

30 YEARS OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

FLORIDA MANATEE

Gentle and leisurely animals, manatees live in shallow, slow-moving rivers, estuaries, saltwater bays, canals, and coastal areas from Texas through Florida and as far north as Virginia. Endangered Species Act protections have allowed southern waters to become home to an increasing number of manatees.

HISTORY OF ENDANGERMENT

Manatees are slow-moving; fortunately, they have no natural predators or enemies, so they can live up to 60 years in the wild. Many manatee deaths are human related, mostly occurring from collisions with watercraft. Manatees are also crushed or drowned in canal locks and flood control structures, injured by eating fish hooks or litter, and killed in crab trap lines.



Jim P. Reid/FWS

These threats combined to reduce the manatee population to such low numbers that the species was listed as endangered in 1967 under the Endangered Species Preservation Act. Subsequently, West Indian manatees

received protection under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated critical habitat for the manatee in 1976 and developed a comprehensive recovery plan. To complement the preservation of critical habitat, a number of sanctuaries, refuges, and protection areas have been established for the manatee.

Within protected areas, boats are required to respect slow speed zones to prevent boat-manatee collisions. Dock and marina development is also restricted so that some manatee habitat remains pristine.



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CONSERVATION TODAY

Even with increased education and boater awareness, manatees continue to die as a result of collisions with watercraft. In 2002, a record 95 manatees were killed by accidents with boats.

Ultimately, however, loss of habitat is the most serious threat facing manatees. Conservation groups continue to seek protections for waters essential to the survival and recovery of this delicate sea creature.

ECOLOGICAL & ECONOMIC VALUE

Manatees have voracious appetites perfect for cleaning waterways clogged with weeds and plants.

Outdoor recreation and tourism related to manatees is growing, particularly in Florida. Interested citizens can now participate in tours to view and swim with manatees, thereby pumping money into local economies and invalidating the myth that Florida's economy has been negatively affected by the adoption of manatee protection measures. In addition, there is evidence that property values increase by as much as 15 percent with a manatee slow speed zone adjacent to the property.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

Because the threats to manatees continue to increase with the growing human population and the sheer number of vessels on the water each year, conservation groups and concerned citizens need to be vigilant in enforcing speed zones. The Florida Manatee Recovery Plan has a Manatee Recovery Team which monitors and assesses recovery efforts and makes recommendations to government officials on additional manatee protection needs as necessary.

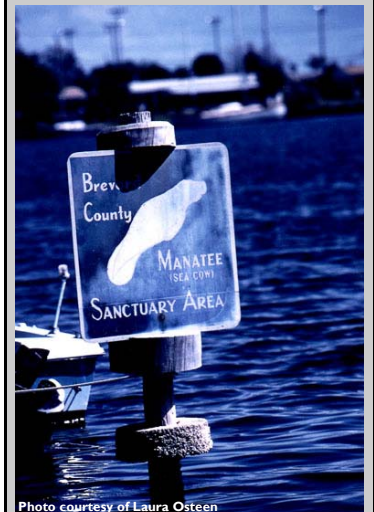


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