

Guidelines for protecting Florida Manatees



We all have a shared responsibility to protect Florida's resources and pass on to future generations the beauty, wildlife, water and natural resources we have today.



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com/Manatee



About Florida manatees

Florida manatees are a native subspecies of the West Indian manatee. They are a grayish-brown marine mammal with a paddle shaped tail and two flippers.

Like all mammals, manatees have hair, which is sparsely distributed on their body, with the area around its mouth having stiff whiskers. Adults average 10 feet in length and about 1,200 pounds but can reach over 13 feet and more than 3,000 pounds. At birth, a calf is about three to four feet long and 60 to 70 pounds.

Manatees eat plants along rivers, coastal areas and at the water's surface. At rest, they can hold their breath for up to 20 minutes; when active, they surface to breathe about every three to five minutes.

They live in both freshwater and saltwater habitats, including rivers, springs, estuaries, bays and canals. Manatees cannot survive for prolonged periods in water that is colder than 68°F, so natural springs and power plant warm-water discharge canals provide important habitat for manatees during colder months.

Female manatees begin to breed between five and seven years of age and are pregnant for 13 months. Calves spend their first two years nursing and learning how to survive before leaving their mothers. Generally, wild manatees live to about 30 years of age.

Tips for boat, including personal watercraft, operators

- Observe and follow all boating regulatory zone signs.
- Wear polarized sunglasses so you can see where manatees are located underwater.
- Slow down. Reducing speed gives you a greater chance to avoid manatees and for them to avoid your vessel.
- Use marked channels when boating. Channel depth reduces the likelihood of crushing or hitting manatees in shallow waters.

Manatee Protection Zones

There are established zones to protect manatees from collisions with boats and harassment. Here are the typical signs found on Florida's waterways:



Idle Speed Zones

Designate a protected area where boats are not permitted to go any faster than necessary to maintain steerage and make headway while producing no wake.



Slow Speed Zones

Designate a protected area where boats must be fully off plane and completely settled and level in the water while moving with only minimum wake.



Motorboats Prohibited Zones

Designate a protected area that prohibits all entry by all power-driven vessels or those operating under mechanical means of propulsion.



No Entry Zones

Designate a protected area that prohibits all entry including boating, swimming, wading, fishing and diving activities.

Report collisions with manatees

You will not be cited if you accidentally collide with a manatee while obeying posted speed zone restrictions. Please report any vessel collisions with manatees as soon as possible to increase the manatee's chance of survival.

Tips for paddlers

- Use caution when paddling near seagrass beds, sanctuaries or refuge area boundaries as manatees frequent these areas. Give manatees space to move freely in their habitat.
- Paddle your vessel to avoid traveling over resting manatees. Manatees must surface to breathe and will startle awake if you are in the way. Startled manatees may quickly flee the area, potentially moving into harm's way. Their quick movements can also cause small vessels to capsize.
- Lower your anchor slowly when securing your vessel as there may be resting manatees below.



Tips for divers and snorkelers

- Consider using snorkel gear when diving near manatees as the sound of air bubbles from SCUBA gear can disturb them.

Other ways to help manatees:

- Participate in coastal cleanup events.
- Attend boating safety classes or take online courses.
- Purchase a "Save the Manatee" license plate or collectible manatee decal from your tax collector's office or online.
- Dispose of monofilament line properly at line recycling bins or drop-off locations to avoid entangling manatees, birds, marine turtles and other marine life.



Tips for viewing wild manatees

- Wear polarized sunglasses so you can see where manatees are located underwater.
- Watch manatees from a distance to limit disturbance. Be mindful of resting manatees.
- Never pursue, chase or disturb any manatee. If a manatee stops feeding, swims toward you or changes its behavior, you are too close.
- Speak quietly and avoid making loud noises when you are near wildlife areas to avoid disturbance.
- Do not separate a mother and calf.
- Watch out for "swirling" when manatees dive. The swirls look like a large "footprint" on the water's surface.
- Never offer food or water to manatees because it alters their foraging behavior and attracts them to areas where they may be harmed.
- Do not touch, remove or damage research equipment attached to manatees. The tag units help researchers monitor these manatees.



Manatees and the law

Manatees are protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978. It is illegal to feed, harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, annoy or molest manatees.

Examples of illegal activities include:

- Giving food or water to manatees, or using food or water to attract manatees
- Separating a mother and calf
- Disturbing manatee mating herds
- Pursuing or chasing manatees either while swimming or with a vessel
- Disturbing resting manatees
- Hitting, jumping on, standing on, holding on to or attempting to ride manatees
- Blocking a manatee's path
- Fishing for or attempting to hook or catch a manatee

Call the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline:

888-404-FWCC (3922)

**#FWC on cell phones,
or text Tip@MyFWC.com**

**to report manatee deaths, injuries,
harassment, accidents, or ones
orphaned or distressed.**



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