



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Sanctuary Initiates Shipwreck Avoidance Program to Protect Fishermen and Historic Shipwrecks

When policymakers face the challenges of protecting historic shipwrecks as mandated by both the National Marine Sanctuaries Act and the [National Historic Preservation Act](#), the fishing industry and conservation interests are often at odds. But they don't have to be.

The shipwrecks of [Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary](#) have united a variety of maritime interest groups, from divers and historians to fishermen, over the cause of protecting these irreplaceable historic resources while protecting fishermen and their gear. To accomplish these goals, NOAA is piloting a [Shipwreck Avoidance Program](#) (SAP), an innovative program dedicated to encouraging commercial and recreational fishing vessels to voluntarily avoid the disclosed shipwreck locations.

Through SAP, NOAA publicized the locations of 11 historic shipwrecks to the public, reversing its previous policy of non-disclosure. In return, NOAA officials request that fishermen voluntarily avoid the designated sites. During the pilot phase, officials will monitor voluntary compliance to determine SAP's effectiveness.

Wrecks Offer Possibilities of Profit but also Danger

Sanctuary archaeologists have located 47 historic [shipwrecks in Stellwagen Bank](#). The wrecks share sanctuary waters with a fleet of fishing vessels. Fishing vessel captains have found that trawling close to these wrecks can bring in a profitable catch of all sorts of fish that find refuge nearby. But these benefits are countered by risks.

Frank Mirarchi, a retired trawler fisherman and Sanctuary Advisory Council Member, explained, "I have lost two nets and done considerable damage to several others throughout my career by encountering random pieces of wreckage scattered on the seabed" he said. "Under poor weather conditions, entangled gear can capsize a boat, jeopardizing the crew's safety," he added.

Protecting Irreplaceable Resources

Many wrecks have been damaged or destroyed by commercial fishing gear. John Perry Fish, the co-discoverer of the iconic *Portland* shipwreck, explained that "trawl nets and floats can become ensnared on wrecks and remain at the site for decades."

Sanctuary shipwrecks are windows into the past, allowing archaeologists and the public



Shipwrecks provide shelter for a variety of species. This side scan sonar image shows a school of fish (cod and pollock) congregating by the wreck of the steamship Portland.

SBNMS and Applied Signal Technologies photo

to learn more about New England's maritime cultural landscapes. Shipwrecks also serve as the featured exhibits in a virtual underwater museum, where diverse topics, like maritime history and marine biology, can be explored. These non-renewable resources cannot be replaced once they are destroyed. Damaging or removing historic sanctuary artifacts is prohibited except if it occurs incidentally from traditional fishing operations.

Undisturbed wrecks provide other benefits like critical habitat for diverse marine life. Intact wrecks in some of the shallower waters provide exciting destinations for divers to explore. Shipwrecks are also memorial sites that are resting places for sailors, passengers, and crews who were lost along with their ships.

Changing Course on Shipwreck Management

NOAA officials made the decision to reverse its previous policy of non-disclosure and publicize the locations of select historic shipwrecks identified at high risk of harm from fishing activities. Mirarchi

agreed, stating that "with the advent of more precise navigation tools, fishermen can safely avoid bad hangs and share these locations with others."

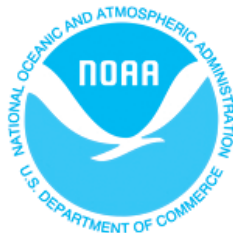
Ben Haskell, deputy superintendent of the sanctuary and SAP manager, noted "This program gives the fishermen the opportunity to avoid the dangers associated with their gear interacting with shipwrecks while protecting these historic resources without the implementation of an added layer of regulation."

The future of the sanctuary's shipwrecks is still uncertain. If SAP successfully encourages avoidance, NOAA officials will likely disclose more sites. By working together towards a shared goal, fishermen, regulators, and other stakeholders can preserve the historic shipwrecks while sustaining commercial fishing.

For more information on SAP or to report a shipwreck location contact ben.haskell@noaa.gov. To view a list of the recently disclosed sanctuary shipwreck sites, visit our website "[Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary Shipwreck Sites](#)".

THIS SUPPLEMENT PROVIDED BY NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL OFFICE

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Slow Down for Right Whales

Critically endangered North Atlantic right whales can be found along the U.S. Atlantic coast during much of the year. Along with entanglement in fishing gear, collisions with vessels are one of the biggest barriers to the species' recovery. Collisions such as these are also dangerous for the vessel involved. Stay safe and help protect right whales by slowing down where right whales are found.

Seasonal Management Areas:

- Areas where high abundances of right whales are known to occur on an annual basis.
- Vessels 65 feet and larger in length are required to slow to 10 knots or less in these areas.
- All mariners are strongly recommended to avoid areas or slow speeds to 10 knots or less.

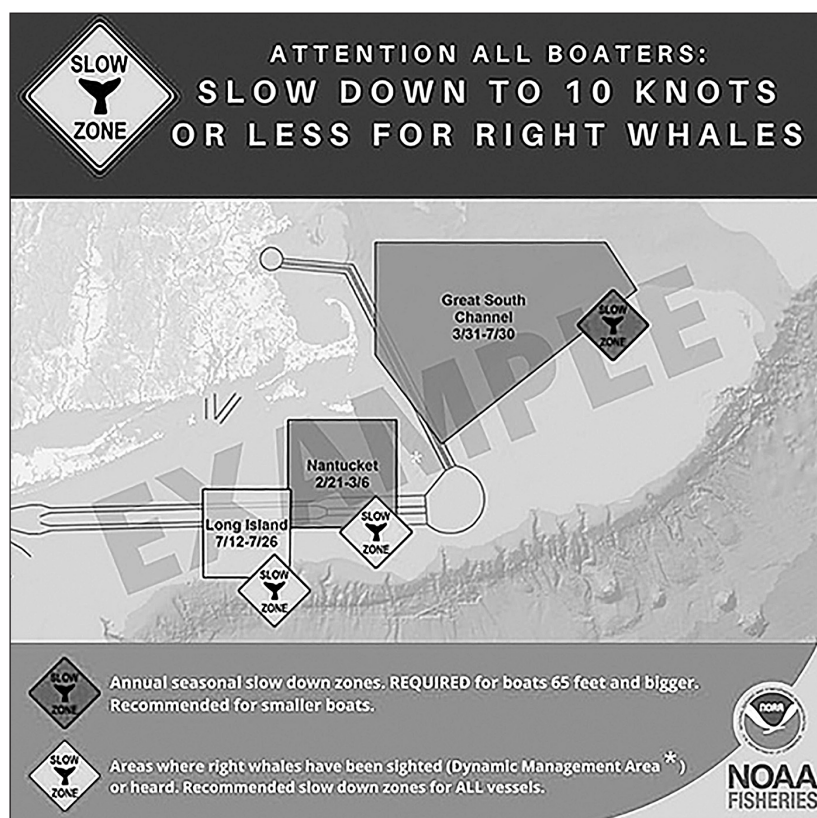
Please note: There are regulatory requirements for vessels of all sizes in certain Massachusetts state waters.

Right Whale Slow Zones

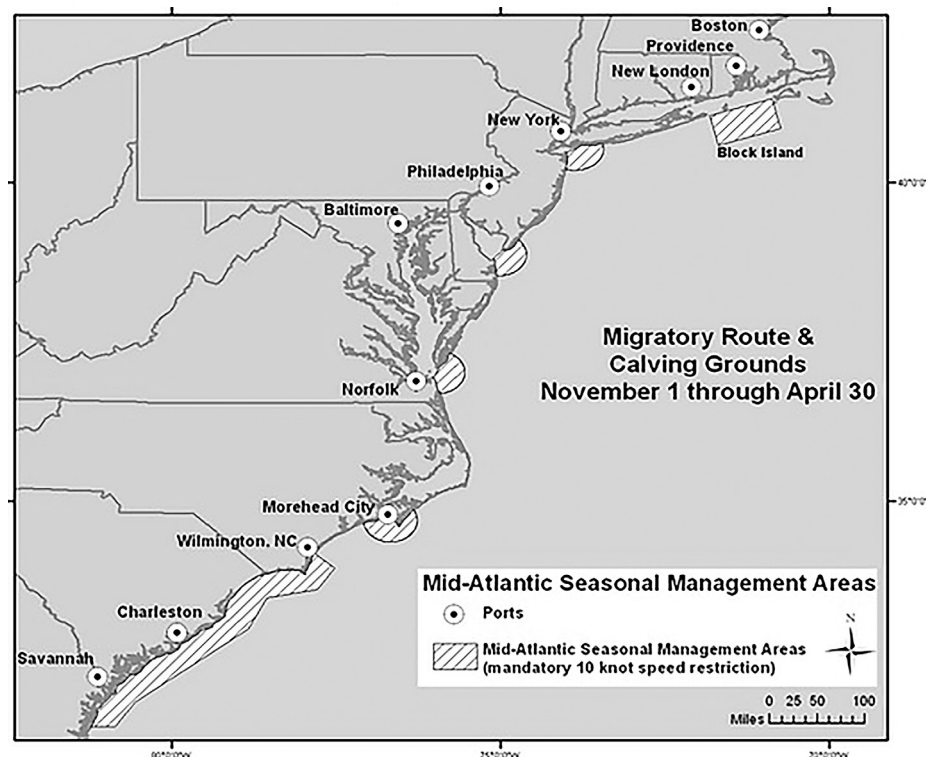
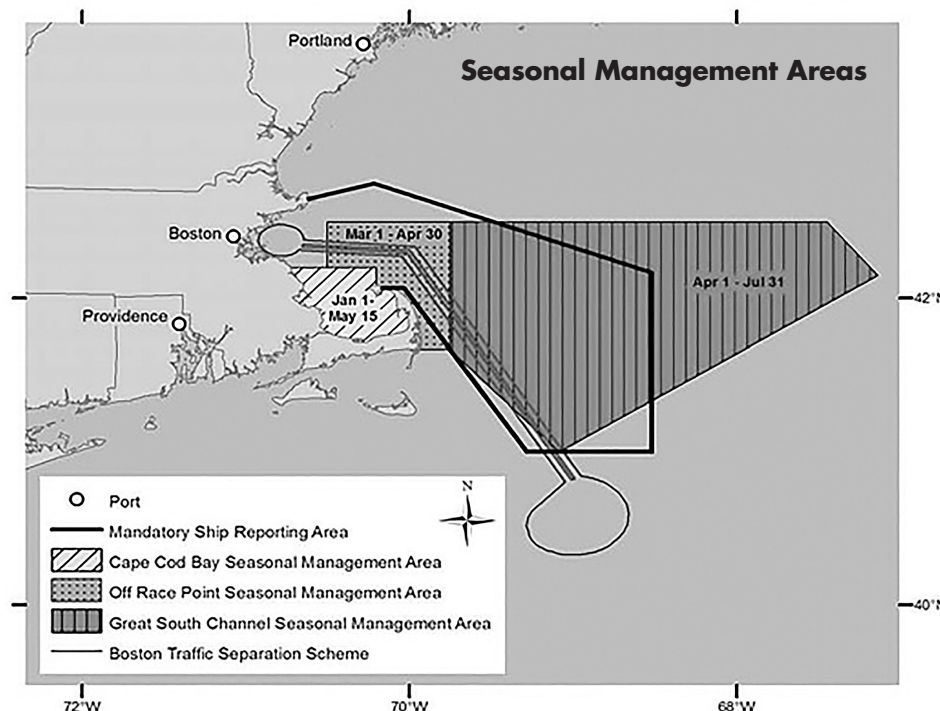
- Areas where right whales have been recently seen or heard.

Mariners are encouraged to reduce speeds to 10 knots or less while transiting through these areas, which are in effect for 15 days. Better yet, if you can avoid these areas you are helping conserve the endangered whale.

You can sign up for email notifications on our webpage (search online for GARFO) and select "Right Whale Slow Zones" under the Regional New England/Mid-Atlantic subscription topics. You can also follow us on Facebook (@NOAAFisheriesNEMA) and Twitter (@NOAAFish_GARFO) for announcements. Information on seasonal right whale speed regulations can also be [found here \(search online for right whale vessel speed regulations\)](#).



Example Slow Zone announcement



Update on Swordfish and Shark Permits

On June 1, 2021, a final rule that modifies the retention limits and related regulatory procedures for some swordfish and shark permit types will become effective. Specifically, the rule increases the default trip limit from zero, two, or three, to eighteen swordfish per vessel per trip for three commercial permit types.

The limit for the Florida Swordfish Management Area will remain at zero swordfish per vessel per trip. In addition, this rule establishes a combined default trip limit of three smoothhound, non-blacknose small coastal sharks, and/or non-prohibited large coastal sharks for the Highly Migratory Species Commercial Caribbean Small Boat (CCSB) permit.

This final rule also modifies the in-season adjustment procedures for the Atlantic HMS CCSB permit swordfish and shark retention limits consistent with other swordfish and shark permits.

For more information about the rule please visit the Atlantic HMS Management Division website.

Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Research Surveys Underway

With protocols in place to operate safely during the pandemic, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center aerial and ship-based surveys are well underway this spring.

Marine Mammal Surveys

Aerial surveys focused on marine mammals have been flying through the winter. For three days in January, Center scientists flew along the Northeast coast looking for gray seals and their pupping colonies, photographing from a window in the NOAA Twin Otter airplane. NOAA Fisheries has been conducting regular aerial surveys since 2005 to keep an eye on the recolonization of habitats by gray seals.

Most of the aerial surveys have focused on documenting North Atlantic right whales in the Northeast region. Many whales have been found south of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, where they appear to be staying in greater numbers and for longer periods than in the past. Right whale use of areas south and west of Nantucket Shoals has been documented in just the last 10 years.

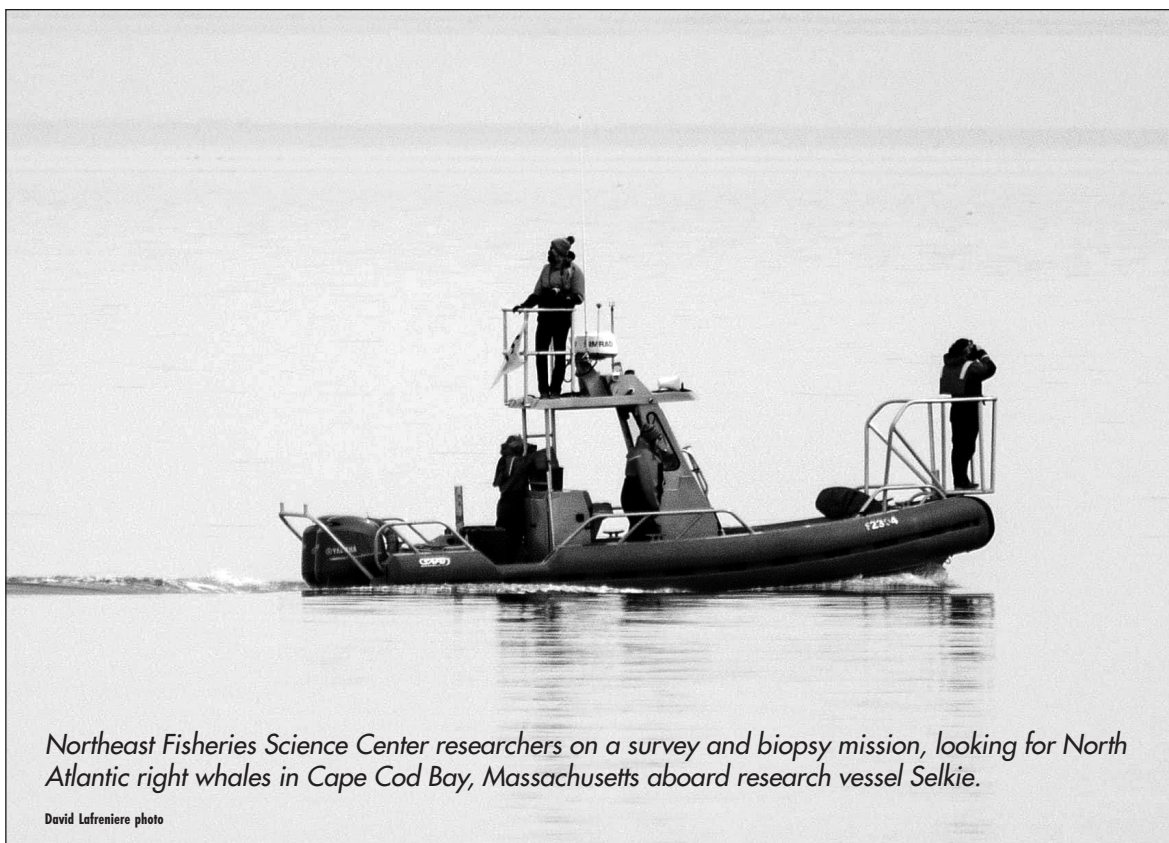
The aerial team will be flying through June 15 before shifting to another Center project for the summer, which will be conducted in waters from Halifax, Nova Scotia to North Carolina. The summer aerial and shipboard marine mammal survey effort is part of the long-running Atlantic Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species. The goal is to collect information to update abundance estimates for several marine mammal species and the Atlantic marine mammal stock assessment reports, and see how populations may be changing over time. The NOAA Twin Otter airplane will return to conducting right whale surveys in October.

North Atlantic right whales have also been the focus of small boat based studies in Cape Cod Bay this spring. Work began in March and ran until early May, when most of the whales leave the bay. The researchers focused on taking photographs to use in identifying individual whales. They also collected small skin samples from whales not previously sampled for population genetic studies.

Fish Surveys

There are also surveys underway involve fish. Two of the three roughly 20-day legs of the spring Bottom Trawl Survey on the NOAA Ship Henry B. Bigelow have been completed, with Leg 3 scheduled to end May 31. This survey includes the area from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, to the northern part of the Gulf of Maine. Our Gulf of Maine Bottom Longline Survey and Coastal Shark Bottom Longline Surveys, both conducted on commercial fishing vessels, got underway in late April and should be completed by the end of May.

For more information, contact Shelley Dawicki via email at shelley.dawicki@noaa.gov.



Northeast Fisheries Science Center researchers on a survey and biopsy mission, looking for North Atlantic right whales in Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts aboard research vessel Selkie.

David Lafreniere photo

Reporting Protected Resources Interactions

Several species in the New England and mid-Atlantic are protected under the Endangered Species Act and/or the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Incidental interactions and entanglements occurring during fishing operations should be reported to NOAA. Interactions can include, but are not limited to, vessel strikes and animals being entangled or hooked in fishing gear.

The following table provides details on how to report this information.

PROTECTED SPECIES	HOW TO REPORT INTERACTION
<i>Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon</i>	Send email to Incidental.Take@noaa.gov and report catch on Fishing Vessel Trip Report (FVTR).
<i>Atlantic salmon</i>	Call Dan Kircheis 207-866-7320 and report catch on FVTR.
<i>Sea turtles</i>	Report catch on FVTR even if observer is onboard at the time the incident occurs.
<i>Marine mammals (seals, whales, and dolphins)</i>	<p>Complete the Marine Mammal Serious Injury and Mortality Reporting Form within 48 hours of incident. Download a reporting form or submit your report online here: https://go.usa.gov/xsRgm</p> <p>Reports must be filed even if observer is onboard at the time the incident occurs.</p> <p>Large whale entanglements or vessel strikes should also be reported to the US Coast Guard or 866-755-6622 as soon as possible.</p>



The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

More Captains Are Hooked on Electronic Reporting

Starting this fall most GARFO permitted commercial and recreational fishermen will be required to report vessel trip reports electronically (eVTR) but you can start reporting electronically any time! To help this transition we continue to improve our eVTR apps based on user feedback.



One recent improvement is that we have developed a new web app that can be used with an internet browser on any device. This is in place of the app for Android devices. We are also continuing to improve our Fish Online (FOL) app for Apple devices. Fishermen who are already reporting electronically are having positive experiences and are providing input to our Port Agents. This information is provided to our developers who may incorporate it into future versions of the apps.

Captain Mark Palombo

Captain Mark Palombo, *F/V Terri Ann*, fishes for lobster and Jonah crabs out of Sandwich, MA, and has been reporting electronically via our Fish Online (FOL) eVTR for iOS app since 2020. When he first started using it, Captain Palombo was hooked after about ten trips and never considered using paper VTRs again. He finds electronic reporting more efficient than paper reporting for a variety of reasons:

- Easier to sell to multiple dealers.
- Easier to track what you did and did not sell.
- Easier to find trap numbers and stat areas.
- Ability to email the VTR to yourself so you have a record of it.
- Use of pre-populated fields so you don't have to enter the same information over and over again.
- Straightforward and relatively easy for owners and captains to learn how to use.

Captain Palombo notes that, "Any one of us technologically challenged people can figure it out."

Captain and New England Fishery Management Council member Vincent Balzano

Captain and Council member Vincent Balzano, *F/V Northern Lights*, Portland, ME, uses the FOL eVTR for iOS app to report his trips electronically. He has been reporting electronically long enough that he experienced several software updates in this iterative development process that were frustrating to accommodate. However, he thinks that the most recent version of this reporting software is more reliable and intuitive, and he was able to figure out an issue on his own. Captain Balzano wants to be finished with trip reporting as soon as he leaves his boat, and says that electronic reporting gets this done for him.

New York Partners Offer eVTR Training

In addition to GARFO's efforts, other partners in the region are also contributing to transition from paper to electronic reporting and providing information and assistance. In New York, the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Suffolk County is providing eVTR training on either of the FOL apps and the eTrips app to commercial fishermen. They will:

- Work with approximately 240 federally and state permitted commercial fishermen.
- Provide one-on-one and group training on eVTRs using a Smartphone or tablet.
- Give a free computer tablet to 40 captains who are actively reporting electronically.
- Provide follow-up support to fishermen.

For more information and to participate in this program please contact CCE Fisheries Specialist, Tara McClintock at 631-740-6486 or email taf4@cornell.edu.

Questions about electronic reporting in our region?

- Call our Industry Support line at 978 -281-9188.
- Contact your [local Port Agent](#) (Search online for GARFO Port Agents).

We Changed the Way You Access Fish Online

Beginning June 1, the way vessel owners and operators login to our Fish Online (FOL) web portal changed. Instead of entering your permit number and PIN combination, you must now login using your personal FOL user account. This is part of our transition to full electronic vessel reporting and permitting beginning later this year and our efforts to increase your account's security. It will also enable vessel owners to give access, or "entitlements," to their vessel's records to other trusted people while being able to manage multiple vessels in one account. We began implementing this process in 2020 and continue to reach out to vessel owners and operators to provide information and offer technical assistance.



Vessel Owners

Earlier this year, in anticipation of our annual vessel permit renewal season, we mailed instructions to vessel owners on how create their accounts. Owners must use their personal usernames and passwords to login to their accounts to:

- Use services such as permit renewals.
- Review landings data submitted by operators and dealers.
- Provide account access to other trusted people.
- Manage multiple vessels in one account.
- If you are a vessel owner and have not yet created your login credentials, we strongly encourage you to do so.

Vessel Operators

Vessel operators also need a FOL account to use any of GARFO's eVTR applications (FOL iOS or web app) and to view their previously submitted eVTRs. Starting last month, we began sending letters to vessel operators that provide instructions and a special code needed to set up an account. We will continue this process throughout the summer. Once vessel operators receive a letter in the mail from us, they should create their user accounts as soon as possible by going to the [How to Create an Account in Fish Online](#) instructions located on our Vessel Trip Reporting web page. These step-by-step directions demonstrate how to create a validated FOL account by using either the Credential Security Code (CSC) in the letter mailed to you or by calling our Help Desk.

Questions?

For assistance with obtaining your CSC code, entitling vessels, or creating your FOL account:

Call our Industry Support line at 978 -281-9188 from the phone number listed on your vessel permit. This is needed to verify your identity.

Contact your [local Port Agent](#) (search online for GARFO Port Agent)

Visit our Vessel Trip Reporting web page (search online for GARFO VTR).

Reporting Reminders for For-hire Vessels and Tilefish Anglers

As the recreational fishing season gets going, we remind vessel operators about our current reporting requirements:

For-hire (party and charter) vessels that hold permits for a [Mid-Atlantic managed fishery](#) (summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, mackerel, squid, butterfish, spiny dogfish, bluefish, and tilefish) **must** submit electronic VTRs within 48 hours for all trips carrying passengers for hire.

Vessels issued only a Northeast multispecies (groundfish) charter/party permit may report via paper or electronic VTRs, until later this fall when [e-VTRs will be required](#).

[Tilefish anglers on private vessels](#) must submit their VTRs electronically for any recreational trips targeting or retaining golden and blueline tilefish within 24 hours of returning to port.

All fishermen are strongly encouraged to start reporting all of their trips electronically as soon as possible. You can choose from several approved smart device and web-based apps.

For more information and technical support:

Go to our [Vessel Trip Reporting](#) web page (search online for GARFO eVTR).

Read our [Vessel Trip Reporting Instructions](#) (search online for GARFO VTR).

Contact your [local Port Agent](#) (search online for GARFO Port Agent).

