



Contact: Kim Amendola  
727-551-5707  
Connie Barclay  
202-441-2398

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Feb. 12, 2009

**Crews Work to Free Another Right Whale From Entangling Ropes**  
*Three Whales Are Rescued, But Two Still Entangled*

NOAA and its partners cut entangling ropes on another endangered North Atlantic right whale off the southeast United States earlier today – this time off northern Georgia.

“We expect the ropes to pull free, making this the third right whale we’ve disentangled in just eight weeks,” said NOAA’s Fisheries Service biologist Laura Engleby. “It is alarming, and with each event we look for clues to help us understand more about why and where these entanglements actually occur.”

Experts have seen an unprecedented number of entangled right whales off the coasts of Georgia and Florida this winter – a total of five since December. Scientists typically document one or two entangled right whale cases in the southeast each year.

However, where the animals pick up the entangling gear often remains a mystery. These whales spend their summers feeding in New England and Canadian waters, then travel to southeast waters to give birth to their calves from mid-November through mid-April.

“These five entanglements represent more than twice the number usually seen in the southeast during right whale calving season,” said NOAA’s Fisheries Service large whale disentanglement coordinator Jamison Smith. “In each case, significant amounts of rope—often more than 500 feet—were in or around the whale’s mouth.”

In December, disentanglement experts successfully removed fishing gear from two whales. Scientists confirmed via aerial surveys that both of these whales remain gear-free. Initial health assessments indicate the whales’ overall conditions are improving since teams removed the entangling gear.

NOAA and partners have preliminarily identified the gear removed from one of these whales as Canadian lobster gear. The gear types removed from the second and third animals are still unknown; however, experts will continue to analyze the gear recovered from all of these whales.

NOAA and its Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network partners are monitoring the two remaining right whales believed to have life-threatening entanglements. Crews responded to these whales earlier this year and removed some rope from each whale, but were unable to free them completely.

“Disentanglement efforts are extremely dangerous and complicated,” Smith said. “These successful disentanglement efforts are a reflection of the experience and resolve of our partners, but at the same time it is difficult for any of us to celebrate these successes, as other whales remain entangled.”

The disentanglement team consists of land, sea, and air support from NOAA, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastwise Consulting, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, New England Aquarium, and Wildlife Trust.

With only between 300 and 400 in existence, North Atlantic right whales are among the most endangered whales in the world. They are protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. Vessel strikes and entanglement in fixed fishing gear are the two greatest threats to their recovery.

In the past few years, NOAA has implemented significant measures aimed at reducing impacts to Right whales from fishing gear and ship strikes.

NOAA's Fisheries Service encourages people to report sightings of dead, injured, or entangled whales to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC(3922). All live right whale sightings should be reported to 1-877-97-WHALE or 1-877-979-4253.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.

Photos will be available Friday, Feb. 13, 2009 on the NOAA.gov website.

On the Web:

NOAA Fisheries Right Whale Facts Page -

[http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/species/Cetaceans/rightwhalefacts.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/species/Cetaceans/rightwhalefacts.html)

NOAA Fisheries Northeast Region's Right Whale Web Page -

<http://www.wh.who.edu/psb/NORTHATLANTICRIGHTWHALE.htm>

NOAA Fisheries Right Whale Sighting Advisory System –

<http://www.nefsc.nmfs.gov/cgi-bin/rwhale.pl>

The Center for Coastal Studies Right Whale Research & Rescue Program –

<http://www.coastalstudies.org/>

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan –

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