A judge has ordered the federal government to publish new steps to protect the endangered right whales. There are fewer than 400 of whales left, scientists say.

We here at FishOn live by a simple creed: There’s no such thing as a wrong whale. Some are just more right than others. And the rightest of the cetaceans right now obviously is the North Atlantic right whale. But for all the wrong reasons.

It’s been a relatively quiet summer in the water for the imperiled species, which in its own way is good news. But out of water is a different story.

A federal judge last week in Washington, D.C., laid down the law, giving NOAA Fisheries until the end of May 2021 to publish a final rule of action to provide more protections for the whales whose numbers have fallen below 400. And so the clock is ticking and U.S. District Court Judge James Boasberg made it clear he will not brook tardiness.

On Thursday, Boasberg said (NOAA Fisheries) would have to vacate its 2014 conclusion that lobstering could continue because it knew the right whales were dying at more than three times the rate sustainable for a species that had dwindled to no more than 400," according to a story in The Portland Press Herald. "But he delayed the vacated order until May 31, adding extra bite to his deadline for a final rule."

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So, with the deadline in place, and a powder keg of a federal law suit still churning through the legal system, coastal states and fisheries regulators must move with more alacrity to develop their individual plans of protection for approval by NOAA Fisheries. The agency's timeline calls for it to issue a draft regulation sometime in the fall.

Environmentalists who are waging the lawsuit against NOAA Fisheries had sought a Jan. 31, 2021, deadline for a final rule. They also had asked Boasberg to close a 5,000 square-mile area south of Nantucket to vertical buoy lines, which would have rendered the right whale feeding grounds off limits to all lobstering. Boasberg declined.

The gestation period for a female North Atlantic right whale is about a year. The gestation period for the new rule and its protections is now set at nine months.

**Baseball quiz question**

On this date in 1940, the great Ted Williams did something he'd never done before in the big leagues and never would do again in his 19-year, Hall of Fame career. What did Teddy Ballgame do?

**Trade assistance? What trade assistance?**
Let's go to Maine for a moment. It's nice there. Let the quarantine begin.

Back in June, when President Donald Trump promised federal trade assistance to help the Maine lobster industry — and by extension, its contemporaries in Massachusetts — rebuild tariff-decimated markets in China and the European Union, our nose twitched in early-onset skepticism. To borrow from Gertrude Stein, it seemed there was no there there.

The promise, made on the fly after a Friday afternoon visit to Maine, was woefully short of information, detail, structure and that new-car smell you get when you know the check is actually in the mail.

On June 24, Trump ordered the Department of Agriculture to develop a program akin to those it created to help Midwestern corn, soybean and pork farmers overcome their own tariff travails. He gave the aggies 60 days to get ‘er done.

Now it appears the collective noses of the Maine congressional delegation be twitching, as well. In a story in Washington D.C.-based The Hill, Maine's senators and House members sound a tad curious on the lack of activity.

This 60-day period is now drawing to a close, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture has yet to take any further action," the delegation wrote in a letter to the USDA, which probably already knew that. "We urge you to keep the president's promise and immediately assist the thousands of Mainers whose livelihoods depend on this critical industry."

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, a Democrat, went further, raising the possibility that Trump's meeting with the lobster and seafood industry might not amount to much more than a presidential photo op.

"I'm sure in his mind, appealing to the lobstermen was, you know, showing concern for working people and an important industry in our state," Pingree told The Hill. "But I don't think it's a positive thing to do if you're just making empty promises, particularly for an industry that has a lot of reasons to be worried."

Then, poof! Out of the blue on Friday, the Trump administration announced it has reached a deal with the EU to cut tariffs on about $300 million of $1.3 trillion worth of trade between the U.S and the EU — including lobsters. The EU agreed to eliminate tariffs on U.S. lobsters for the next five years with the intent of making the move permanent.

The U.S. sent $111 million worth of lobsters to the EU in 2017, the last year the market was competitively open to the U.S. lobster exporters.

The trade deal announced Friday is independent of what Trump promised in Maine and stems from negotiations ongoing since 2018. And China is still out there.
Baseball quiz answer

In the first game of a doubleheader at Fenway Park against the Detroit Tigers, Williams, six days before his 22nd birthday, recorded his only pitching appearance for the Red Sox.

The Tigers were blowing out the Red Sox 11-1 in the top of the eighth inning when Boston manager Joe Cronin brought Williams in from left field to pitch to the bottom of the Tiger order. Williams surrendered a leadoff single to Frank Croucher before exiting the frame unscathed. Things got tougher in the ninth. Pinky Higgins — later to manage Williams in Boston — and future Hall of Famer Hank Greenberg singled to leave runners at the corners. Williams struck out Rudy York looking, gave up a run-scoring fielder's choice and induced future teammate Birdie Tebbetts to tap back to the mound. That left Williams with a career earned run average of 4.50.

Ding, ding, ding . . . bonus baseball quiz answer

The Boston catcher for Williams that day was journeyman Joe Glenn, who also was behind the plate for the Yankees in 1933 when Babe Ruth beat the Red Sox in the final pitching performance of his career.

Where else are you going to get stuff like this?

What was that? Um, we can't print that.

As always, no fish were harmed in the making of this column.

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