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**For immediate release**

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Phase II of the Bottom Line Project to Begin in 2008

Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) will conduct several voluntary groundline rope exchanges in 2008 as part of Phase II of the Bottom Line Project, to help lobstermen comply with new federal whale regulations which require them to use sinking groundlines in some areas of the coast. GOMLF, a small Maine-based non-profit organization that involves lobstermen and scientists in collaborative research and outreach projects, was awarded over \$2 million in federal funds to help lobstermen defray the costs of converting their floating groundlines (the line between traps) to sinking line.

The Final Whale Rule, which outlines exact requirements regarding gear modifications and exempted areas, was released by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in October 2007. Among the regulations is the requirement that floating groundlines be replaced by sinking line outside the specified exemption zone by October 1, 2008.

Polypropylene-based rope used in the commercial lobster industry, often called float rope or poly, has been implicated in the entanglement of large whales in the Gulf of Maine – humpbacks, finbacks, right whales, and minke. According to federal fisheries managers, replacing floating groundlines with sink rope may diminish the threat of entanglement.

However, sink rope is heavier and more expensive than the float rope preferred by many lobstermen, and it may not last as long as float rope in conditions typically found in Maine lobstering such as rough and rocky ocean floor and strong currents.

The Phase II rope exchanges will begin no later than March 2008 and will be conducted in at least three different regions of the coast. A survey has been mailed to all Maine commercial lobstermen which will help GOMLF determine the level of participation from those who want to take advantage of the economic assistance. All lobstermen are eligible to bring in their floating groundlines *if any of their gear is fished outside the exempted area* and if they pre-register.

It is important to note that this program is for the exchange of groundlines only. Poly used in the endlines or main warp, while limited in its allowable length, is not required by the Whale Rule to be removed and will not be accepted in the rope exchanges. Upon dropping off their used poly groundlines at a collection site, lobstermen will receive a voucher worth \$1.40 per pound of poly to be used toward the purchase of sinking rope at participating rope vendors.

During Phase I of the Bottom Line Project, held in May 2007, GOMLF collected nearly 140,000 pounds of used poly. During Phase II, GOMLF anticipates the collection and recycling of up to one million pounds of used poly groundlines. It is estimated that there are between 6 million and 9 million pounds of poly groundlines used in the Maine lobster industry, but limited funding will require that this round of rope exchanges will be on a first-come, first-served basis. GOMLF continues to seek future funding for similar economic initiatives.

For more information on the Bottom Line Project, visit [www.gomlf.org](http://www.gomlf.org) or contact Laura Ludwig at the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, 207-263-5300.