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February 2019



STOP! **Florida/Atlantic Seismic Testing**

A Message from Julie Ferreira, *Chairperson*

Most of us know that our administration in Washington, D.C. has proposed opening a large swath of our country's offshore drilling reserves along the east coast to oil companies. And in response, in late November, The National Marine Fisheries Service issued "Incidental Harassment Authorizations" (IHSs). Those permits authorized five companies to harm or harass marine mammals while conducting seismic air gun blasting in an area twice the size of California, stretching from Cape May, N. J. to Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Fearing the drastic effects of seismic testing on marine life, in December 2018, the National Sierra Club along with the National Resources Defense Council, Surfrider, and other environmental groups filed suit in the U. S. District Court of South Carolina. The suit claims that the National Marine Fisheries Service violated the Marine Mammal Protection Act, Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act when it issued the IHAs in late November.

In the government's own studies, it was estimated that seismic air gun blasting in the Atlantic Ocean could harass or harm marine mammals like dolphins and whales (which depend on sound to feed, mate and communicate) hundreds of thousands of times. Seismic air gun blasting would also jeopardize the iconic North Atlantic right whale, a critically endangered species, according to 28 leading right whale specialists.

How serious is our administration about moving forwards with drilling off the Atlantic coastline? Even though the government was shut down for over a month, the Trump administration called the permitting employees at the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) back (without pay) to continue processing the permit applications from five seismic testing companies proposing to survey off the East Coast. That is **SERIOUS**.

Luckily on January 18th, a Charleston, S. C. federal judge initiated an injunction saying that work to issue permits for offshore seismic exploration cannot continue until the partial federal government shutdown ends. Judge Richard Gergel also blocked all federal agencies, including BOEM, from working

on the permits until after he rules on a motion filed by the South Carolina Attorney General aimed at blocking planned seismic testing and offshore drilling. The motion was filed earlier in January to join the lawsuit against the federal government filed by sixteen South Carolina cities and town and also the state Small Business Chamber of Commerce.

A Call to ACTION!

PLEASE write to Governor DeSantis! His election campaign platform included opposition to offshore oil drilling, but it was lacking details.

NOW is the time for him to take a position. Go to Nassau Sierra Club's <https://www.airwag.org/> and click on the "**How to Help**" tab for a sample letter to Governor DeSantis about seismic testing.

It is **URGENT** that he be clear that seismic testing has inherent dangers that outweigh any benefit to Florida. Nine state attorney generals from the Mid-Atlantic coastal states intervened in the December 2018 lawsuit on our behalf. It is time for Governor DeSantis and Ashley Moody, the incoming attorney general, to speak on behalf of the citizens of Florida.

What the Heck is AIRWAG?

Nassau Sierra Club's AIRWAG, or the Amelia Island Right Whale Action Group, is a newly formed Nassau County Sierra Club sub-committee. The Sierra AIRWAG group was formed last spring after a Nassau Sierra monthly meeting when Barb Zoodsma from the local NOAA office gave us a report on the current status of right whales. People were shocked to hear the high number of right whale deaths in 2017-2018. There were 20 in all, coupled with the lack of calves that were born during the 2018 season. These statistics had left experts and whale advocates gravely concerned about the future of the species.

The estimated population of right whales in the North Atlantic has fallen from around 500 in 2010 to now only 411. Of those, only about 71 are believed to be females capable of giving birth to calves. Right whales are at a point where more are dying than are being born. The species is presently not self-sustaining.

Each year a small number of the few remaining right whales migrate to our area from their feeding grounds in Canada and the Bay of Fundy. Their preferred calving grounds are right here off the north Florida/GA coast, with Amelia Island being just about ground zero.

There is exciting news, however. The 2019 season has started off with a bang! To date, four babies have been spotted swimming with their mothers in our area, and we are hoping for this season to just keep getting better.

Continued on page 2

What the Heck is Nassau Sierra AIRWAG? (Continued from page 1)

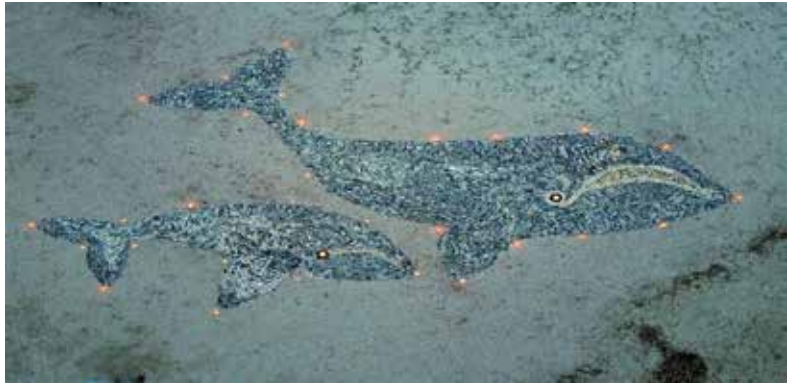
Exciting Sierra AIRWAG activities have been planned for the future, and the best way to keep up with them will be via Nassau Sierra's website (airwag.org) which was created by Sierra Club member, Chuck Oliva. There will be many ways to get involved.

Sierra AIRWAG has already been quite busy by helping to sponsor the large right whale sculpture at Main Beach in November that was made out of oyster shells by local artist and AIRWAG member, Lauri Holton DeGaris. All the shells used were collected by Fernandina Beach/Nassau County residents from the beach. This was truly a magical event.

In January, Sierra's AIRWAG sponsored Julie Albert, coordinator of the right whale sighting hotline for the Marine Resources Council, to give two local seminars on right whale sighting and reporting. In all, around 100 participants were trained. Please keep an eye out for these

critically endangered animals and future Sierra AIRWAG activities.

Through the combined efforts of the Nassau Sierra Club and AIRWAG, speakers have been sponsored, club members are doing educational outreach in local schools, creating plans to build a float for the Shrimp Festival, and other planned activities.



How to Spot a Right Whale



To identify right whales, look for these characteristics:

- Both sides of their tails are black with no white on them.
- They are smooth backed and do not have a dorsal fin.
- They spout a V-shaped spray of water.
- They have whitish patches of raised and roughened skin (called callosities) on top of their heads.
- They can't hold their breath very long, so right whales spend their time at the surface and may be seen in shallow waters.

February seems to be the best month for right whale sightings, though whales are present and observed from December to March. Humpback whales also migrate through our waters on their way to their Dominican Republic winter waters. But they usually move through earlier and later than right whales.

Right whales are critically endangered and federal law prohibits any vessel or person from intentionally approaching these animals closer than 500 yards. Even from that distance, it is an amazing experience to see the rarest and most endangered of all the great whales. Keep your binoculars with you and scan the water as you walk the beach or are boating.

REPORT YOUR SIGHTING! If you spot a whale you can call 1-888-97-WHALE. If you report immediately, and the sighting is verified, ships can be diverted from crossing a whale's path.

KNOW YOUR LOCATION! This includes your city and the nearest cross streets or beach access number. This is crucial for verification of your sighting.

Volunteers are critical in helping to stop possible ship strikes which cause the largest number of right whale deaths. The busiest shipping lanes in the southeast Atlantic area are between Jacksonville and Brunswick. Our local Fernandina Port, which is busy in its own right, is right in the middle. So it is important that we divert vessels around areas where mothers and calves are swimming in our waters.

Sierra Club's AIRWAG Visits Yulee Elementary Science Club North American Right Whale Community Outreach

By Mary Kramek

Julie Ferreira and Mary Kramek, as members of the Amelia Island Right Whale Action Group, Sierra Club subcommittee (AIRWAG), visited with 5th graders in October. The purpose was to present information about the Sierra Club and the local connection to the plight of this highly endangered whale.

The Scientists of the Future Club, sponsored by teacher Rebecca Baker, watched a video about the whales produced by Harbor Branch Oceanography Institute and the Marine Resources Council. The students then participated in a whale making project utilizing STEAM, or Science, Technology, Art and Math concepts to produce a pod of five adults and two juvenile lightweight North Atlantic Right Whale sculptures. Two are displayed at the school. The other five have made appearances at the Fernandina City Hall November Right Whale Proclamation Ceremony, the Right Whale Festival in Jacksonville, the Sierra Club AIRWAG Meeting at the library, and at the Peck Center for the December Wild Night's right whale presentation. One also now resides at the local NOAA offices!



March 30th, Sat., 7 am -3pm

***RECYCLE EVENT*! City of Fernandina Beach**

Paper shredding along with a recycling event. **Accepted items:** glass/plastic bottles, propane tanks, steel, aluminum cans, paper, cardboard, metal, **electronics, appliances**, oil, filters, **tires**, hazardous chemicals, fluorescent bulbs, paint, **batteries**, non-prescription medications. Event is for residential use only.

PLEASE BRING A NONPERISHABLE ITEM FOR DONATION TO THE BARNABAS FOOD PANTRY.



LOCATION:

Maintenance/Utilities Complex
1017 South 5th Street
Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

April 27th, Saturday, 9-11 am ★ **Free**

Waterway CleanUp & Free Lunch at White Oak Plantation!

Sierra Club is partnering with White Oak Conservancy and the St. Mary's Riverkeeper in a "waterway" clean up. You will be supplied with gloves and bags. **YOUR BAGS OF TRASH earn you a wrist band from your site captain for a FREE LUNCH at White Oak Conservancy after the cleanup. RESERVATIONS REQUIRED! Call Chuck Oliva at (347) 495-7771 to reserve NOW!** (Space limited to 20.) **NO PETS PLEASE!** Animal Conservation Area! (Directions to White Oak Plantation will be given at the Clean Up site on April 27th to cleanup participants.)



May 18, Saturday, – TWO EVENTS!

At Main Beach, Fernandina Beach

HANDS ACROSS the SAND! 11:30 am

A popular annual event! Join us in making a statement against offshore drilling and for clean energy! The photo and posters are well worth the trip!



WILD AMELIA -Wildlife Festival, 10 am – 3pm

At nearby Atlantic Recreation Center - This popular event features groups from all over the area featuring our wildlife and our coastal environment. Come visit our Sierra booth! Great for children and adults alike, this is truly a fun educational experience for all.

THURSDAYS, From Feb. 7th thru March 14th

Join others in a seminar on everything from dune protection to horseshoe crab populations on Amelia Island. Classes on Thursdays! Sign up at Amelia Island Beach and Marine Life Conservancy: registrarAIBMLC@gmail.com

Feb. 12, Tues., 7:00 pm, Peck Center

Ms. Anna Laws, NEW Executive Director of the St. Marys Riverkeeper, will be the guest speaker at Wild Amelia. She will discuss the threats to our watersheds and what people can do to mitigate them. Ms. Laws earned her Masters of Science in Conservation Biology from the Durrell Institute of Conservation Ecology in the United Kingdom. Welcome her!

Feb. 15, Fri., 5:30-7 pm, Florida House

Please join us with Sierra's AIRWAG for a "**Baby Shower**" celebration honoring this season's Right Whale moms and NEW babies at the historic Florida House Inn, 22 S. 3rd St., Cash bar and nibbles.

Feb. 20, Wed., 4:30 pm, Float Design

Please join us with Sierra AIRWAG to discuss the design of the right whale float for the Shrimp Festival Parade at DiAnn Matheny's garage, 321 S. 5th St. All are welcome!

March 1, Fri., 7:00 pm, Movie Night - A Screening!

Please join us at the Fernandina Beach Library to attend a free screening of "**DIRT RICH**". Dirt Rich is a documentary that explores one of our last strategies for reversing the effects of global warming. The footage empowers viewers with knowledge and inspiration to participate in solutions that can literally REVERSE the vast effects of runaway global warming.



March 9 & 10, Sat. and Sun. - Outings Training!

An extensive weekend training to **become an Outings Leader** for Nassau County Sierra Club Group (NCSCG). Be able to share your favorite hikes, kayaking, camping trips, or other outdoor adventures as an outings leader! Training will include First Aid, OLT 101, OLT 102, plus water safety and basic canoeing skills. Participants need to be at least 18 years old. Cost: Current Outings Leaders for NCSCG- no charge. Local NCSCG members \$20; and non-Sierra members \$60. If you are interested in sharing your passion for the outdoors with others, this is for you! **Contact Julie @ (904)583-4388 for more info.**



Students create a pod of North Atlantic right whale sculptures. *See page 2.*

Did you see a **WHALE** on your beach walk? **Report your sighting, it could save a whale's life!** See Page 2 for reporting instructions. **CALL!**
* **1-888-97-WHALE**



Nassau Sierra Club THANKS YOU!

David Scott Murphy

Nassau County Sierra Club members wish to send our heartfelt sympathies to the family of David Scott Murphy. He passed away recently. His family requested "in lieu of flowers" that donations be made to "Sierra Club" or other conservation organizations. We received several donations on David's behalf. Thank you!

Laurie Moffitt and 'Color It Green'

Nassau Sierra truly appreciates the thoughtful contributions to Nassau Sierra's Amelia Island Right Whale Action Group. On December 4th, Color It Green donated 10% of its sales toward the subcommittee's efforts. As a result, the Nassau Sierra Club was able to offset some expenses incurred in funding the recent Right Whale Training by Julie Albert. We send many thanks for your support!



Nassau County Sierra Group
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