

To our friend, Robin: Our thanks and best wishes

Earlier this month, friends, family, industry colleagues, and former employees gathered for an evening of celebration to mark the retirement of Robin Alden.

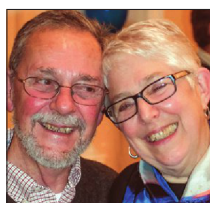
Robin, as most of you know, has been a remarkable force in fisheries here in Maine and throughout the region for more than four decades.

Her career spans three significant phases, beginning in the 1970's when she co-founded, and then went on to serve as publisher and editor, the publication that eventually evolved into *Commercial Fisheries News*.

In the 1990's, she left CFN to take a position in Maine Gov. Angus King's administration, serving as Commissioner of Marine Resources.

Leaving the DMR post during King's second term, Robin then moved on to be the founding executive director of the Stonington-based non-profit, Penobscot East Resource Center, which has recently rebranded itself as the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries.

Fiercely passionate about fisheries in



MCCF/Amber Jones Photography photo

general, and about engaging fishermen in the management and regulatory process in particular, Robin has clearly left her mark and touched many lives over her long and impressive career.

Nowhere is that more true than right here at CFN.

We will leave it to others to define what Robin's lasting legacy will be. But for us here at the paper she will be always be best remembered, fondly, for being the catalyst that brought us all together.

Robin has a gift for recruiting and inspiring the very best. The crew that she assembled during her tenure at CFN is a shining example of that.

For years, decades even, that team has worked tirelessly and passionately to make CFN the best it can be.

Along the way, we all grew up together; got married and sometimes divorced; had kids, watched them grow up, leave the nest, and have kids of their own; and stood side by side during times of triumph and sorrow.

As is inevitable, our crew has come and gone over the years, as CFN has evolved, along with the lives and careers of those who make her happen every month.

But regardless of whether you are a current or former member of the CFN crew, odds are each and every one of us would say we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Robin Alden.

Thank you, Robin for your vision, your friendship, and your commitment to this newspaper, this industry, and this very special crew.

While those of us who know you well find it hard to imagine you will ever "retire" in the conventional sense, we do join in wishing you all the very best as you begin this next chapter in your life.

Cheers and good tidings! /cfn/

guest column

Right whales in crisis, immediate action necessary

by Mark Baumgartner and Scott Kraus

The latest assessment of the North Atlantic right whale population is bleak.

The number of whales increased from around 270 in 1990 to almost 500 whales in 2010. Since 2010, however, the population has declined and now has fewer than 450 animals (Fig. 1).

Population size and growth depends upon the number of births and deaths each year and, prior to 2010, the number of calves born each year nearly always exceeded the number of whales that died.

However, recent high numbers of human-caused deaths are exceeding the number of calves born, causing

the population to decline.

Unfortunately, we do not have much time to reverse this downward trend for right whales. There are just 100 adult breeding females in the population right now.

According to the recent assessment from both government and independent scientists, an astounding 20 right whales died each year between 2011 and 2015 (the most recent period analyzed), and at that high rate, all of these 100 adult females

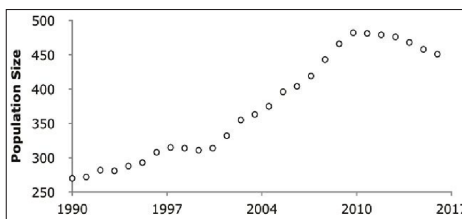


Fig. 1. Number of North Atlantic right whales estimated to be alive each year between 1990 and 2016.

will be gone in just 21 years.

This means that in two decades, there will be so few females left that recovery of right whales will be impossible.

We must act now to save this species.

The longer we wait, the more difficult it will be to solve this problem, since every lost female removes both that female from the population as well as all of the calves that she would have had in the future.

We also must act now to help preserve the fisheries that interact with right whales. As the population dwindles, regulatory action will almost surely become more restrictive, ultimately affecting the economic viability of the industry.

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Fig. 3. An entangled right whale found dead near Mount Desert Island, ME. Rope can be seen caught in the mouth and wrapped around the right flipper. Note that the wide yellow and white straps were used to secure the carcass to the flatbed and were not part of the at-sea entanglement.

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Deaths

Of all the right whale carcasses that have been examined for cause of death, only calves have died of natural causes. All others died from fishing gear entanglements and ship strikes.

For a species that can live to at least 70 years and possibly longer (the closely related bowhead whale can live to over 200 years), females are currently dying at ages 20-30 from human causes.

During the period 2010-2014 (the latest cause-of-death data available), 82% of documented right whale deaths were attributed to fixed fishing gear entanglements (primarily trap/pot fisheries), while the remaining 18% were attributed to ship strikes (Fig. 2).

Efforts to reduce ship strikes, including shifting the shipping lanes approaching Saint John (New Brunswick, Canada) and Boston, and reducing the speeds of large ships to 10 knots or less in seasonal management areas along the US East Coast, have been largely successful, although not perfect.

However, the number of fishing gear entanglements and entanglement deaths have been increasing rapidly since 2010 (Fig. 2), and are now nearly twice as high as the highest annual mortality (death) rate ever attributed to ship strikes (which was observed over the 2002-2006 period and motivated the

2008 US ship speed regulation).

Approximately 85% of right whales have scars from being entangled in fishing gear at least once in their life, and over half of all right whales have been entangled two or more times. While fishermen may not see right whales often (or ever) at sea, right whales encounter fishing gear regularly.

Deaths from entanglements involve significant suffering for weeks to months by the animal, and would never be tolerated by the public in a land animal.

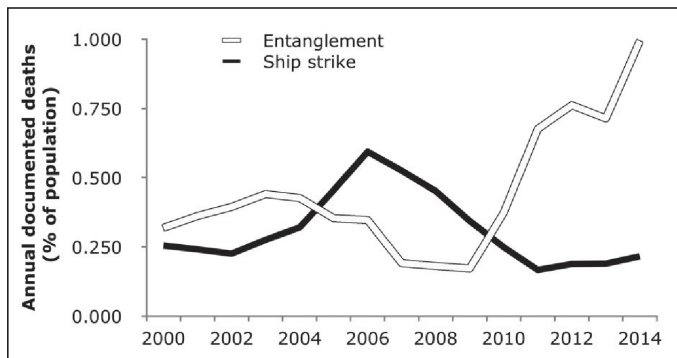


Fig. 2. Number of deaths each year attributed to ship strikes and fishing gear entanglements (expressed as a percentage of the population size). Values are 5-year averages as reported in the US government stock assessment reports.

All photos and graphics provided by the authors

Many entanglements involve rope wrapped around flippers where it penetrates flesh to the bone, frequently leading to fatal infections (Fig. 3).

Mouth entanglements (i.e., rope caught in the whale's baleen) can cause half-swallowed rope to be permanently lodged in a whale's throat, interfering with the animal's ability to feed.

Young whales drown if they cannot reach the surface after getting entangled at depth.

Births

The calving (birth) rate over the past 5 years is half of what it was

in the 2000's when the population was growing. Two factors are likely responsible for this trend: environmental changes, and the health effects of fishing gear entanglements.

Since 2010, right whales have been either changing their distribution or moving more often among their traditional habitats and other areas along the eastern seaboard of the US and Canada, possibly in response to a changing distribution or abundance of food.

Swimming long distances to find reduced amounts of food would prevent females from accumulating enough fat to successfully reproduce, thus reducing calving rates. Increased travelling also increases the probability that whales will encounter fishing gear and get entangled, since fixed fishing gear is used widely throughout both the US and Canada.

Unfortunately, fishing gear entanglements also play a role in reducing calving rates.

It takes a lot of energy to drag rope through the water, and entangled whales lose fat and develop health issues that take a long time to resolve after escaping the gear (either on their own or from disentanglement by people).

For female right whales, loss of fat and long recovery times cause delays in calving, which in turn contribute to fewer calves born each year.

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Take photos like this to report length.




The Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen's Association (AOLA) is working with New Hampshire Fish and Game and Maine Department of Marine Resources to tag lobsters in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank in 2017 and 2018, in order to track migration and investigate growth.

WHAT TO REPORT: date, location, tag #, whether the lobster had eggs or v-notch, and whether it was kept or released.

Carapace Length: We are testing a software system that can accurately measure size from photographs. Please take a photo of the lobster next to a gauge (top right above) and text this to 774-251-9454 along with the measured carapace length.

REWARDS: Every tag report qualifies as one raffle entry. Rewards will be drawn in July and December, 2018 & 2019. Reports with accurate length reports and/or photos will be entered into higher value raffles. \$8,000 in rewards will be distributed.

If you haul a tagged lobster, please release it and contact:
774-251-9454 or heidi@offshorelobster.org

2017 and beyond

Last year was a particularly bad one for right whales. There were 17 documented deaths and only 5 births. Twelve right whales died in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, Canada, and 5 carcasses were found near Massachusetts.

Eleven carcasses were able to be retrieved and examined for cause of death, and of these, 5 died from ship strike (1 US and 4 Canada), 4 died from entanglements (2 US and 2 Canada), and the cause of death for the rest remains unconfirmed.

There were also 5 new live entanglements observed in Canada and 2 in US waters. The increase in detected deaths and entanglements in Canadian waters can be attributed to increased search effort there, but probably also to an increase in fishing effort by the snow crab fishery.

There is no doubt that Canada has as much of a right whale mortality problem as the US.

The Canadian government closed the snow crab fishery early this past summer in response to the documented entanglements, established mandatory ship speed restrictions in a portion of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, and is working on measures to address the crisis in both the fishing and shipping industries.

It remains to be seen what the final measures will be, but the Canadian government appears to be motivated to prevent the 2017 Gulf of Saint Lawrence right whale mortality disaster from happening again.

Fishermen on the US East Coast have been involved in efforts to mitigate right whale entanglements for nearly two decades.

A variety of approaches, including seasonal closures, weak links, sinking ground lines, and fewer traps per trawl, have been tried in different areas. While some of these efforts have undoubtedly helped, none has solved the problem.

Right whales travel widely, and we have learned over the past two decades of visual surveys, passive acoustic monitoring, and satellite tagging that right whales can appear nearly anywhere on the US and Canadian East Coast at any time. No one can legitimately claim that right whales do not visit their waters.

With their very small population in decline, right whales are in crisis and science-based solutions to the entanglement problem that span the species' entire range are urgently needed.

Over the next several months, a new non-governmental organization called the Canadian-US Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) for Right Whale Recovery will be convening to identify, recommend, and advocate for specific actions to reduce both human-caused deaths and threats that depress calving rates while allowing industry to remain economically viable.

The IAC will have separate ship-

strike and entanglement working groups comprised of scientists, industry members, and conservationists who will work together to produce recommendations for the US and Canadian governments by summer 2018.

The central premise of the IAC is that actions recommended jointly by scientists, industry, and conservationists will have the greatest chance of being accepted and implemented, and will therefore be most successful in reducing human impacts to right whales while ensuring economic viability for industry.

As the US co-chair of the IAC (Kraus), and the US co-chair of the

IAC entanglement working group (Baumgartner), we are seeking engagement from both US and Canadian fishermen to proactively identify and advocate for solutions, and to harmonize efforts to reduce entanglements between the US and Canada in fairness to all fishermen.

We firmly believe prosperous trap/pot fisheries and right whales can coexist.

Right whales are a strong and resilient species; they demonstrated this for two decades (1990-2010) when we saw the population grow.

Right whales can recover if we choose to reduce human-caused mortality.

By bringing diverse interests together for frank, honest, and open

dialogue with a genuine sense of urgency, we fervently hope that the IAC can identify viable solutions that will significantly reduce or even eliminate entanglements of right whales. ■

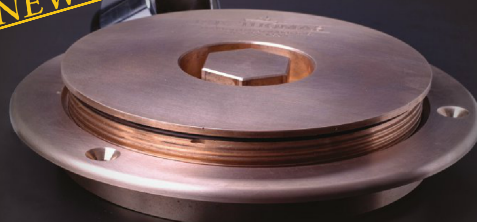
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