proposed Action (to manage, conserve, and recover the species)
- Existing permits would be revoked and no new permits issued
- Would not allow collection of information critical to management and recovery of right whales

Suspension of All Invasive Research

- Does not meet the purpose of the Proposed Action (to manage, conserve, and recover the species)
- Would suspend invasive research methods such as biopsy sampling and tagging under existing permits
- Would not allow collection of information needed to understand stock structure, habitat use, etc.

Status Quo Alternative

- Does not meet the purpose of the Proposed Action (to manage, conserve, and recover the species)
- Existing permits would remain unmodified through their expiration date, but would be renewed to maintain current level of research
- Would not allow adaptive changes to research program that may be responsive to changes in population status

Photo: M. Moore, WHOI

