



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

Critical Habitat and North Pacific right whales: the facts



What is critical habitat?

Areas that contain the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of threatened and endangered species.

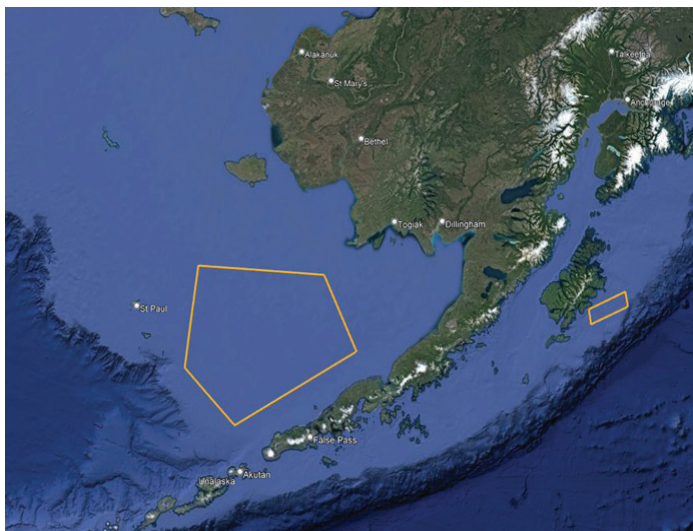
The Endangered Species Act mandates that critical habitat be designated for listed species, based on the best available scientific information.

Essential features includes water characteristics, prey, and geological features.

Essential features may be temporary (e.g., seasonal oceanographic patterns) or dynamic (e.g., plankton blooms).

Critical habitat:

- A critical habitat designation alone does not restrict any human activities (e.g., commercial fishing or subsistence hunting).
- If any regulatory measures may be appropriate to mitigate threats to critical habitat, NOAA Fisheries would propose them using a separate process that includes an analysis of the costs and benefits, and an opportunity for public comment.



Map 1. Currently designated North Pacific right whale critical habitat

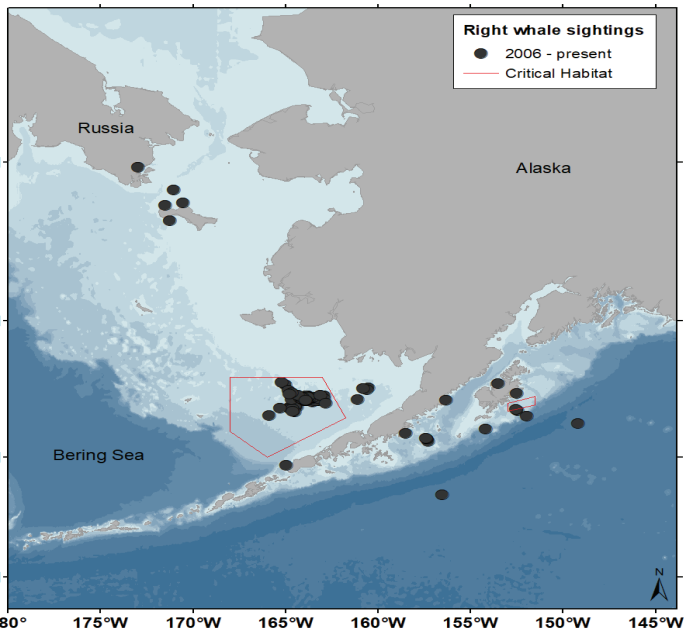
Existing North Pacific right whale critical habitat

- NOAA Fisheries designated Critical Habitat for North Pacific right whales in 2008.
- There are two critical habitat areas off Kodiak Island in the Gulf of AK and in the Southeastern Bering Sea (Map 1).
- The essential features are large concentrations of copepods and euphausiids (zooplankton) and their habitat.

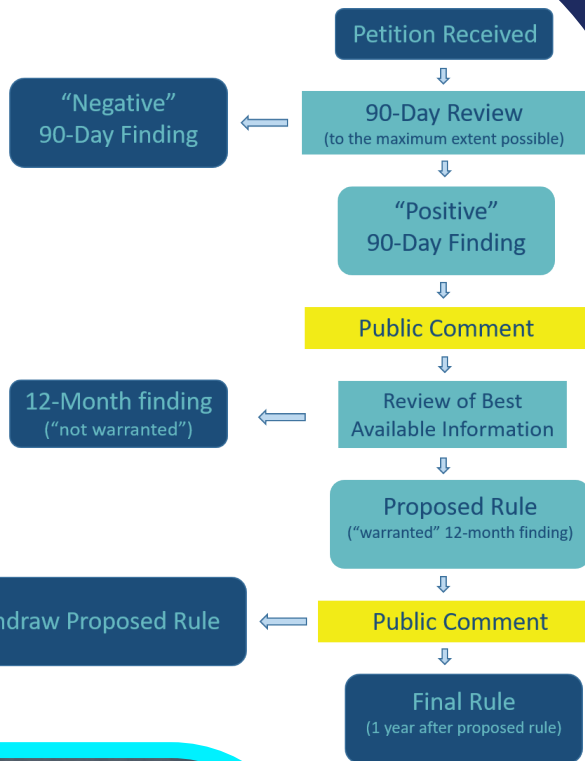


Why is NOAA Fisheries considering revising North Pacific right whale critical habitat?

- NOAA was petitioned in 2022 to revise their critical habitat.
- We concluded that a revision may be appropriate and are proceeding through the process outlined in the flowchart.



Map 2. North Pacific right whale sightings in Alaska since 2006



What is NOAA Fisheries doing to decide if/how critical habitat should be revised?

- Analyzing all available acoustic data
- Analyzing all data on sightings (Map 2)
- Assessing spatial and temporal patterns of prey species and oceanographic information
- Synthesizing acoustic, prey, and sightings data into a predictive model
- Conducting an economic impact analysis

How you can provide input: NOAA Fisheries will be accepting public comments on the proposed rule to revise critical habitat once it is published in the Federal Register.

