

December 2017 Survey Report for New York Bight Whale Monitoring Aerial Surveys

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December 2017

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

hr	Hour
km	Kilometer
SE	Standard error

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tetra Tech, Inc., in coordination with Smultea Environmental Sciences, LLC and Aspen Helicopters, Inc. (collectively, the “survey team”), is contracted by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC), Division of Marine Resources to conduct 36 monthly line-transect aerial surveys focused on the six large whale species most likely to occur in the New York Bight. This survey report documents the survey effort and sightings from the December 2017 survey, representing the tenth of the 36 surveys scheduled to occur under this contract.

2.0 EFFORT

The December 2017 survey occurred from December 4-8, 2017. A total of nine flights were conducted, representing a total of 22.30 hours in the air (i.e., from aircraft wheels up off the airport tarmac to wheels down on the tarmac for each flight). A total of 4,539.21 kilometers (km) were flown and included completion of 100 percent of the 15 transect lines. [Figure 1](#) shows the survey lines flown. [Table 1](#) presents the flight time durations and distances by effort type.

TABLE 1. FLIGHT TIME AND DISTANCE BY EFFORT TYPE DURING THE DECEMBER 2017 SURVEY

Survey Dates	Hours and Kilometers (km) by Type of Flight Effort										Total	
	Overland		Transit		Transect		Circling		Cross-Leg			
	hr	km	hr	km	hr	km	hr	km	hr	km	hr	km
December 4-8, 2017	1.43	293.12	5.83	1346.94	13.16	2529.39	1.17	226.34	0.71	143.42	22.30	4,539.21

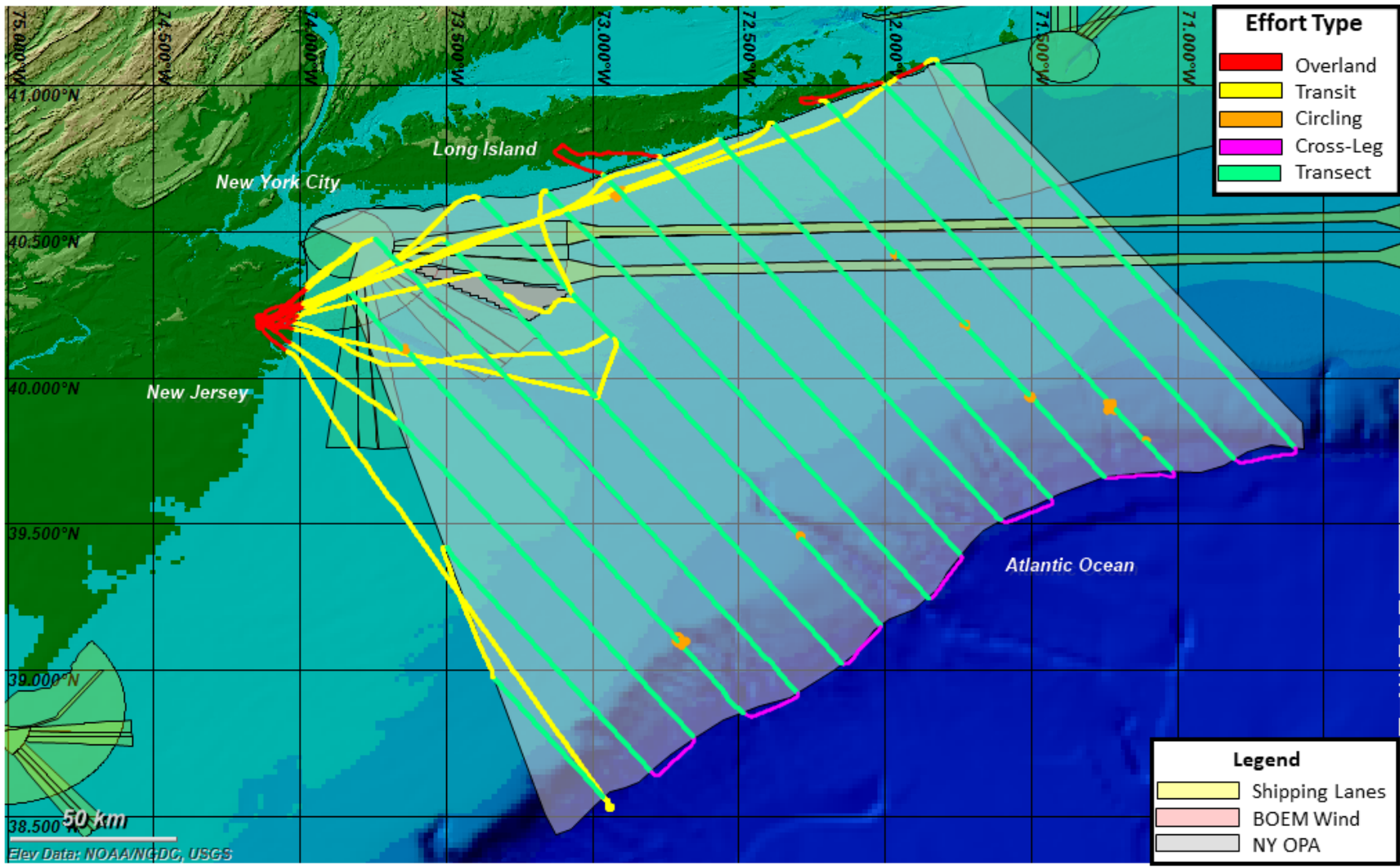


Figure 1. Survey Lines Flown by Effort Type During the December 2017 Survey

3.0 SIGHTINGS

Sightings are presented below based on the following subsections: (1) the six priority large whale species and unidentified whales, (2) other marine mammal sightings, (3) sea turtle sightings, (4) unusual or rare sightings, (5) sightings of dead, injured, stranded, or entangled marine mammals or sea turtles, and (6) other species/object sightings. [Figure 2](#) is a map of all large whale sighting locations, [Figure 3](#) is a map of all marine mammal sighting locations, and [Figure 4](#) is a close up of two nearby sightings (fin whale and unidentified beaked whale).

3.1 LARGE WHALE SIGHTINGS

A total of two sightings of an estimated four individual large whales were seen ([Table 2](#)). All these sightings were identified to species. Large whale sightings included two groups (four individuals) of fin whales.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF THE LARGE WHALE SPECIES SIGHTED DURING THE DECEMBER 2017 SURVEY

Common Name*	Scientific Name	Number of Groups	Total Number of Individuals	Mean Group Size (SE)
Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	0	0	0
Fin Whale	<i>B. physalus</i>	2	4	2 (1.0)
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	0	0	0
North Atlantic Right Whale	<i>Eubalaena glacialis</i>	0	0	0
Minke Whale	<i>B. acutorostrata</i>	0	0	0
Sei Whale	<i>B. borealis</i>	0	0	0
Sperm Whale	<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	0	0	0
Unidentified Large Whale		0	0	0
Total		2	4	

Notes:

*Listed in alphabetical order

SE = Standard error

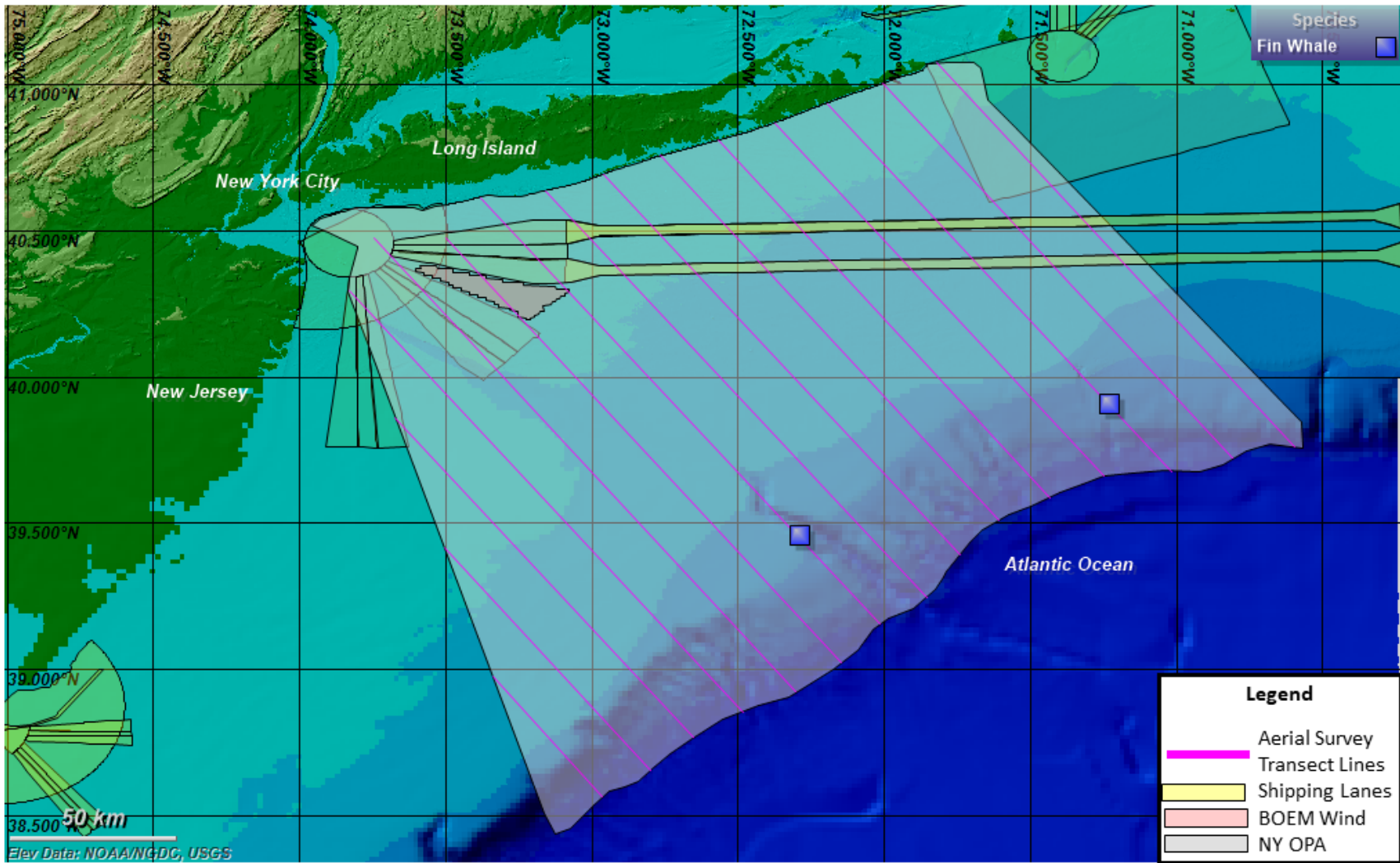


Figure 2. Locations of All Groups of Large Whales Sighted During the December 2017 Survey

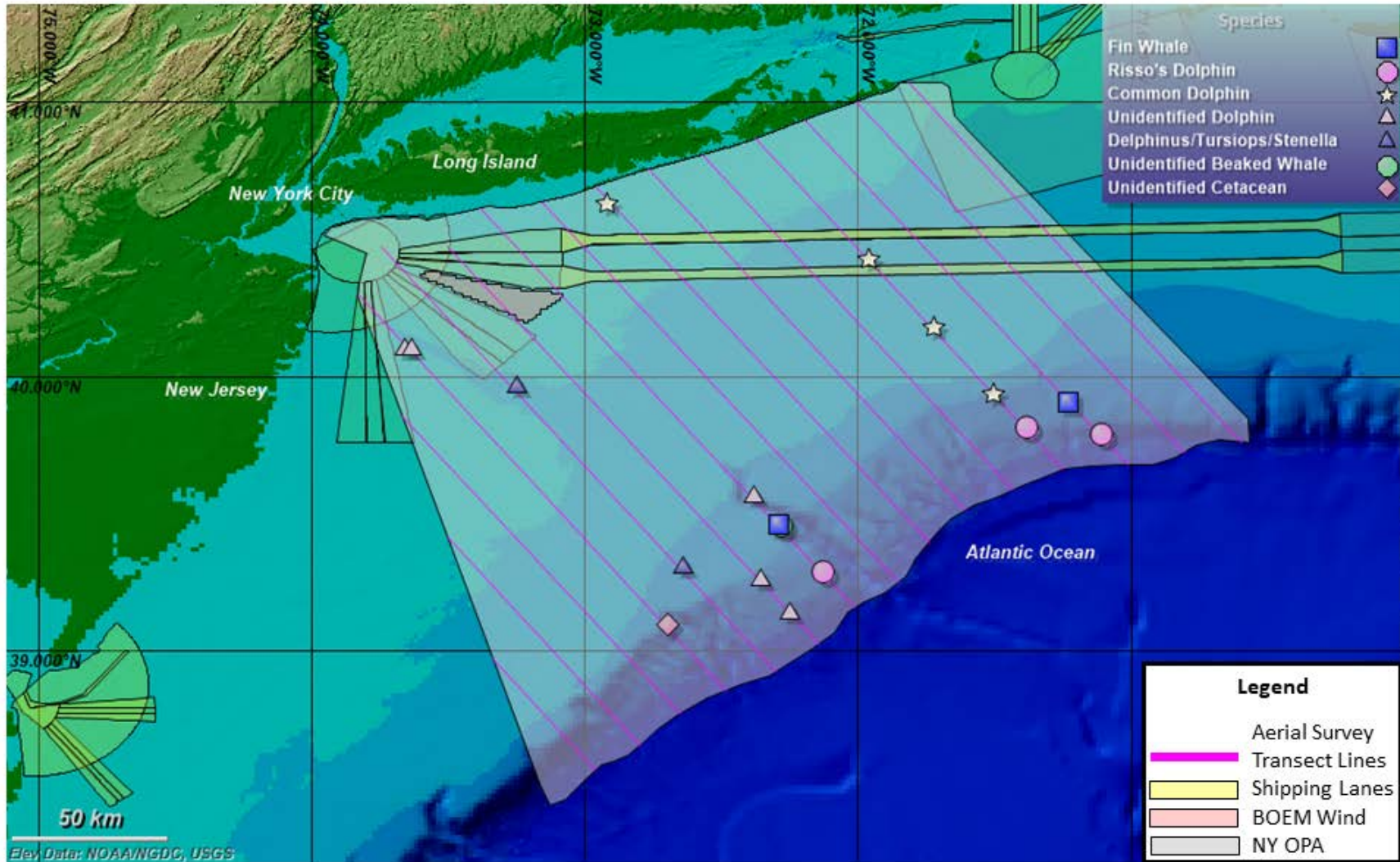


Figure 3. Locations of All Groups of Marine Mammals Sighted During the December 2017 Survey

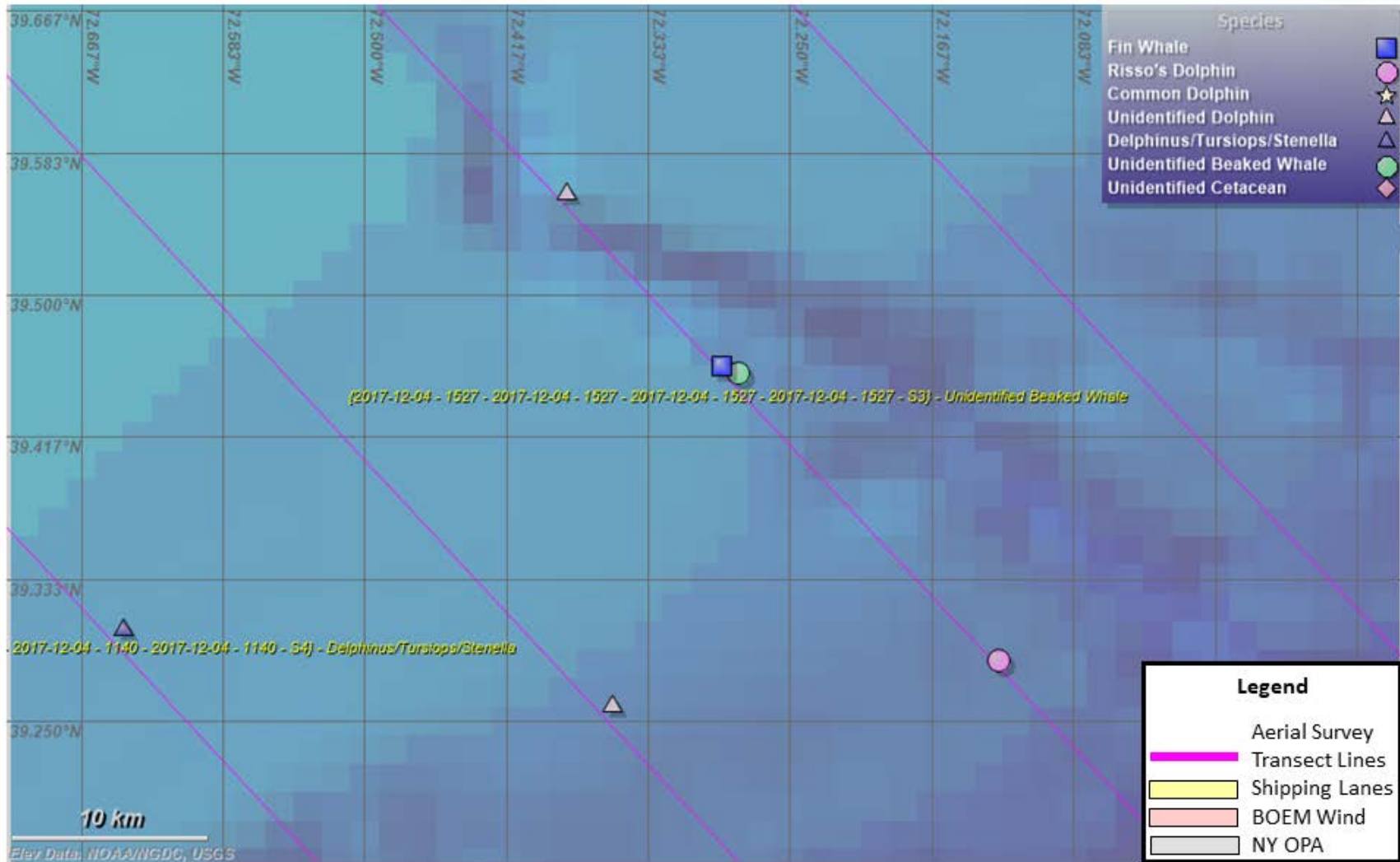


Figure 4. Close up of Fin Whale and Unidentified Beaked Whale Groups Sighted During the December 2017 Survey

3.2 OTHER MARINE MAMMAL SIGHTINGS

A minimum total of 16 sightings of an estimated 933 individual marine mammals other than the six priority whale species were observed (Table 3). This included four groups (estimated 735 individuals) of common dolphin, two groups (estimated 105 individuals) of Delphinus/Tursiops/Stenella Sp., three groups (estimated 23 individuals) of Risso’s dolphin, one group unidentified beaked whale (two individuals), one single unidentified cetacean and five groups (estimated 67 individuals) of unidentified dolphins (note, in accordance with the project scope of work, dolphins were not regularly circled to confirm species).

TABLE 3. OTHER MARINE MAMMAL SIGHTINGS DURING THE DECEMBER 2017 SURVEY*

Common Name**	Scientific Name	Number of Groups	Total Number of Individuals	Mean Group Size (SE)
Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	0	0	0
Common Dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	4	735	183.8 (60.7)
Delphinus/Tursiops/Stenella Sp.	<i>Delphinus/Tursiops/Stenella p.</i>	2	105	52.5 (27.5)
Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala sp.</i>	0	0	0
Risso’s Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>	3	23	7.7 (2.3)
Unidentified Beaked Whale		1	2	2 (NA)
Unidentified Cetacean		1	1	1 (NA)
Unidentified Dolphin		5	67	13.4 (7.2)
Total		16	933	

Notes:

*Some species identifications are preliminary and not certain due to not circling/photographing

**Listed in alphabetical order

NA = not applicable

SE = Standard error

3.3 SEA TURTLE SIGHTINGS

There were no sea turtle sightings during this survey.

3.4 UNUSUAL OR RARE SIGHTINGS

There were no unusual or rare sightings.

3.5 STRANDING AND ENTANGLEMENT REPORTS

There were no sightings of dead, injured, stranded, or entangled marine mammals or sea turtles during this survey.

3.6 OTHER SIGHTINGS

In addition to those described above, there were other types of non-marine mammal sightings. To focus observation efforts on searching for large priority whale species, only the sighting type, time, and general location of these other sightings were recorded opportunistically as feasible, with additional details recorded into the voice recordings (e.g., estimated body length and coloration, behavior, and group size). We used hot keys on the laptop running the software Mysticetus to mark the locations of these sightings when doing so would not interfere significantly with priority observation efforts (e.g., in areas where all sightings were relatively low). The sightings below consist of those for which general locations were noted using the computer in the field; thus, they should be considered *minimum numbers* of sightings. Review of the voice recorder data would be required to fully enumerate these sightings (e.g., we orally recorded the time of these sightings, which could be merged with GPS in the future to determine locations).

- Minimum one (single individual) Atlantic manta ray (*Manta birostris*) sighting
- Minimum of five sunfish (*Mola mola*) sightings
- Minimum of four fish school sightings

4.0 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

There were no problems encountered during the December 2017 survey.

5.0 PHOTOGRAPHS

There were no “best of photographs” during this survey.