



Contact: Anne Smrcina, SBNMS-
781-545-8026, ext. 204

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Teri Frady, NMFS
508-495-2239

**NOAA'S Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Asks
Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bay Boaters to Watch Out for Whales**

Whales Now Present in Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bays

NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary and NOAA's Fisheries Service advise Massachusetts boaters to watch out for and steer clear of whales, which feed on Stellwagen Bank and elsewhere in Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bays in large numbers during spring, summer and early fall. North Atlantic right whales and humpback whales are particularly vulnerable to vessel collisions, as they often travel near shore, through the shipping lanes, and in areas of high commercial and recreational vessel traffic.

Boaters should use caution year-round, but the late spring and summer months present a greater chance of coming into close contact with whales. In the spring, critically endangered right whales feed on thick patches of plankton in Cape Cod Bay as well as in the southern portion of the sanctuary and adjacent waters. Federal law requires all vessels to stay at least 500 yards from these whales. From April through October, humpback whales feast on schooling fish in the sanctuary and environs. These whales include mothers with their new calves who have swum north from Caribbean calving and mating grounds.

With the busy summer boating months quickly approaching, the sanctuary warns boaters to keep a watch out for other vessels as well as for the blows of feeding whales and whales resting at the surface. The blow of a humpback whale looks like a puff of smoke about 10-15 feet high. Other signs of whales include large splashes, the lifting of tails into the air as the whales dive, large aggregations of seabirds in the vicinity of the feeding activity, flat patches of water called "footprints" that indicate a whale recently dove under the water, and "bubble nets" and "bubble clouds" indicating feeding whales. Humpback whales often blow bursts or rings of bubbles to aggregate their prey after which the whale lunges and then rises up through the bubbles. Boaters and fishermen should keep well clear of these greenish-white areas of disturbed water.

Boaters should *not*:

- Approach within 100 feet of any one whale, except in the case of right whales where laws require vessels to stay 500 yards (1,500 feet) away;
- Approach within 300 feet if another vessel is within the 100-300 foot viewing area;
- Attempt a head-on approach to the whale;
- Intentionally drift down on a whale;
- Cut across a whale's path;
- Move faster than 7 knots when approaching or leaving a whale and within a half mile of a whale;
- Get between several whales traveling together, especially a whale cow and her calf — if separated from its mother, a calf may be doomed to starvation;
- Transit through "bubble clouds" or "bubble nets" or through groups of feeding whales;

- Cast line or troll fishing gear over whales or in the vicinity of whales; or
- Depart the area unless all whales are observed clear of harm's way from the vessel.

Vessel operators should post a lookout when whales are sighted two miles or closer to the boat to monitor the location of these marine mammals. Boaters should be aware that if one whale is sighted, more whales are likely to be present in the area.

All whales are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Some local species, such as North Atlantic right whales, humpback and finback whales, are also protected under the Endangered Species Act. Interrupting the natural behavior of whales, such as their feeding, resting, breathing, mating, nursing or transiting is considered to be "harassment" and a violation of these federal laws. Maintaining vigilance, safe distances and utilizing NOAA's Northeast Region/Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary whale watching guidelines will help boaters from inadvertently harassing whales.

Boaters are also urged to report any sightings of stranded, ship-struck, entangled or dead whales to NOAA's Stranding & Disentanglement Hotline: 1-866-755-NOAA (6622). If possible, boaters reporting an entangled whale are asked to stand by that whale until a rescue team can get on site.

Regional whale watching guidelines are available on the internet at www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/mmv/ or stellwagen.noaa.gov/visit/whalewatching/guidelines.html or directly from sanctuary or fisheries offices. For more information about safe boating around whales, the sanctuary and NOAA Fisheries, along with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, have developed *See A Spout, Watch Out!*, an education program for recreational boaters, and *Whale SENSE*, a recognition program for commercial operators and naturalists. The program's Web site, www.whalesense.org, contains valuable information for anyone interested in whale watching.

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, the only such marine protected area in the Northeast, is located 25 miles east of Boston, three miles north of Cape Cod and three miles southeast of Cape Ann. It is considered one of the world's premier whale watching sites due to the regular presence of whales.

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On the Web:

Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary: <http://stellwagen.noaa.gov>

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov>