



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

April 2, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretaries Ross and Zinke:

New data suggests that the continued existence of the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale hangs in the balance, and your departments can take steps to prevent further harm to the species.

According to scientists, not a single right whale calf has been spotted this calving season – spelling an unprecedented and potentially disastrous outcome for the population. Last year, only five calves were born and at least seventeen confirmed deaths were recorded. The overwhelming majority of right whale deaths are attributed to entanglements with fishing gear and vessel strikes.

Today, there are only about 430 of these whales remaining, with only about 100 breeding females. At this rate, they are dying out faster than they are reproducing. Scientists predict that the species could go extinct by 2040.

Your departments are currently considering granting companies the authority to further stress these imperiled whales. Proposed seismic airgun surveys along the Atlantic coast directly overlap the breeding, feeding, and migration habitats of the right whales, and include areas off northeast Florida that serve as the exclusive breeding and calving grounds for the animals.

Given the recent news, this species certainly cannot afford the added pressure seismic activity would create. That's why I'm asking you to deny the oil and gas-related applications pending before agencies in your jurisdictions that threaten the North Atlantic right whale, including the Incidental Harassment Authorizations and the geological and geophysical permits.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson".