

Collision Course

North Atlantic Right Whales and the Shipping Superhighway



● Recorded Whale Mortalities

2017-2025 Unusual Mortality Event (UME)

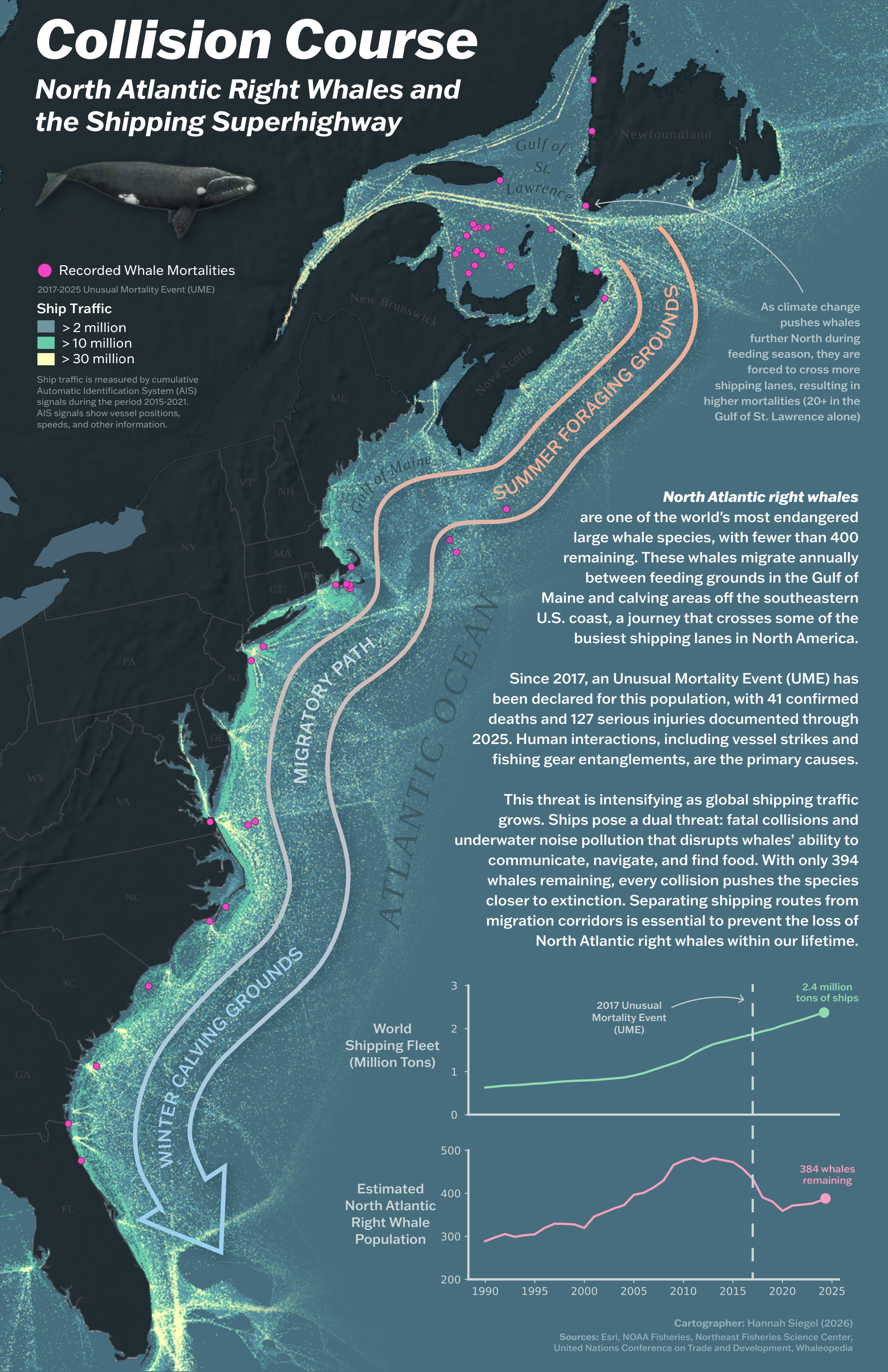
Ship Traffic

■ > 2 million

■ > 10 million

■ > 30 million

Ship traffic is measured by cumulative Automatic Identification System (AIS) signals during the period 2015-2021. AIS signals show vessel positions, speeds, and other information.

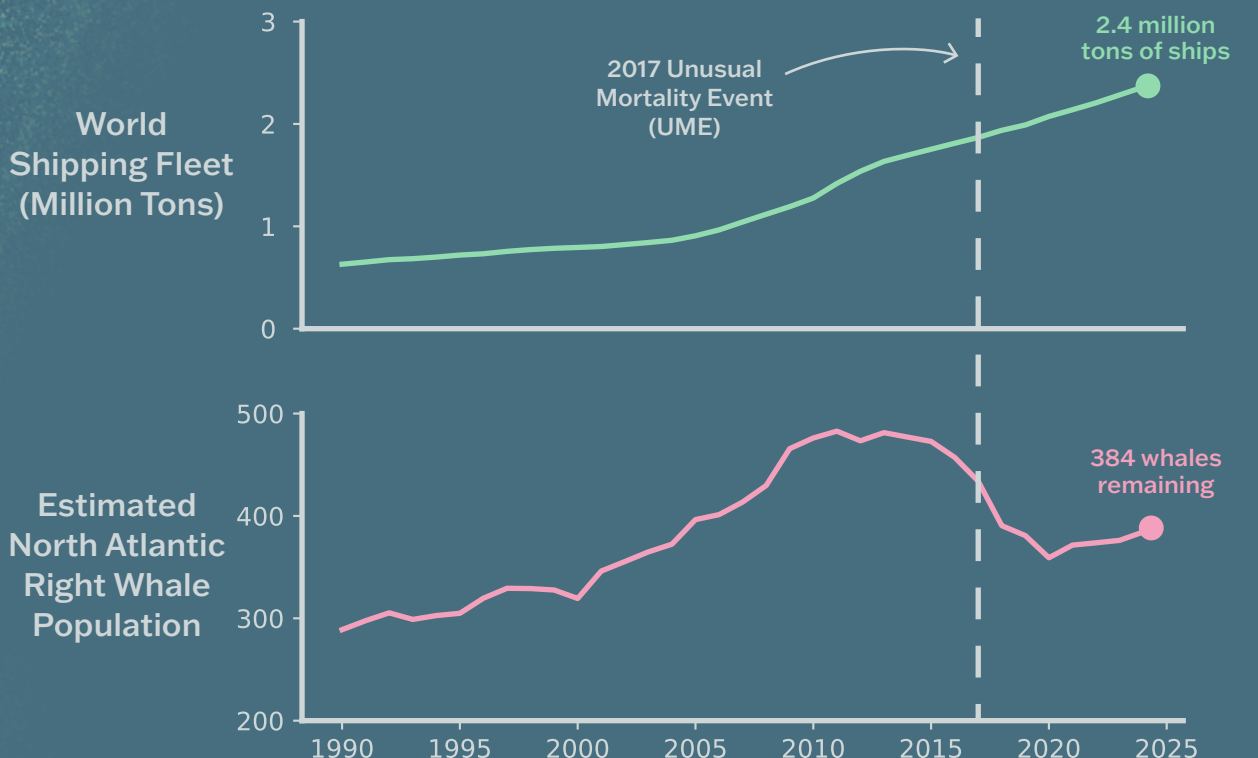


As climate change pushes whales further North during feeding season, they are forced to cross more shipping lanes, resulting in higher mortalities (20+ in the Gulf of St. Lawrence alone)

North Atlantic right whales are one of the world's most endangered large whale species, with fewer than 400 remaining. These whales migrate annually between feeding grounds in the Gulf of Maine and calving areas off the southeastern U.S. coast, a journey that crosses some of the busiest shipping lanes in North America.

Since 2017, an Unusual Mortality Event (UME) has been declared for this population, with 41 confirmed deaths and 127 serious injuries documented through 2025. Human interactions, including vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglements, are the primary causes.

This threat is intensifying as global shipping traffic grows. Ships pose a dual threat: fatal collisions and underwater noise pollution that disrupts whales' ability to communicate, navigate, and find food. With only 394 whales remaining, every collision pushes the species closer to extinction. Separating shipping routes from migration corridors is essential to prevent the loss of North Atlantic right whales within our lifetime.



Cartographer: Hannah Siegel (2026)

Sources: Esri, NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Whaleopedia