

Funding for this program has been allocated through the Pacific Salmon Coastal Recovery Fund administered by NMFS, and is consistent with Bureau of Reclamation steelhead recovery efforts ongoing in the Okanogan Basin. Notice of the receipt of this permit application was published in the **Federal Register** on January 14, 2003.

In total the proposed programs would provide artificial propagation and release of about 1.03 million ESA-listed Upper Columbia River steelhead into the Upper Columbia River Basin and for the monitoring and management of the returning adult steelhead to the Upper Columbia River Basin. The general effects on the environment considered include the impacts on the physical, biological, and socioeconomic environments of the Upper Columbia River Basin.

Dated: April 8, 2003.

**Phil Williams,**

*Chief, Endangered Species Division, Office of Protected Resources National Marine Fisheries Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[Docket No. 030409080-3080-01; I.D. 031103D]

RIN 0648-ZB41

### Financial Assistance for North Atlantic Right Whale Research Programs Through A Competitive Grants Program

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC).

**ACTION:** Notice of solicitation for applications.

**SUMMARY:** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (hereinafter "we" or "us") issues this document to solicit applications for Federal assistance under the North Atlantic Right Whale Grant Program (RWGP). This document describes how to submit applications for funding in FY 2003 under the Program and how we will determine which applications will be funded. Under the RWGP, we will provide financial assistance to eligible researchers working within waters inhabited by North Atlantic right whales and submitting applications pertaining only to this species. Applications will be reviewed for eligibility, technical

merit, and consistency with the RWGP's goals and regional funding priorities. Final selection will be based on results of a peer review process (described below), as well as other restrictions based on appropriations language.

**DATES:** The application package must be postmarked by 5 p.m. (local time) June 16, 2003. The package must include: (1) one signed original of the entire application and all required forms, and (2) two signed copies of the entire application and all required forms (including supporting documentation). The applicant may also voluntarily submit an electronic copy (on CD or diskette in Microsoft Word v. 97 or earlier or WordPerfect v. 9 or lower) of the narrative project description.

**ADDRESSES:** All application packages should be sent to NOAA/NMFS Right Whale Grants Program, Protected Species Branch, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, email [rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov](mailto:rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov).

Federal forms and required elements of the application packages can be obtained from the NMFS Right Whale Grants Program webpage at <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/grantforms>. We cannot accept completed applications via the Internet or facsimile at this time.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Dr Phillip J. Clapham, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, 508 495-2316, email [rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov](mailto:rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov).

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### I. Introduction

For fiscal year (FY) 2002, Congress directed that \$1 million for right whale research be administered through a competitive grants program operated by the Northeast Consortium. For FY 2003 (and in future years if continued), this grant program will be administered by NMFS as the Right Whale Grants Program (hereafter referred to as the RWGP). This document describes how to submit applications for funding in FY 2003 under the RWGP and how we will determine which applications will be funded.

#### A. Background

Management of marine mammal populations falls within the jurisdiction of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 and, for some species, under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. The agency is mandated to conserve the endangered species under its jurisdiction, and must undertake actions to prevent further

decline of populations, facilitate their recovery, and safeguard the quality of their habitat.

The North Atlantic right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) is among the world's most endangered cetaceans. The population is believed to number only about 300 individuals and appears to be declining. The lack of recovery is due in part to high mortality from human sources, notably fishing gear entanglements and vessel collisions. A Recovery Plan is in effect (NMFS 1991), and conservation of this species is a high priority for NMFS. Research directed at facilitating such conservation or to provide monitoring of the population's status and health, is also a high priority for the agency.

The RWGP is conducted by the Secretary of Commerce to provide Federal assistance to eligible researchers for: (1) detection and tracking of right whales; (2) behavior of right whales in relation to ships; (3) relationships between vessel speed, size or design with whale collisions; (4) modeling of ship traffic along the Atlantic coast; (5) population monitoring and assessment studies; (6) reproduction, health and genetic studies; (7) development of a Geographic Information System database or other system designed to investigate predictive modeling of right whale distribution in relation to environmental variables; (8) habitat quality studies including food quality and pollutant levels; and (9) any other work relevant to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales. The RWGP is administered by the Protected Species Branch of the NOAA/NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

#### B. Objectives

The principal objectives of the RWGP are to fund research or other activities that can provide information useful to management of North Atlantic right whales, with emphasis on understanding or mitigation of factors inhibiting the species' recovery.

Successful applications will be those that have a high probability of providing novel information that can be used to monitor the status and health of the North Atlantic right whale population, or to improve management strategies aimed at reducing risk from human factors or at otherwise facilitating the population's recovery. Priority will be given to researchers with a demonstrated track record of publishing the results of previous work in the peer-reviewed scientific literature.