

GULF OF MAINE LOBSTER FOUNDATION



For Immediate Release
August 11, 2009

GOMLF Contact:
Laura Ludwig, 207-985-8088

Continued Federal Funding for Lobster Industry

The Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) announces that, through the steadfast support of Senators Snowe and Collins, it has received further appropriations to help provide economic relief to Maine lobstermen in order to protect large whales. Congressional support of the Bottom Line Project makes it possible for GOMLF to assist a significant portion of the Maine lobster industry in the transition to sinking groundlines and thus comply with the federal whale rules.

GOMLF was recently informed that federal funds would be allotted for the state of Maine to continue the Bottom Line Project groundline exchange program and to conduct research through the Maine Department of Marine Resources (Maine DMR) during the next fiscal year. With the bulk of the funds, GOMLF, a 501(c)3 non-profit research organization founded by members of the lobster industry, will be able to continue administering program, while Maine DMR will conduct a gear survey with the balance.

As of April 5, 2009, the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) mandates that sinking groundline be used on the bottom between lobster traps for a large portion of the Maine lobster fishery, and bans the use of floating groundline fished in areas outside of an exemption line, in order to reduce the risk of entanglement to endangered right whales and other large whales. While the ban on the use of floating line may afford greater protection for these animals, it comes at a significant cost to Maine's independent lobster businesses, as the replacement line is considerably more expensive and requires replacement more often. The development of a groundline exchange program in 2006 was essential to facilitate Maine lobstermen's compliance with the requirements of the ALWTRP, and the program was made possible by consistent congressional support since its inception.

In the next 12 months GOMLF will conduct a minimum of four more groundline exchanges to allow the 570+ lobstermen on the waiting list plus new applicants to exchange their floating groundline for sink rope vouchers, as long as funding allows. Additionally, for the first time, GOMLF may also be able to offer the rope exchange to other Maine fixed-gear fishermen, such as hagfish and crab fishermen.

To date, GOMLF has collected over 1.3 million pounds of rope from over 900 lobstermen, and has issued vouchers for sinking groundline worth more than \$1.8 million.