

STUDY TITLE: Literature Search and Data Synthesis for Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles in the US Atlantic from Maine to the Florida Keys

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KEY WORDS: marine mammal, sea turtle, U.S. Atlantic Planning Areas, legal status, distribution, abundance, habitat, stock structure, life history, food habits, health, acoustics, fisheries interactions, vessel interactions, energy projects

BACKGROUND: In September 2009, the Minerals Management Service (renamed the Bureau of Ocean Management (BOEM), Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce established an inter-agency agreement (IA), through which NOAA was to provide services to the DOI, BOEM in the form of an electronic data base and synthesis of recent literature and research on marine mammals and sea turtles in the US Atlantic from Maine to the Florida Keys.

OBJECTIVES: The goals and objectives of this IA were: 1) a reference document that includes the latest and best information on marine mammals and sea turtles in the U.S. Atlantic from Maine to the Florida Keys, 2) identification of data gaps in the knowledge of marine mammals and sea turtles in the Atlantic, and 3) identification of research

priorities recommended by national/regional agencies and groups (e.g., Marine Mammal Commission, NMFS and FWS recovery plans, Sea Turtle Expert Working Group,). This study area corresponds to BOEM north-Atlantic, mid-Atlantic, south-Atlantic and Straits of Florida outer continental shelf (OCS) planning areas. The document provides a basis for analysis of potential impacts of BOEM-regulated activities on protected sea turtles and marine mammals as required by NEPA, for petitioning that might be required by the MMPA, and for Section 7 consultations under the ESA. The document can also serve as a guide to future decisions on planning and funding of needed research on sea turtles and marine mammals in the U.S. Atlantic.

DESCRIPTION: The information presented here came from primary literature, NMFS stock assessment reports, species recovery plans and websites. The reports include information of the status, distribution, abundance, habitat preference, stock structure, life history traits, food habits, health (strandings, contaminants, and disease), acoustics, fisheries interactions, vessel interactions, energy projects and data gaps and research recommendations. These summaries were meant to be comprehensive and current; therefore they include information on these species from other parts of their range.

This document also contains a collection of maps. These include sighting, stranding, tag, and fishery by-catch locations by species and well as other relevant information such as fishery management areas designated under the harbor porpoise regulations, and right whale critical habitat areas. Seasonal information is presented as well. Sightings maps are not effort-corrected and as such should not be interpreted as complete representations of species distribution. A table of data sources utilized to create these maps is provided.

There is a table of current marine mammal and sea turtle researching occurring along the U.S. Atlantic Coast. It was compiled from the abstracts of research presented at three important Scientific Conferences: The 18th Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals, Quebec City, Canada (12-16 October 2009); the Annual Meeting of the Right Whale Consortium Meeting, New Bedford, MA, (3-4 November 2010); and the 31st Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, San Diego, California (12-15 April 2011). The table includes research occurring in the BOEM Atlantic Planning Areas and contact information for the lead author.

Finally, there is a comprehensive bibliography of the literature included throughout the document. PDFs of open access literature were compiled separately on a CD for BOEM.

SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS: Not relevant, synthesis of existing information.

STUDY RESULTS: Generation of the above-described document and literature collection.

STUDY PRODUCT: Waring, Gordon T., Stephanie A. Wood, and Elizabeth Josephson. 2012. Literature search and data synthesis for marine mammals and sea turtles in the

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