Vessel Strike Avoidance Fund

NFWF CONTACTS

Ellen Bolen
Director,
Marine and Coastal Conservation
ellen.bolen@nfwf.org
202-595-3911

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

PARTNER

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



North Atlantic right whale

OVERVIEW

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in parternship with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) announced a 2025-year round of funding for Vessel Strike Avoidance Fund (VSAF) projects. Eight new technology and/or outreach grants totaling nearly $3.9 million were awarded. The eight awards announced leveraged more than $700,000 in matching contributions from the grantees, providing a total conservation impact of more than $4.6 million.

This is the first grant slate awarded under VSAF. This program was created to support the development and use of innovative technology solutions to provide mariners with tools to more effectively avoid collisions (vessel strikes) with large whales and benefit the conservation of critically endangered North Atlantic right whales (right whales). Vessel strikes are one of the major human-induced threats to the whales' ability to recover, as their habitat and migration routes often overlap with major ports, shipping lanes and areas of heavy recreational use along the Atlantic coastline. VSAF aims to serve as a catalyst to advance promising technologies from development to implementation while engaging with interested mariners to ensure user uptake.

(continued)

ABOUT NFWF

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) works with partners to foster sustainable and impactful conservation solutions so that people and nature thrive together. Chartered by Congress in 1984, NFWF has grown to become the nation's largest conservation foundation. Since its founding, NFWF has funded more than 23,300 projects that have generated a total conservation impact of $11.3 billion. NFWF is an equal opportunity provider.

Learn more at **www.nfwf.org**

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
1625 Eye Street, NW
Suite 300
Washington, D.C., 20006
202-857-0166

Boater Education and Outreach to Raise Awareness for Right Whale Conservation (VA)
Grantee: BoatUS Foundation
Grant Amount:..... $450,000
Matching Funds:..... $500,000
Total Project Amount:..... $950,000
Engage hundreds of thousands of recreational boats to raise awareness of vessel strike threats to the right whale. Project will inform boaters through public service announcements and educational courses which include information on management areas, whale detection technology, whale sighting information sources, and rules and regulations around marine mammal interactions to decrease the changes of collisions.

Characterize Threat of Vessel Strikes through Analysis of Boat Sizes and Classes (GA, MA, NJ, NC)
Grantee: Whale and Vessel Safety Taskforce
Grant Amount:..... $188,400
Matching Funds:.....$20,000
Total Project Amount:..... $208,400
Gather data on performance and calculate risk profiles of various vessel sizes and classes that operate within the range of the right whale along the U.S. Atlantic coast. Project will collect information on maneuverability and other factors for 50 vessels through a combination of modeling, on-water observations and data logging to develop risk profiles, characterize operator response and understand collision avoidance ability following whale detections.

Exploring Real Time Monitoring of Right Whales with Automated eDNA Analysis (MD)
Grantee: Johns Hopkins University
Grant Amount:..... $733,600
Matching Funds:..... $0
Total Project Amount:..... $733,600
Establish environmental DNA sampling and analysis capabilities in Cape Cod Bay and coastal waters of Georgia for North Atlantic right whale detection. Project will demonstrate environmental DNA detection for the species alongside visual and acoustic surveys, with the objective of transitioning remote analysis technologies and data into regional monitoring systems.

Improve Passive Acoustic Monitoring for Real-time Conservation of Right Whales (MA)
Grantee: Deep Voice
Grant Amount:..... $283,600
Matching Funds:..... $0
Total Project Amount:..... $283,600
Develop an artificial intelligence-based classification algorithm to accurately distinguish between right whale and humpback whale calls using passive acoustic monitoring. Project will help to increase the efficiency of acoustic monitoring, which could lead to timely alert systems and help prevent vessel collisions with whales.

Leveraging Automatic Information Systems to Disseminate Whale Information to Mariners (MA)
Grantee: International Fund for Animal Welfare
Grant Amount:..... $492,800
Matching Funds:.....$10,000
Total Project Amount:..... $502,800
Upgrade and expand an existing vessel communication tool, known as automatic information system, by adding the capability to send automated vessel alerts of whale sightings or management areas. Project will leverage automatic information system technology to automatically disseminate information to improve mariners' awareness of whale locations and reduce the risk of vessel strikes.

Real-time Verification of Thermal Imaging Whale Detection through Automation (MA)
Grantee: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Grant Amount:..... $749,300
Matching Funds:..... $0
Total Project Amount:..... $749,300
Evaluate the use of a real-time, human assisted verification network for thermal imaging-based whale detection systems. Project will provide operators of vessels equipped with thermal cameras with reliable notification of whale detections and mitigation actions to reduce the vessel strike risk for right whales.

Whale Alert: Improving Ship Strike Reduction Platform through Feature and Audience Expansion (FL)
Grantee: Conserve.IO
Grant Amount:..... $675,000
Matching Funds:..... $195,000
Total Project Amount:..... $870,000
Substantially increase the availability of regularly updated information on whale sightings to mariners to reduce the risk of collisions with right whales. Project will increase the value of the existing Whale Alert application for ship strike reduction through developing new end-user features, linking to new right whale detection sources, connecting to additional third-party applications, and significantly increasing outreach.

WhaleCast: Providing Recreational Boaters with Dynamic Risk Maps for Avoiding Vessel Strikes (NC)
Grantee: Fathom Science
Grant Amount:..... $295,300
Matching Funds:.....$24,000
Total Project Amount:..... $319,300
Develop a vessel strike risk forecast model to help recreational boaters avoid collisions with right whales along the Atlantic coast from Georgia to Nova Scotia. Project will gather and integrate early feedback on WhaleCast and explore integration with technology already on vessels to deliver daily dynamic risk maps.