

## Animal Welfare Groups Unite for Endangered North Atlantic Right Whales

By DC Animal Welfare Examiner, Lisa Marie Czop  
September 18, 12:12 AM

Although the North Atlantic right whales have been on the [list of endangered species](#) for nearly four decades, these marine mammals continue to be threatened in their natural habitat due to various factors. In an attempt to secure some much-needed safety for these creatures, conservation and animal welfare groups joined together today in Washington to file a formal request to expand protected habitat for this critically endangered species.

According to the highly respected animal rights organization [Defenders of Wildlife](#), "the petition filed with the [National Marine Fisheries Service](#) (NMFS), requests that three areas used by North Atlantic right whales for essential life functions be added as critical habitat. The petition seeks to expand critical habitat in the whales' only known calving grounds off the coast of northern Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, and in the whales' feeding and nursery grounds throughout the Gulf of Maine. The petition

also calls for adding the migration route between the calving and wintering grounds as critical habitat."



There are less than 400 North Atlantic right whales left in existence today, but research indicates that saving only two females a year would bring the species closer to repopulation. Unfortunately, the reproduction process is timely; adult female right whales give birth to one calf every three to four years and do not reach reproductive maturity until age 8. Simple protection from factors such as fishing equipment entanglement, vessel strikes, and marine construction would ensure these animals would thrive in their surrounding ocean, however current laws do not protect their habitat.

"Saying you're protecting right whales without



sufficiently protecting their habitat is akin to saying you are going to protect sun-fish while you drain the pond," said Regina Asmutis-Silvia, senior biologist with the [Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society](#). "Without protecting the places where right whales live, we cannot, in reality, save the species."

The petition for expanded right whale critical habitat was filed on behalf of [The Humane Society of the United States](#), Defenders of Wildlife, [Center for Biological Diversity](#), [Ocean Conservancy](#), and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society. Under the [Endangered Species Act](#), NMFS must respond to the groups' request within 90 days. As the five groups await the results of their intense efforts, they can hope that their scientific discoveries bring safety to this fading but beautiful marine animal.

"Every single right whale counts when it comes to ensuring this species' survival," said Sharon Young, marine issues field director for The Humane Society of the United States. "Protecting the right whale's vital feeding, nursery, and migratory habitat is the most basic, common sense step towards moving this species out of the emergency room and onto the path to recovery."