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Human Resources: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)

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The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the federal agency with stewardship responsibility for our nation's living marine resources. The agency's Woods Hole Laboratory conducts research on fisheries resources and the fishermen who harvest them, and on marine mammals and other protected resources in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean. Information derived from this research is primarily used by those who make management decisions about these resources and their habitats.

Created by Congress in 1871 as a summer sampling station, the laboratory is the world's oldest facility specifically dedicated to marine fisheries research. It became a year-round institution in 1875, and is currently part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service.

Laboratory scientists are primarily interested in three broad areas of research—resource assessment, ecosystem monitoring, and socioeconomics. Resource assessment scientists determine the distribution, size, and productivity of marine fish, shellfish, and marine mammal populations, as well as the effects of fishing and other human activities on those populations. Ecosystem monitoring scientists investigate the role that natural or nonhuman factors (such as climate change and food web dynamics) play in marine populations and the overall ecosystem. Socioeconomic scientists study the social, economic, and cultural effects of fisheries and marine mammal management on coastal communities in the New England and Mid-Atlantic states. Fieldwork by laboratory scientists is supported by two research vessels, the 190-foot Albatross IV and the 160-foot Delaware II.

The Laboratory employs about 175 natural and social scientists, technicians, and administrators. It also houses the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, which annually receives more than 150,000 visitors, including several thousand students on science field trips.

The Laboratory further serves as headquarters for NMFS's Northeast Fisheries Science Center, which coordinates research not only at the Woods Hole Laboratory, but also at four other laboratories in the Northeast (Narragansett, RI; Milford, CT; Highlands, NJ; and Washington, DC). These other laboratories conduct research on marine ecosystem health, aquaculture, habitat conservation, and biodiversity.

Contact Information

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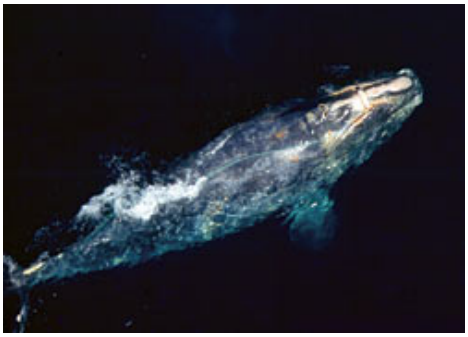
Woods Hole Science Aquarium welcomed a new resident, Lu-Seal. (Photo courtesy of National Marine Fisheries Service)

Enlarge Image

A monkfish caught during a research survey conducted aboard a commercial fishing vessel. (Photo courtesy of National Marine Fisheries Service)



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An endangered North Atlantic right whale

sighted during a NOAA Fisheries whale research flight. NOAA operates the stranding and response network that disentangles whales. (Photo courtesy of National Marine Fisheries Service)

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