



# New England Gear Innovation Fund

## NFWF CONTACTS

### Gray Redding

Manager,  
Fisheries Conservation  
gray.redding@nfwf.org  
202-595-2438

### Nora Ong

Coordinator,  
Regional Programs  
nora.ong@nfwf.org  
202-595-2608

## PARTNERS

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Shell USA

## ABOUT NFWF

Chartered by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) protects and restores the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Working with federal, corporate and individual partners, NFWF has funded more than 6,000 organizations and generated a total conservation impact of \$8.1 billion.

Learn more at [www.nfwf.org](http://www.nfwf.org)

## NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

1133 15th Street, NW  
Suite 1000  
Washington, D.C., 20005  
202-857-0166



Lobster boat

## BACKGROUND

The North Atlantic right whale (right whale) is critically endangered with fewer than 350 right whales remaining and less than 70 breeding females. The New England Gear Innovation Fund, established in 2023, will support projects working with volunteer New England fishermen and fishing communities to develop, test and implement innovative fishing gears that reduce the risk of lethal or sub-lethal fishing gear entanglement, one of the major human induced threats to the species. These solutions will need to be efficient and practical for fishermen, helping to ensure that the right whale and vibrant New England fisheries and fishing communities can coexist.

2023 is the first year of the New England Gear Innovation Fund, which builds off NFWF's collaborative work with fishermen and fishing communities since 2010 through the Fisheries Innovation Fund. In 2023, the New England Gear Innovation Fund awarded approximately nearly \$18.3 million to 18 projects working to develop or trial innovative fishing gears and engage fishermen in the use of innovative gear. The 18 awards announced leverage more than \$1.4 million in matching contributions from the grantees, providing a total conservation impact of \$19.7 million.

The New England Gear Innovation Fund is a partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), with additional support from Shell USA. Funding for this program was appropriated by Congress in the 2023 Omnibus Spending Bill.

*(continued)*



Lobster traps in Maine

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the New England Gear Innovation Fund include:

- developing, testing, or deploying innovative gear that reduces entanglement risk, including work on locating underwater fishing gear, integrating gear into fishing practices, and furthering interoperable technology solutions across manufacturers
- conducting outreach with fishermen to encourage participation in the process of developing, testing and voluntarily adopting innovative gear

These goals work in concert to help ensure the sustainable co-existence of right whales and New England fishing communities in the future.

When right whales co-occur with buoys lines from fishing gear, they are exposed to some risk of entanglement. This program focuses on the New England region of the United States based on habitat use of the right whale and the density of lobster and other pot or trap fisheries in the area. The primary states that were awarded grants this year are Maine and Massachusetts, with a focus on the Gulf of Maine.