

Monitoring Program

Get Involved

Attend a Training Class! Join MRC from mid-November through mid-January for free training seminars. Learn about right whale history, biology, migration, feeding habits, threats, and what you can do to help save right whales. Find our class schedule at www.mrcirl.org.



Report Whale Sightings! Please call 1-888-97-WHALE immediately to report a whale sighting in the southeast U.S. MRC's whale hotline is active 24 hrs/day, 7 days/week from November 1st through April 30th each year. The hotline is available during business hours in the off-season.

Become a Volunteer! Get involved, stay informed, and contribute to science! Help verify right whale sightings, gather data, gain field experience, educate the public, and become a part of one of the world's largest endangered species monitoring networks. No specific amount of time is required. Just attend a class, learn how to tell right whales apart from other whales, and report the sightings. Register as a volunteer, join our email list, and follow us and the whales on our blog at <http://mrcrightwhalemonitoring.blogspot.com>.



This is a publication of the

3275 Dixie Highway NE
Palm Bay, Florida 32905
(321) 725-7775
email: council@mrcirl.org
website: www.mrcirl.org

blog: <http://mrcrightwhalemonitoring.blogspot.com>

Report Whale Sightings:
1-888-97-WHALE
(1-888-979-4253)



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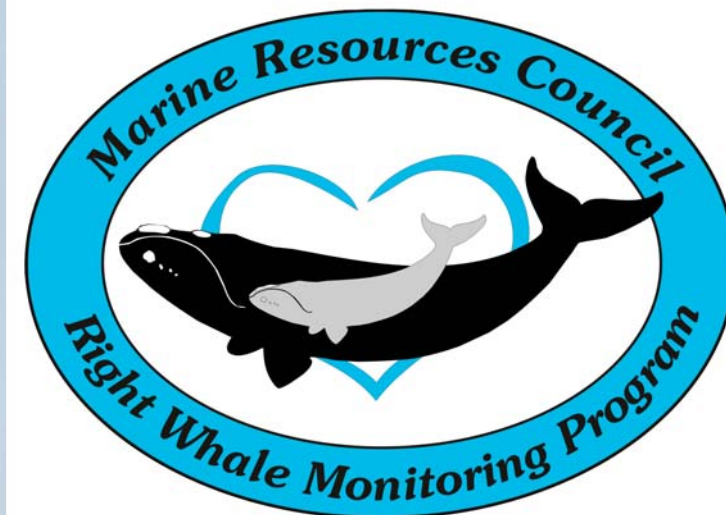
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- 5. Owen Nichols / PCCS
- 6. EcoHealth Alliance
- 7. Rick Cain / St. Augustine Lighthouse & Museum

Saving the North Atlantic Right Whale



Report Whale Sightings to
1-888-97-WHALE
(1-888-979-4253)

North Atlantic Right Whale



Program History

In 1994, the Marine Resources Council (MRC), with help from the Cocoa Beach Woman's Club, began the Right Whale Volunteer Sighting Network. More than 800 volunteers along the east coast of Florida have been trained to recognize right whales and report their sightings in order to avoid whale/ship collisions. For more than a decade, the principal means of monitoring right whales has been through aerial surveys. However, these surveys do not take place much farther south than St. Augustine, Florida. About 120 nautical miles of the federally-designated right whale critical habitat are almost solely monitored by MRC's shore-based Right Whale Volunteer Sighting Network. Despite over 75 years of protection, right whales have not rebounded from centuries of whaling. It is MRC's goal to educate the public about the plight of right whales and rally citizens to supplement aerial survey efforts to enhance conservation and recovery of the species.

1-888-97-WHALE



Report Whale Sightings to 1-888-97-WHALE



Background



Right whales were hunted for nearly 1000 years because they were the “right” whales to kill. They move slowly, float when dead, and yielded a large amount of valuable oil and baleen. Right whales were given international protection in 1937. However, despite over 75 years of protection, the population still has only about 500 individuals. North Atlantic right whales die primarily from ship strikes, which account for more than 30% of their documented deaths. More than two-thirds of the population bears scars from ocean-going vessels or entanglements in commercial fishing gear. More recent protection measures include ship speed reductions and shifts in shipping lanes.

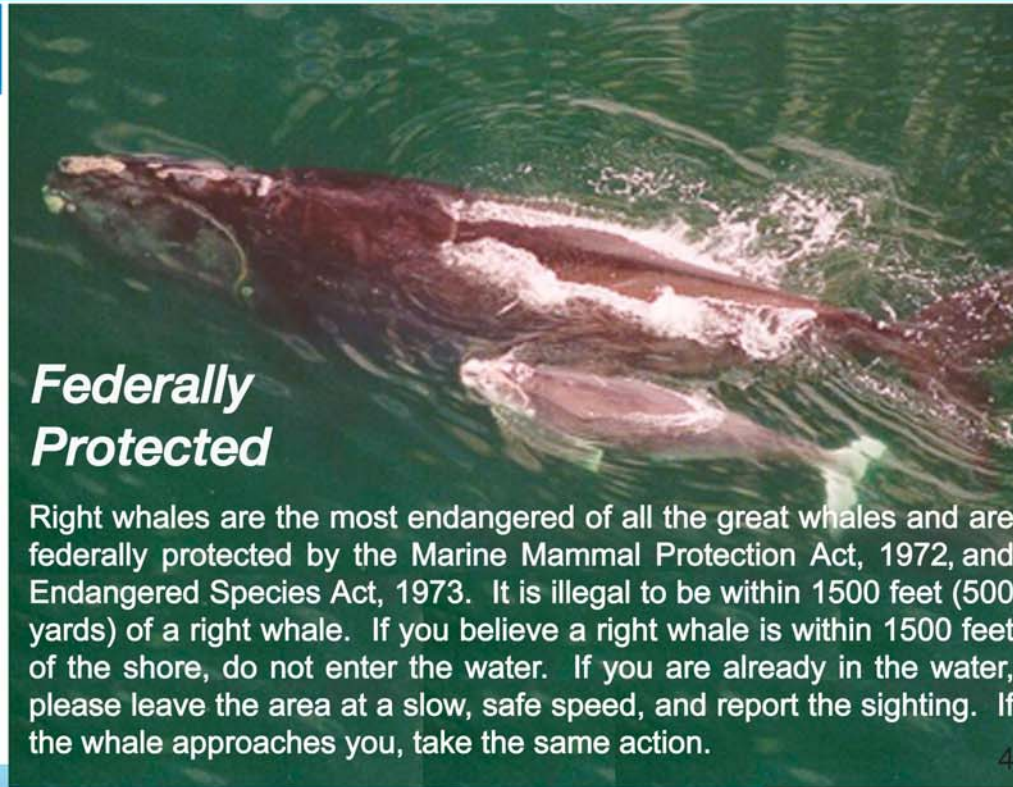
Right Whale Characteristics

Right whales can be found very close to shore. They can easily be seen from beachfront condominiums, fishing piers, and even from the beach. The following characteristics will help you identify a right whale:

- **no dorsal fin** on the whale’s back
- **V-shaped blow** when it exhales
- white, raised patches of skin on the head (**callosities**)
- short, paddle-like, **black flippers** on both sides of the body
- triangular **tail, black on both sides**, with a deep notch in the middle



Adult right whales can be over 50 feet in length and weigh over 50 tons. North Atlantic right whales spend their summers feeding and breeding in New England and Canada. In the winter, pregnant females migrate to the warm waters of Florida and Georgia to give birth to their calves. This calving ground is the only known place in the world where these whales give birth. Some non-pregnant females, males, and juveniles also migrate to the southeast U.S. During their winter stay, adults fast and live off their blubber while calves nurse on their mother’s rich milk. The whereabouts of part of the population during the winter months is unknown.



Federally Protected

Right whales are the most endangered of all the great whales and are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act, 1972, and Endangered Species Act, 1973. It is illegal to be within 1500 feet (500 yards) of a right whale. If you believe a right whale is within 1500 feet of the shore, do not enter the water. If you are already in the water, please leave the area at a slow, safe speed, and report the sighting. If the whale approaches you, take the same action.



Immediately report the following for sightings in the southeast U.S.: number of whales, location, heading, and time of day.



MRC Helps Prevent Ship Strikes

The Marine Resources Council (MRC) coordinates a network of trained coastal volunteers to report right whale sightings to their hotline at 1-888-97-WHALE. MRC staff photograph the whales for identification, collect field data, and report the whales’ locations to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWCC). FWCC distributes the real-time sighting information to all commercial and military traffic in the southeast U.S. to help prevent whale/ship collisions.



Become a Volunteer

- As an MRC whale volunteer, you can enjoy:
- notification of whale sightings in your area
 - MRC’s semi-annual whale newsletter to keep you informed of events of the calving season
 - updates during the season via email or blog
 - contributing information to the North Atlantic Right Whale Consortium database

MRC has over 800 coastal volunteers that help protect right whales. Every winter MRC conducts classes, free to the public, to teach residents how to identify and report right whales. To learn more about MRC’s North Atlantic Right Whale Monitoring Program, contact the Marine Resources Council at (321) 725-7775.