



**SIERRA  
CLUB**  
FOUNDED 1892

MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER

Massachusetts Sierra Club  
10 Milk Street, Boston, MA 02108-4621  
(617)423-5775  
office@sierraclubmass.org • www.sierraclubmass.org

## **An Act to Protect the Northern Right Whale**

*Formal Title: Relative to the protection of right whales within the coastal waters of the Commonwealth  
Rep. Peter Kocot  
H2009*

Establishes and regulates the operation and use of the right whale research and protection fund; mandates the use of monies in said fund by the division of coastal zone management within the executive office of environmental affairs, to diminish fatalities of right whales in Massachusetts coastal waters; directs said division to establish a grant program to meet said goals; authorizes the sale of bonds to fund said operations.

The North Atlantic right whale (or northern right whale), is a large, slow-swimming, and curious marine mammal which lives along the coastal waters of North America. The whale is easy to spot, and floats once killed, making it a prime target for whalers into the early twentieth century. The population of the Northern Right Whale was depleted so rapidly due to whaling that by the early 1900s it was no longer economically viable to hunt. Since then, the northern right whale has still not bounced back from the brink of extinction. In the 1970s, it was declared an endangered species. Today there are an estimated 300 northern right whales left. Despite extensive research done on the in the last 20 years, valid policies have yet to be implemented by Federal, State, or local governments to protect the whale or its habitat. Two major factors cause whale fatalities. An average of two to three right whales are killed each year by either vessel strikes or entanglement in fishing gear- two whales more than allowed by federal law.

Although the northern right whale has been listed as an endangered species for decades, no recovery plan has been adopted that adequately protects the species. Recently, however, a recovery plan has been created that calls for more research on whale habitat and feeding and breeding areas, but still more action needs to be taken. Research without action is useless. The Sierra Club is working with whale advocates and state and federal agencies to help develop more adequate protection for right whales and other endangered whale species.

Because large whales protected under federal law continue to become entangled in fishing gear, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has decided to review its plan to reduce whale mortality. The entanglement of 27 large whales in 2002, with five deaths (including one right whale), is a problem of epic proportions that must be solved immediately if some of the endangered whale species are to survive the century.