

MINIMUM APPROACH DISTANCES
FOR OTHER NORTHEAST
REGION MARINE MAMMALS

- Dolphins: 150 feet (50 yards)
- Porpoises: 150 feet (50 yards)
- Seals: 150 feet (50 yards)

Contact Information

To Request Whale Watching Information &
Additional Information on Marine Mammal
Protection

978-281-9300, X-6505

www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/mmv/

To Report Right Whale Sightings

978-585-8473 (pager)

To Report an Entangled Whale

800-900-3622, or USCG via CH-16

Please stand-by and keep the whale in sight until help arrives or arrange for another vessel to maintain contact with the whale.

To Report a Dead Whale

978-281-9351

To Report Potential Violations

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement HOTLINE:
800-853-1964

NOAA's Gerry E. Studds Stellwagen Bank
National Marine Sanctuary (SBNMS)

781-545-8026

www.stellwagen.noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries Service
Northeast Regional Office
Protected Resources Division

978-281-9300

www.nero.noaa.gov

U.S. Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)



NORTHEAST
REGION
WHALE WATCHING
GUIDELINES

for Commercial & Recreational
Whale Watchers



Whale Center of New England & SBNMS



Whale Center of New England



Whale Center of New England & SBNMS

NOAA science | service | stewardship

Large Whales of the Northeast Region

Fin Whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)

Status: *Endangered*

Size: up to 80 feet in length, 70-80 tons

Gulf of Maine Population: 2,000-3,000

Features: fast swimming; large, well-formed dorsal fin, does not raise flukes when it dives; asymmetrical coloration with the lower right side of the head white and the lower left side uniformly dark; "chevron" or white streak that starts behind blow hole and continues along each side used for identifying individuals.

Prey: sand lance, herring, mackerel, other small schooling fish, and krill.

Range: abundant on Stellwagen Bank, Jeffreys Ledge, off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Cape Ann, Cape Cod, and Long Island from spring-fall; moves south and/or offshore into deep water in the winter; breeding/calving areas unknown.



Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)

Status: *Endangered*

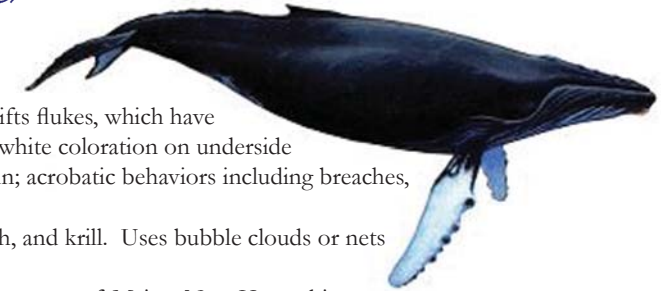
Size: up to 55 feet in length, 40 tons

Gulf of Maine Population: 800-900

Features: stocky baleen whale; long, white pectoral flippers; lifts flukes, which have saw-toothed trailing edges, when it dives; variable black and white coloration on underside of each fluke used for identifying individuals; small dorsal fin; acrobatic behaviors including breaches, flipper and tail slaps.

Prey: sand lance, herring, mackerel, other small schooling fish, and krill. Uses bubble clouds or nets to corral or concentrate fish.

Range: abundant on Stellwagen Bank, Jeffreys Ledge, off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Cape Ann, and Cape Cod from spring-fall; juveniles seen off Virginia in winter; migrate to Caribbean Sea to breed and calve in winter.



North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*)

Status: *Endangered* (*See Right Whale Regulations)

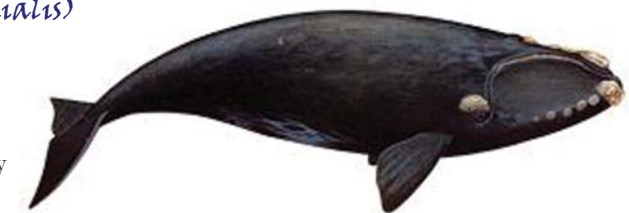
Size: up to 60 feet in length, 80 tons

Gulf of Maine Population: Approx. 300

Features: slow-moving; generally stays close to shore; robust body; long baleen; "callosities" on head and jaw used to identify individuals; usually lifts smooth-edged, triangular flukes when diving; lacks dorsal fin.

Prey: skim feeds (surface and subsurface) on dense concentrations of zooplankton, particularly copepods.

Range: Cape Cod Bay and occasionally Stellwagen Bank during late winter and early spring; Great South Channel in late spring.



Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

Size: up to 30 feet, 10 tons

Gulf of Maine Population: Approx. 3000-4000

Features: Second smallest of the baleen whales, distinctive sickle-shaped dorsal fin; white bands on pectoral flippers; rarely lifts its flukes to dive; displays little or no visible breath or spout.

Prey: similar to fin and humpback whales

Range: similar to fin whales



Whale Illustrations by Garth Mix

MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION

All whales, dolphins and porpoises in the Northeast region are federally protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Most large whales in the area are further protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Under these Acts, it is illegal to “harass, hunt, capture or kill” any marine mammal.

Prohibited conduct includes any “negligent or intentional act which results in the disturbing or molesting of marine mammals”.

The following operational procedures are intended to avoid harassment and possible injury to large whales, particularly the finback, humpback and minke whales, commonly seen by vessels engaged in whale watching.

Following the guidelines can help protect both you and the whale you wish to watch and keep you from violating federal law.

RIGHT WHALE REGULATIONS

The North Atlantic right whale is protected by separate state and federal regulations that prohibit approach within 500 yards (1500 ft.) of this species. Any vessel finding itself within the 500 yard (1500 ft.) buffer zone created by a surfacing right whale must depart immediately at a safe and slow speed. The only vessels allowed to remain within 500 yards of a right whale are those with appropriate research permits, commercial fishing vessels in the act of hauling back or towing gear, or any vessel given prior approval by NOAA Fisheries Service to investigate a potential entanglement.

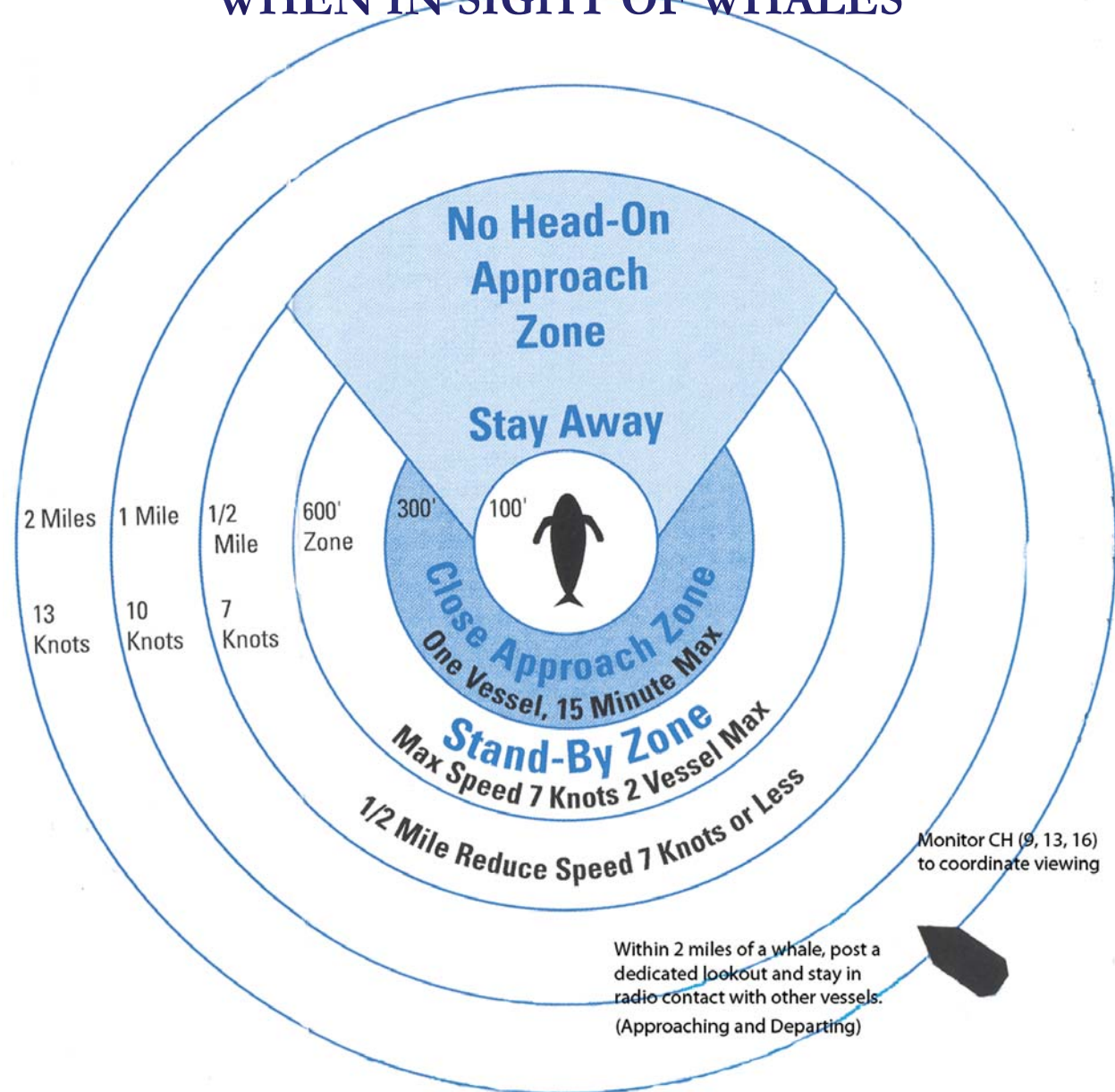
PENALTIES

Violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and/or the Endangered Species Act may result in civil or criminal penalties (up to \$50,000). To report potential illegal activities, call the NOAA Office of Enforcement hotline:

Office of Enforcement hotline:
1-800-853-1964.



OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES WHEN IN SIGHT OF WHALES



2 MILES - 1 MILE AWAY FROM WHALES

- Reduce speed to 13 knots.
- Post a dedicated lookout to assist the vessel operator in monitoring the location of all marine mammals.
- Avoid sudden changes in speed and direction.
- AIRCRAFT: maintain a minimum altitude of 1,000 ft. over water.

1 MILE - 1/2 MILE AWAY FROM WHALES

- Reduce speed to 10 knots.

1/2 MILE OR LESS FROM WHALES (*see right whale regs.*)

- Reduce speed to 7 knots.
- Maneuver to avoid head-on approach.

CLOSE APPROACH PROCEDURE

The following procedure applies to being 600 feet to 100 feet away from whales (*other than right whales*)

- Always parallel the course and speed of moving whales up to the designated speed limit within that distance.
- Never attempt a head-on approach to the whale.
- Approach and leave stationary whales at no more than idle or “no wake” speed, not to exceed 7 knots.
- Do not intentionally drift down on whales.
- Vessels in multi-vessel approaches should maintain communication with each other (via channels 9, 13, or 16 for hailing) to coordinate viewing.
- Take into account the presence of obstacles (vessels, structures, fishing gear, or the shoreline). All vessels in close approach must stay to the side or behind the whales so they do not box in the whales or cut off their path

STAND-BY ZONE

300 feet - 600 feet away from whales:

- Two vessel limit within the 300- to 600- ft Stand-By-Zone at any one time.

CLOSE APPROACH ZONE

100 feet - 300 feet away from whales:

- One vessel limit.
- Other vessels stand off (up to two vessels in Stand-By Zone - others outside 600 ft).
- If more than one vessel is within 600 ft, the vessel within 300 ft should limit its time to 15 minutes in close approach to whales.

NO INTENTIONAL APPROACH CLOSER THAN 100 FEET OF WHALES

Do not approach closer than 100 feet of whales.

If whales approach within 100 ft of your vessel, put engines in neutral and do not re-engage propulsion until whales are observed clear of harm’s way from your vessel.

DEPARTURE PROCEDURES

- All vessels should leave the whales following the same speed and distance procedures described above.
- In order for vessels to be clear of whales before dark, vessels should cease whale watching and begin their return to port 15 minutes before sunset.