

FishOn: Lobster Industry Willing to be 'Right-sized' for Right Whales?

By Sean Horgan Feb 10, 2019 Gloucester Times



A North Atlantic right whale feeds on the surface of Cape Cod Bay off the coast of Plymouth last March. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission announced on February 6 that it will consider options designed to reduce vertical lobster fishing lines in the water by as much as 40 percent in an attempt to help save the declining species of the rare whale. Photo by Michael Dwyer.

So, we're pretty excited about the Patriots' Super Bowl victory parade tomorrow. We've been gearing up since the big game and just hope the weather is as nice as last Tuesday. That would have been the day for the parade.

Hold on a second, someone is speaking to us.

"What? Are they sure?"

OK, let's talk about lobsters.

Last week, there was much ado in the lobster industry, particularly in Maine where fishermen, regulators and legislators are discussing the possibility of loosening some of the permitting constraints to accelerate the pace of issuing new licenses in a classic old guard vs. new guard tableau.

On a more macro level, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission said its American lobster management board is considering new measures to reduce the amount of vertical fishing lines in the water as a further protection for right whales.

The goal, they said, is to remove as much as 40 percent of the existing lines and gear through a combination of gear changes, trap limits, area closures and other actions to make the waters

safer for the highly imperiled right whales that probably are starting their migration north as we speak.

Lobstermen say they understand the urgency, but want to make sure that any new conservation measures are consistent with the level of present danger in U.S. waters as opposed to Canadian waters, where more right whale mortalities have occurred.

"What we do need is to be right sized for what's going on with whales," said Patrice McCarron, executive director of the Maine Lobstermen's Association. "We want to do our part and have that solution meet the risk we actually have."

The final measures are still months in the making, but the momentum for right whale conservation actions continues to run apace, fueled by conservation groups and spearheaded by the federal and interstate regulators. New regulations are coming. No stopping that train.

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