

## The Manatee Needs Your Help

The Florida manatee, a subspecies of the West Indian manatee, is a large grayish-brown aquatic mammal. Its sausage-like body tapers to a flat, paddle-shaped tail. The upper part of its body has two flippers with three to four “fingernails” on each flipper. The head and face are wrinkled, and the snout has stiff whiskers.

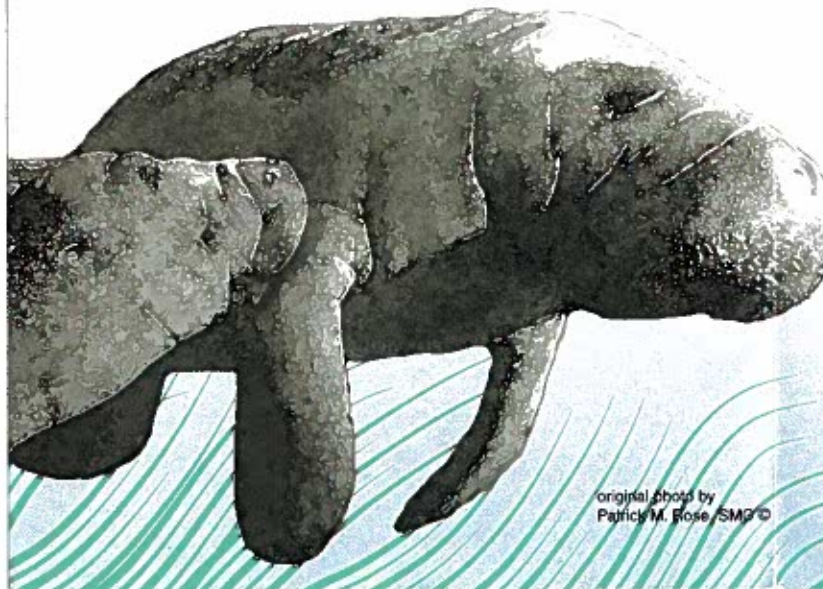
Adults have been known to reach lengths over 13 feet and weights over 3,000 pounds. Calves are three to four feet long and 60 to 70 pounds at birth.

Manatees spend most of their time feeding and resting. They graze for food along rivers, coastal areas and at the water’s surface. Manatees may hold their breath for as long as 20 minutes, but they usually surface about every five minutes to breathe.

Their minimum population is estimated to be between 3,000 and 3,500; however, the continuing development of Florida’s coastal areas and habitat loss threatens manatee survival.

As a wildlife watcher, you are encouraged to follow the guidelines in this brochure when you encounter manatees in Florida’s waterways.

**You can support manatee protection efforts by purchasing a Save the Manatee license plate for your vehicle or a manatee decal for your vessel or vehicle.**



## What Can Boaters Do?

**You can reduce your chances of harming a manatee by following these simple guidelines:**

**Observe and follow all boating speed zone signs.**

**Slow down.** Reducing boat speed gives you a greater chance to avoid a manatee. You will also increase your safety margin with other boats. Remember to post a lookout.

**Use marked channels whenever possible.** Manatees have shown signs that they are avoiding heavy boat traffic areas. Channel depth reduces the likelihood of pinning or crushing manatees.

**Wear polarized sunglasses while operating a boat.** Polarized lenses make it much easier to see objects beneath the surface and the “swirling” that occurs when a manatee dives. (The swirls look like a large “footprint” on the water’s surface or a series of half moon swirls.)

**Post a proper lookout while boating.** A proper lookout is a person on board designated to look out for wildlife, other boaters, swimmers or obstructions when the vessel is underway. Plan for safety.

## What Can Divers Do?

**As divers or snorkelers, you are directly entering the manatee’s habitat. By following these simple guidelines you can minimize your impact.**

**Manatees are wild animals and should not be fed or given water.** Close exposure to or dependence on humans can harm them.

**While swimming or diving, do not approach or chase a manatee.** Move away slowly and immediately if an animal stops feeding and comes toward you or changes its direction of travel. Keep your distance.

**Never poke, prod or stab a manatee with your hands, feet or any object.** Share the joy of wildlife viewing with others, especially children, and teach them about the importance of not disturbing animals.

**Use snorkel gear if you dive near manatees as the sound of air bubbles from scuba gear can frighten them.** Manatees at warm-water sites should not be disturbed. They must conserve energy in order to stay warm during the cold weather. Practice passive observation.



**A cow and her calf belong together.** Please do not separate them, as the calf needs its mother to survive.

**LOOK, but please DO NOT TOUCH manatees.** Touching is a form of harassment. Manatees that are resting (no movement except to breathe) should not be approached. Please observe manatees from a distance.

## Boating Speed Zones

**To alert the boater and protect the manatee in its sanctuaries, the law provides regulatory zones on waterways. Here are typical signs found on Florida’s waterways:**



### IDLE SPEED ZONE

Protected area where boats are not permitted to go any faster than necessary to maintain steerage and make headway.



### SLOW SPEED ZONE

A protected area where boats must be fully off plane and completely settled and level in the water while moving.



### NO ENTRY ZONE

A protected area that prohibits all entry, including boating, swimming and diving activities.



### SAFE OPERATION ZONE

A sign indicating that you may resume safe boating speed; visible as you leave a protected area.



### CAUTION SIGN

Posted by individuals in areas frequently inhabited by manatees. Requests caution on the part of boaters to avoid disturbing or injuring the animals.

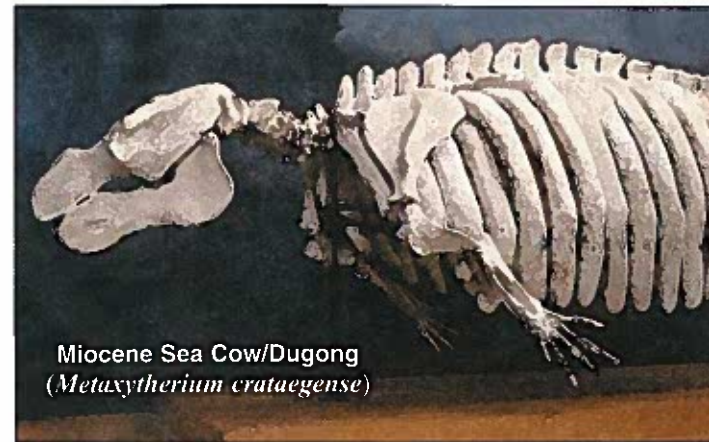
## Look Out for Manatees!

Manatees are mammals. They are expected to live in their environment until old age (over 40 years). Based on age data collected over a five-year period the average age of the manatees that were killed by watercraft was 7.2 years. Researchers have found that female manatees mature sexually at 3 years of age (Marmontel 1995) and that most females breed successfully by 6 to 10 years of age (Reynolds and Odell 1991). After breeding starts, females usually produce one calf every 2 to 5 years, which denotes a low reproductive cycle. The loss of viable female manatees in the breeding phase of their life cycle further impacts the overall manatee population. Please follow the guidelines in this brochure to reduce impacts to manatees from watercraft-related deaths.

## Manatee Harassment

Manatee harassment is defined as, "any intentional or negligent act or omission which creates the likelihood of causing an injury to a manatee by annoying it to such an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavioral patterns which include breeding, feeding or sheltering. The intentional provision of any type of food to manatees not in captivity shall be considered harassment under this definition, unless authorized by a valid federal or state permit." (68C-22.022 FAC)

**Manatee habitat needs are space, water, food and shelter. Help keep manatee habitat healthy by keeping litter and pollution out of the waterways.**



Miocene Sea Cow/Dugong  
(*Metaxytherium crataegense*)

## Manatees Are Native to Florida

This fossil skeleton is of an animal that inhabited the shallow bays and rivers of Florida 15 million years ago. It was discovered in a quarry in northwest Florida and donated to the state in 1929.

The "urban myth" that says manatees were brought to Florida for weed control is not true. A study conducted during the 1960s, which used test animals from Florida's existing manatee population, tried to determine if manatees could be used to control weeds in Florida waterways. The study found that even though manatees could help with weed control, it was not an effective way to do this job; it was too hard to catch manatees or keep them in targeted areas.

Manatees are considered one of Florida's true native species – a Florida treasure that we all can enjoy. Please do your part to protect Florida's 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 harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, annoy or molest manatees.

The state of Florida has also established regulatory speed zones to protect the manatee and its habitat.

Anyone convicted of violating state law faces maximum fines of \$500 and/or imprisonment of up to 60 days. Conviction for violating federal protection laws is punishable by fines up to \$100,000 and/or one year in prison.

To report manatee deaths, injuries, harassment, accidents or orphaned manatees, call the  
FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Law Enforcement  
1-888-404-FWCC  
1-888-404-3922

For more information:



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation  
620 South Meridian Street, 6-A  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1600  
(850) 922-4330  
Boating Safety Classes: MyFWC.com



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Cover photo by Tom Scott, Florida Geological Survey

# The Florida Manatee



## A Florida Treasure

**Guidelines for Boating,  
Diving and Snorkeling  
Around Manatees**

