

Conservation efforts by Massachusetts commercial lobstermen are making our waters safer for the protection of all whales.

CONSERVATION TIME LINE

- 1935-International ban on hunting whales goes into effect. Est; population of North Atlantic Right Whales-100
- 1970-North Atlantic Right Whales listed as endangered.
- 1996-NOAA implements the Large Whale Take Reduction Plan.
- 1997-MA requirement for “breakaway” features in gillnets & trap/pot buoy lines ban in Cape Cod Bay (CCB) for gillnets & ban on the use of floating rope. Dedicated aerial surveys begin in CCB.
- 2004-Year-round ban-floating rope between traps-CCB.
- 2007-Year-round ban-floating rope between traps statewide.
- 2014-present-MA Restricted Area (MRA) 3-month closure Feb-April 3,071 sq. miles.
- 2017-3 month (Feb/Apr) closure pots/traps in MRA PLUS 4-day extension of gear closure in CCB.
- 2018-3 month (Feb/Apr) closure- pots/traps in MRA- PLUS 15-day extension of gear closure & speed restriction (10 mph) for small vessels in CCB.
- 2019-3 month (Feb/Apr) closure-pots/traps in MRA- Developed whale safe weaker red/candy-cane rope breaking at 1700 lbs.
- 2022-Southern N.E. closed 5,648 sq. miles Est; whale population 350. Making the total sq. miles 11,722 closed to lobstering.

The Lobster Foundation of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association, and the Massachusetts Seafood Marketing Program collaborated together to keep you up to date on all conservation efforts put forth on behalf of the North Atlantic Right Whale and all whale species.



MASSACHUSETTS COMMERCIAL LOBSTERING

THE RIGHT WAY

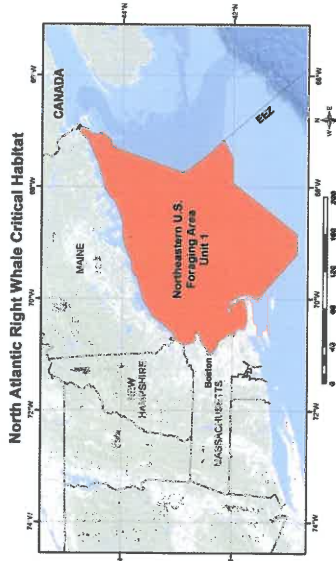


Massachusetts efforts in protecting all whales while preserving its local lobster industry.

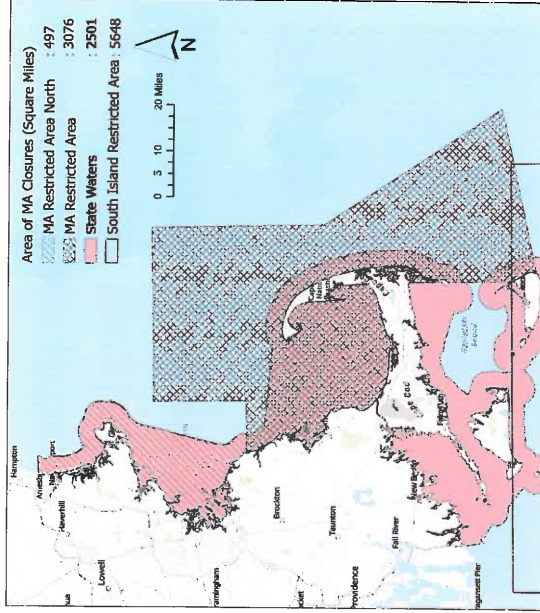


Massachusetts waters are important feeding habitat for protected and endangered whales, including minke, humpback, finback and North Atlantic right whales.

These waters contain dense concentrations of copepods and other zooplankton, staples in their diet. The right whale population is currently estimated at 350 individuals.



The areas designated as critical habitat contain approximately 29,763 square miles of marine habitat in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and off the Southeast U.S. coast.



Massachusetts has over 11,722 square miles closed to lobstering from Feb-April, extended into May if whales are still present.

The American Lobster is fished from Canada to New Jersey. In Massachusetts, in state waters the lobster fishery consists of independent fishermen who operate their own vessels. Lobster is the most valuable marine species harvested in Massachusetts waters.

Massachusetts commercial lobstermen fish from vessels that range in size from 18-42 feet.



They set baited lobster pots on the ocean floor to attract lobsters and typically make day-trips to haul between 150-400 lobster pots per day. Majority of landings and effort take place from June-November yielding over 15 million pounds per year.



The fishery is regulated with lobster pot limits, “escape vents” to allow undersized lobster to escape, and rules on allowable minimum and maximum sizes of lobster. All egg-bearing female lobsters are V-notched on their tails, which is done using a special V-notching tool. This protects the egg-bearing females from harvest for 2-4 years.

Lobster gear is connected to the surface by a vertical line attached to a surface buoy, allowing lobstermen to locate their lobster pots to haul to the surface. In Massachusetts, lobster pots are typically connected in 6-20 pot trawls using a “connecting ground-line”.

Entanglement in fishing gear can potentially cause injury and mortality for large whales.

Massachusetts commercial lobstermen have removed over 9,000 miles of floating ground-line in the water column by switching to mandatory sinking ground-lines to further reduce risk of an entanglement.



The Massachusetts Lobster Foundation, in collaboration with the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association and Ketcham Trap developed weaker red & candy cane rope breaking at 1,700 lbs., with a MASS LOBSTER tracer ribbon.



Massachusetts Environmental Trust, **Drive for a better environment**, provided grant funding to further Massachusetts commercial lobstermen’s conservation efforts on behalf of North Atlantic Right Whale and all whale species.