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On Endangered Species Day, 22 Georgia groups urge the Biden Administration to take immediate action for North Atlantic right whales

Brunswick, Georgia—Today, on Endangered Species Day, a coalition of Georgia-based conservation organizations, ecotour businesses, concerned scientists, and other groups came together to [urge the Biden Administration](#) to take swift action on behalf of the North Atlantic right whale, one of the most critically endangered species on the planet.

In their letter, One Hundred Miles and 21 other organizations and individuals, collectively representing more than 100,000 members and advocates across Georgia, implored the administration to take immediate action and finalize the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)’s proposed expansion of the 2008 vessel speed rule to protect right whales from extinction. They expressed dismay at the excessive time it has already taken to finalize the rule—even as whale deaths from vessel strikes have increased in ocean waters off the Southeastern coast. And they spoke to the pride and responsibility Georgians feel for their state marine mammal.

From November to April every year, the warm, shallow waters of the Georgia and North Florida coasts serve as the right whale’s only known calving ground in the world—a point of pride for generations of Georgians across the state. “Georgians have a long history of coming together in support of our wildlife and natural environment,” says Cindy Dennard, co-owner of Captain Gabby Charters based in Darien. “Right whales are an important part of our ecosystem, and a reason people want to live in, visit, and explore Georgia’s extraordinary coast in the first place. Every winter we anticipate the whales’ return and get excited about reports of new calves. It is important to do what we can to make sure they are protected when they are in our waters.”

Thanks to threats from vessel strikes and entanglements in commercial fishing gear, scientists estimate that there are only about 360 individuals remaining on this planet, with fewer than 70 reproductively active females. This past calving season (November 2023 to April 2024) was particularly devastating, with four right whales— a reproductive female, a juvenile female, and two newborn calves—killed or seriously injured by vessel strikes that occurred in Southeastern U.S. waters. The very first right whale calf documented this season—born to a right whale

known as Juno—died at only four months old from extensive injuries caused by a vessel strike.

“This rule stands on sound science,” says Amy Sharma, PhD, Executive Director of Science for Georgia. “NOAA’s proposal, which expands its safe and effective 2008 rule, utilizes the best available scientific data about the overlap between right whale and vessel traffic. It follows guidance from researchers who understand these animals and the threats facing their species—including the dedicated biologists who are based in Georgia and regularly risk their lives for these animals.”

According to data from NOAA and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR), since a vessel speed rule was first implemented in 2008, the number of right whales killed in the U.S. by large vessels over 65 feet in the U.S. declined, while the number of mortalities from those 65 feet or less did not. The proposed amendment under consideration by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) would broaden the boundaries and timing of Seasonal Speed Zones along the East Coast based on the best available scientific data, expand mandatory seasonal speed restrictions of 10 knots or less to include most vessels 35–65 feet in length, and create a Dynamic Speed Zone program to mandate temporary 10-knot speed restrictions when right whales are detected outside designated Seasonal Speed Zones. Notably, NOAA’s proposal would also update the rule’s safety provisions, allowing vessels to exceed the 10-knot speed restriction in circumstances where human health and safety are at risk.

“The devastating impact of vessel strikes on the North Atlantic right whale is all too familiar to us here in coastal Georgia,” says Megan Desrosiers, President and CEO of One Hundred Miles. “While decision-makers in Washington delay the implementation of rule, we watch as these magnificent mammals are struck and killed by unregulated vessels at an alarming rate. This inaction is unacceptable, particularly when we already know a critical piece of the solution. Expanded protections must be enacted immediately.”

To read the group’s letter, please visit [OneHundredMiles.org/NARWLetter](https://www.onehundredmiles.org/NARWLetter).

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One Hundred Miles (OHM) is a nonprofit organization based in Brunswick, Georgia, dedicated to protecting and preserving Georgia’s coast through advocacy, education, and citizen engagement. We focus on a variety of coastal conservation issues, including the protection of threatened and endangered wildlife like the North Atlantic right whale. Learn more at [OneHundredMiles.org](https://www.onehundredmiles.org).

Other groups and individuals signing the letter include:

Altamaha Riverkeeper | www.altamahariverkeeper.org

Caretta Research Project | [carettaresearchproject.org](https://www.carettaresearchproject.org)

Coastal Georgia Audubon | coastal-georgia-birds.square.site
Kathryn Craven, Ph.D., Endangered and Protected Species Biologist
Cindy Dennard, Captain Gabby Charters | www.captgabby.com
Heather Farley, Ph.D., Public Policy Researcher
Georgia Interfaith Power and Light | gipl.org
Georgia River Network | www.garivers.org
Glynn Environmental Coalition | glynnenvironmental.org
Little St. Simons Island | www.littlestsimonsisland.com
Russell Regnery, Ph.D., Chair, Little Cumberland Island
Cathy J. Sakas, Coastal Naturalist Productions
Sam Ghioto Studios | samghiotostudios.com
Satilla Riverkeeper | www.satillariverkeeper.org
Savannah Riverkeeper | www.savannahriverkeeper.org
Science for Georgia | scienceforgeorgia.org
St. Simons Island Sea Turtle Project
Surfrider Georgia | georgia.surfrider.org
The Dolphin Project | thedolphinproject.org
Tybee Island Marine Science Center | www.tybeemarinescience.org