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New Consumer Campaign encourages Georgians to help save right whales: Eat Local, Not Lobster

BRUNSWICK, GA – One Hundred Miles, Glynn Environmental Coalition, St. Marys Earthkeepers, and The Dolphin Project have partnered for a new consumer education campaign targeting residents and visitors to Georgia's coast. The campaign launched today is designed to increase understanding about the deadly impact fishing gear from the lobster and snow crab fisheries have on critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.

Alice M. Keyes, Vice President of Coastal Conservation at One Hundred Miles says, "Entanglement is the leading cause of death for North Atlantic right whales, who travel thousands of miles to our coastal waters to give birth to calves. Until whale-safe fishing practices are implemented throughout the lobster and crab industries, we are asking Georgians to 'Eat Local, Not Lobster.'"

Scientists estimate that there are fewer than 375 individual North Atlantic right whales remaining on the planet, and only about 100 calving females. The population continues to decline: since 2017, at least 47 animals have died due to ship strikes and entanglement—including 'Cottontail,' an 11-year old male who was found dead off the South Carolina coast late last month, after observers first spotted him entangled in gear last October.

Like Cottontail, entangled right whales often suffer long and painful deaths. Ropes and gear from the lobster and snow crab industries in New England and Canada wrap around right whales—weighing them down, digging into flesh and bone, and obstructing their ability to swim and breathe. And with only 16 calves documented so far this calving season, the whales' death rate is significantly outpacing their current rate of birth. Unless dramatic action is immediately taken, scientists predict that the species could become functionally extinct in the next 20 years.

The campaign partners emphasize that even though Georgia is geographically removed from the source of entanglement, Georgians have a stake in the survival of the state's marine mammal. "Every year, coastal residents and visitors celebrate the right whale's migration to our shores, but few people fully understand the impact our food choices have on the fate of these animals," says Peach Hubbard, President of The Dolphin Project. "By educating Georgians about the impact of current lobster and snow crab fishing practices, we hope our consumer campaign will send a unified message that we need more effective protections now."

Thanks to partnerships between lobster and crab fishermen and whale advocates, new advances in fishing gear offer a glimmer of hope to help the population to recover. New types of rope, breakaway links, ropeless cages, and other innovative technologies are actively being tested to make it easier for whales to avoid or escape entanglement. But changes are

progressing too slowly. Even with recently proposed changes to the federal rules—which most advocates believe fall short of what is necessary to conserve the species—the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates new technologies will take years to realize.

“We are hopeful that this campaign gives Georgians a tangible and immediate way to help right whales, while also supporting the fishing communities of the Southeast.” says Alex Kearns, Executive Director of the St. Marys EarthKeepers. “Fishing, crabbing and shrimping have been an economic backbone of our coastal communities for generations and offer a delicious seafood alternative to New England lobster.”

“Choosing to buy local seafood also reduces the contaminants polluting our air and water,” says Rachael Thompson, Executive Director of the Glynn Environmental Coalition, a Georgia based organization that hosts a program around safe seafood consumption. According to [Sustainable Fisheries](#), fishing for lobster emits more greenhouse gases per pound of protein than any other seafood because the boats require a great deal of fuel to drop and collect traps.

Although it can feel hopeless to watch a species suffer from afar, especially when many decisions are being made thousands of miles away, our residents and visitors deserve the opportunity to be heard. The ‘Eat Local, Not Lobster’ campaign gives Georgians the power to push suppliers to source more whale-friendly practices and drive improvements throughout the industry. And it comes at a crucial moment when we don’t have time to waste.

“Our luxury has become their loss,” says Megan Desrosiers, President and CEO of One Hundred Miles. “If we don’t change our habits now and demand meaningful protections, we will lose our coast’s connection to these beloved whales—because they will cease to exist. The future of their species depends on us.”

The partners have created multiple resources to help consumers protect right whales when dining out or at the grocery store. Learn more about this important campaign and how you can get involved at OneHundredMiles.org/RightWhales.

One Hundred Miles is a coastal conservation organization that seeks to preserve and protect Georgia’s 100-mile coast through advocacy, education, and citizen engagement.

OneHundredMiles.org

Glynn Environmental Coalition is a non-profit organization committed to assuring a clean environment and healthy economy for citizens of Coastal Georgia.

www.GlynnEnvironmental.org

St. Marys EarthKeepers’ mission is to actively inform, encourage and galvanize the residents of St. Marys regarding matters of effective environmental stewardship.

www.StMarysEarthKeepers.com

The Dolphin Project is the longest running and largest all-volunteer non-profit research, education and conservation organization dedicated to the protection of the wild, estuarine bottlenose dolphin and our shared environment.

TheDolphinProject.wildapricot.org