

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Date: November 16, 2016

Subject: Proposed Revisions to Manatee Protection Zones in Collier County (68C-22.023, FAC)

Purpose:

Staff is seeking approval to propose amendments to the manatee protection rule for Collier County. The proposed changes, which would affect only a small portion of the existing zones, would increase protection in a few areas and reduce or eliminate restrictions in other areas.

Summary:

Collier County is one of the 13 counties identified by the Governor and Cabinet in 1989 as “key” counties that needed to implement several actions to help protect manatees. Two of those actions were to develop countywide site-specific boat speed zones and the other was to develop county Manatee Protection Plans that provided a comprehensive approach to manatee protection in each of the 13 counties. The first state manatee protection zones in Collier County, addressing only the Faka Union Canal area, were adopted in 1983. A countywide rule was adopted in 1990 and amended in 1997 based in part on recommendations included in the Manatee Protection Plan developed by the County and approved by the state in 1995. A comprehensive review of manatee protection needs in the county had not been performed since the countywide rule was last amended almost 20 years ago. This rule is identified for review in the FWC Manatee Management Plan because it is one of the older rules and new manatee and boating data have both been collected in recent years in anticipation of a review. In addition, in 2014 the city of Naples petitioned the FWC to amend the rule in order to add protection in the Moorings Bay system.

Evaluation of data and consideration of potential changes has been underway for several years and has included input from many local residents, Collier County, the city of Naples, state and federal resource agencies, as well as local, state, and federal law enforcement. In March 2016, a detailed data review and preliminary recommendations were given to a county-appointed Local Rule Review Committee (LRRC) as required by statute. The LRRC met seven times over the next two months to review and discuss the information, with FWC staff attending every meeting in person or by teleconference. The LRRC submitted its report to FWC in late May and the FWC staff prepared the required written response in early August.

Recommended zone changes would affect under 4% (1,971 acres) of the 51,459 acres of inshore water in Collier County that is accessible to manatees, with most of the affected area (84%; 1,658 acres) changing to a less restrictive zone type or no zone at all. Increased protection would be provided in 0.6% (313 acres) of the area, with the zones in Moorings Bay requested by the city of Naples accounting for three-quarters of the increased protection.

Staff Recommendation:

Authorize staff to publish a Notice of Proposed Rule, gather and review public comment, and then bring the rule back for a final public hearing and final consideration at a future commission meeting.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Carol Knox, Section Leader, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation