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FAU Harbor Branch Marine Mammal Team Researches Endangered North Atlantic Right Whales

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (April 17, 2013) – The Marine Mammal Research and Conservation (MMRC) Program team at FAU’s Harbor Branch recently completed an annual collaborative study of North Atlantic Right Whales (NARW). The most endangered of the great whales inhabiting U.S. waters according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Fisheries Service Office of Protected Resources, NARWs have an estimated remnant population of 500 and are most at-risk from ship strikes and entanglement with fishing gear.

The study, led by Edmund Gerstein, Ph.D., director of marine mammal research and behavior at FAU’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, recorded the acoustic conditions and calls of known NARWs. The information collected will help researchers develop monitoring techniques that can be used to alert and divert approaching ships.

During the current 2012-13 calving season, the international team of researchers conducted photo-identification, surface video and synchronized underwater acoustic recordings of more than 28 NARWs, including 13 different mother and calf pairs of the 18 total pairs sighted in the area this season.

The NARW study was conducted under a special NOAA research permit that allows close approach to the critically endangered great whale species. MMRC researchers have participated in this collaborative effort since its inception in 2010. This study site is in the NARWs Southeast Critical Calving Habitat along the northeast Florida coastline.

For more information, contact Carin Smith at 772-242-2230 or carinsmith@fau.edu.

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About Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute:

Founded in 1971, Florida Atlantic University’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute is a research community of marine scientists, engineers, educators and other professionals focused on Ocean Science for a Better World. The institute drives innovation in ocean engineering, at-sea operations, drug discovery and biotechnology from the oceans, coastal ecology and conservation, marine mammal research and conservation, aquaculture, ocean observing systems and marine education. For more information, visit www.hboi.fau.edu.

About Florida Atlantic University:

Florida Atlantic University, established in 1961, officially opened its doors in 1964 as the fifth public university in Florida. Today, the University, with an annual economic impact of \$6.3 billion, serves more than 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students at sites throughout its six-county service region in southeast Florida. FAU's world-class teaching and research faculty serves students through 10 colleges: the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. FAU is ranked as a High Research Activity institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University is placing special focus on the rapid development of three signature themes – marine and coastal issues, biotechnology and contemporary societal challenges – which provide opportunities for faculty and students to build upon FAU's existing strengths in research and scholarship. For more information, visit www.fau.edu.