

GULF OF MAINE LOBSTER FOUNDATION

PO Box 523 * Kennebunk, ME 04043 * 207-985-8088 * 207-985-8099fx * gomlf@gwi.net

To: All Maine state and federal lobstermen
From: Laura Ludwig, Bottom Line Project Director
Date: December 14, 2007
Re: 2008 Bottom Line Project survey and registration

In October 2007, the National Marine Fisheries Service published the Final Whale Rule which bans floating groundlines and tailer warps on lobster gear fished in Maine's nearshore and offshore waters outside of an exemption line (see enclosed map).

Due to the support of Maine's congressional representatives, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) has obtained a limited amount of funding available for Maine lobstermen interested in exchanging their old **poly groundlines and tailer warps** for new sink rope.

Because of limited funding, registration for this program will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Only pre-registered lobstermen will be eligible for the program. *If your gear is all fished inside the exemption line, you may not be eligible to participate in the rope exchange program (see enclosed map showing the exemption line).*

During the first phase of the Bottom Line Project in May 2007, 130 lobstermen participated in the rope exchange. Nearly 140,000 pounds of used poly groundlines were collected, for a total voucher value of \$220,000 toward the purchase of new sinking rope. It is our intention that all the collected poly rope will be recycled

For lobstermen who want to exchange their poly groundlines for vouchers toward the purchase of new sinking line, we are planning to offer rope exchanges during the months of March, April and May 2008. All Maine lobstermen who use floating groundlines outside the exemption line are eligible to participate, *even those who participated last May.*

You must fill out the enclosed survey and return it to GOMLF by January 5, 2008, in order to be registered for the next round of rope exchanges. Exact details about the collection dates and locations along the coast will be announced after the surveys are tallied. While this is a **voluntary** rope exchange, hosted by GOMLF with funds approved by Congress, lobstermen are encouraged to take advantage of this financial assistance while it is available in order to comply with the Whale Rule.

Information about the program is listed on the reverse side. Please feel free to contact me on my mobile phone with any questions or comments you may have at (207) 263-5300. **The deadline for survey return is January 5, 2008.**

THE MAINE BOTTOM LINE PROJECT: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO COMPLY WITH THE FEDERAL WHALE RULE

Background: In 2006, Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) requested support from Congress to provide economic assistance to Maine lobstermen who would be financially impacted by the Final Rule of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. Maine's Congressional delegation worked hard to convince Congress to award GOMLF nearly two million dollars for a Maine poly groundline exchange program (the Bottom Line Project), a *voluntary* program for all Maine commercial licenseholders. Additional funding was secured to supplement the program in 2008.

Final Whale Rule: After a significant delay, the Final Whale Rule was released by NMFS in October 2007. Float rope from the lobster fishery has been found on entangled whales, and the Rule seeks to provide protection for endangered whales in the North Atlantic by mandating a **ban on the use of floating groundlines** in many areas of the Gulf of Maine, among other components of the Rule.* Despite efforts by many stakeholders to postpone the enactment of the rule, the published implementation date is October 2008, by which time lobstermen up and down the east coast will be required to comply with the ban outside of certain exempted areas.

Poly Exchange: The Maine Bottom Line Project is for **poly groundlines and tailer warps only**, not endlines. Endlines (buoy lines, up-and-down lines) may continue to use poly at the trap end, for no more than 1/3 of their overall length. Maine commercial lobstermen are invited to bring in their poly groundlines during the 2008 collection period and receive a voucher worth **\$1.40/lb** of poly toward the purchase of sink rope. The poly must be prepared to certain specifications and must be free of sink rope, hog rings, etc., as the rope will be recycled. Details about the exchange, including rope preparation, collection sites and dates, will be sent to all who register for the program.

Sink Rope: Rope manufacturers, distributors and dealers are concerned about the supply of and demand for sink rope as a result of the Final Rule. Lobstermen can assist them by indicating what brand and diameter of rope they intend to purchase to replace their poly groundlines. Please provide this information in the last section of the survey, if you know what brand you will be purchasing. As part of the rope exchange, lobstermen will receive vouchers that will be honored at participating rope dealers for the purchase of sink rope (this includes all rope sold as "whale safe" or "neutrally buoyant"). Registered lobstermen will receive a list of these dealers and the rope they sell.

Survey and Registration: The enclosed Bottom Line survey is your way to tell us whether you want to participate in the exchange or not – **either way, we need to know**. Even if you already filled out our previous survey (in early 2007) and/or brought rope in during the May 2007 rope exchange, we need you to fill out this survey again. We assure you that any information you provide us will be held in strict confidence. Your responses will help us estimate the level of participation and make the best use of program funds, as well as provide important information for rope manufacturers and distributors.

Survey Deadline: January 5, 2008. Fill it out now and help us protect your bottom line. Fold survey as indicated and mail completed survey to:

Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF)
Bottom Line Survey
PO Box 523
Kennebunk ME 04043

For more information on the Bottom Line Project or GOMLF, call Laura Ludwig at (207) 263-5300 or Patten White at (207) 363-6783.

*For more information on the Final Whale Rule, see <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/>.