

GULF COAST MEDIA

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Bethany McCourt

**Bethany McCourt
Sales Representative**

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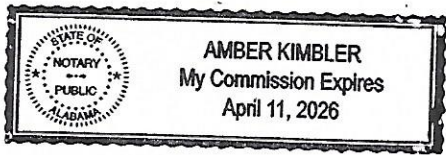
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This 7th day of February, 2025

Amber Kimbler

**Amber Kimbler
Notary Public for Alabama**

My commission expires on April 11, 2026



WHALES

FROM PAGE A1

typically spotted in the Atlantic Ocean around New England, mid-Atlantic and the U.S. southeast, Carmichael said. To ensure safety of the whales and viewers, she said it is best to stay at least 500 yards, or "about five football fields," away from any whale sighted in the Gulf.

Whale sightings can be reported to 877-942-5343 (877 WHALE-HELP) or to the coast guard via VHF-FM CH 16. As right whales are "slow moving animals," they are at a high risk of boat collisions. Carmichael said that if a vessel were to intentionally approach a whale, the driver could be charged with a violation of federal law.

Carmichael said the pair of right whales was last spotted off the Florida coast in early

January. One of the whales was confirmed to be adult female, Curlew, while the other could not be confirmed. However, Carmichael said Curlew typically travels with another adult female whale named Koala.

Other sources, such as the Right Whale Sighting Network, Gulf State Park and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute Facebook pages, identified the non-confirmed whale as Koala.

"It is estimated that reproductive adult females comprise less than 25% of the remaining right whale population, making sightings of adult females even more rare," Carmichael said.

FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's post states the two whales could be spotted throughout the Alabama Gulf Coast and the Florida Panhandle or West Coast "in the coming days and weeks."

The post also states that "very little is known" about right whale migration to the Gulf, which President Donald Trump recently renamed the Gulf of America via an executive order.

"Despite their enormous size, right whales maintain a low profile (like an alligator or log) and are often difficult to spot," the FWC post reads. "Boaters are urged to post a lookout. If a whale is spotted, slow down and operate at a slow speed or put your engine in neutral if possible."

The post also states to "never pursue or follow a whale" but to "assess the scene" and leave the area in a slow, cautious manner.

Marine mammals are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the post states, and right whales are also protected under the Endangered Species Act, corroborating what Carmichael said about the federal violation, stating it is "against the law (50 CFR 224.103) and 500 yards must be maintained between the whale and any vessel, non-motorized equipment and aircraft."

"Every winter, many right whales travel more than 1,000 miles from their feeding grounds off Canada and New England to the warm coastal waters off the southern United States," the FWC post reads. "These waters are where pregnant right whales typically give birth and nurse their young, but other adult and juvenile whales are also regular visitors."

The Gulf State Park's Facebook post states Koala and Curlew were spotted near St. Augustine, Florida, on Dec. 20, 2024. It also requested anyone who posted pictures of the whales along the Alabama coast to tag Gulf State Park Alabama.

The post from Right Whale Sighting Network states a previously sighted right

whale, Snowcone, "brought her very young calf" to the area in 2020 during the calving season. The calf was "struck by two different small vessels" just weeks apart in their journey back north.

"Right whales in the Gulf do occur, although they are rare," the Right Whale Sighting Network post reads. "We beat this drum often, but it is crucial for people to keep their distance and report sightings as soon as possible."

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website, the North Atlantic right whale is one among two other species of right whale, the North Pacific right whale and the Southern right whale, "which is found in the southern hemisphere."

North Atlantic right whales can weigh up to 140,000 pounds and measure up to 52 feet in length, the NOAA website states. Their lifespan is typically up to 70 years.

Commercial whalers hunted North Atlantic right whales "to the brink of extinction" by the early 1890s. The whales got their name "from being the 'right' whales to hunt" as they would float after they were killed.

"Whaling is no longer a threat, but they have never recovered to pre-whaling numbers, and human interactions still present the greatest danger to this species," the website reads. "Entanglement in fishing gear and vessel strikes are the leading causes of North Atlantic right whale mortality."

Another cause of concern, the website states, is the increasing level of noise in the ocean from human activities, which "may interfere" with how right whales communicate with each other and "increase their stress levels."



PHOTO BY FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION UNDER NOAA PERMIT 20155
Two North Atlantic right whales, identified as Curlew and Koala, were spotted off the Alabama coast in Orange Beach on Feb. 2.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY ORANGE BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Human impacts "continue to threaten the survival" of right whales, according to the NOAA website, and there are only about 70 active reproducing females in the estimated population of 470. This species was added to the list of species covered under the Endangered Species Act in 1970.

The website also states that this species of right whale has experienced "an ongoing Unusual Mortality Event" (UME) since 2017. UME, which impacts more than 20% of the population, consists of whales reported to be ill, sublethally injured, seriously injured and dead.

"Individuals are only counted once in the UME," the website reads. "Scientists estimate that only about one

third of North Atlantic right whale deaths are detected."

With the biggest threat mentioned by NOAA being entanglements in fishing gear, vessel strikes, climate change and ocean noise, the website encourages everyone to report whale sightings "from Virginia to Maine" at (866) 755-6922 and from Florida to North Carolina "at the previously mentioned number, Whale Alert app and coast guard channel." The app and channel can be used for reports from any location.

"Numerous organizations around the country are trained and ready to respond," the NOAA website reads. "Never approach or try to save an injured or entangled animal yourself — it can be dangerous to both the

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BALDWIN COUNTY COMMISSION NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Baldwin County Alabama
Flood Hazard Management Plan

Notice is hereby given that the Baldwin County Commission will conduct a public hearing concerning An update to the Baldwin County, Alabama Flood Hazard Management Plan.


The public hearing will be conducted during the regular meeting of the Baldwin County Commission, which is scheduled for **Tuesday, February 18, 2025, beginning at 10:00 a.m.**, at the Baldwin County Fairhope Satellite Courthouse, County Commission Meeting Chambers-2nd Floor, 1100 Fairhope Avenue, Fairhope AL 36532.

Information related to the plan can be viewed online at <https://baldwincountyal.gov/departments/building-inspection>

or in the office of the Baldwin County Building Department 201 East Section Avenue, Foley, AL 36535 during normal business hours. You can also speak with someone by telephone about the plan by calling (251)-972-6837 ext. 2693.


You may submit comments about the plan by email to: buildingdepartment@baldwincountyal.gov, or by sending correspondence to the Baldwin County Building Department, 201 East Section Avenue, Foley, Alabama, 36535. If you would like to address the Baldwin County Commission in person, please attend the public hearing at the time and location listed above.

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, disability, or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or those requiring language translation services should contact Mindy Smith at the Baldwin County Building Department at (251) 972-6837 or mindy.smith@baldwincountyal.gov



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