

Where are Florida's **manatees?**



© Susan Lowe, Ellie Schiller Homosassa
Springs Wildlife State Park

**And other interesting facts about
Florida's state marine mammal**



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission

MyFWC.com

What are manatees?

The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) consists of two subspecies: the Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) and the Antillean manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*). Florida manatees – Florida’s state marine mammal – are native to Florida.

The Florida manatee breathes air, just like other mammals. It has a large, tube-shaped body, a flat, round, paddle-shaped tail, two relatively short front flippers and a whiskered face. The average adult manatee is about 10 feet long and weighs approximately 1,200 pounds. Manatees can live more than 65 years; however, among the wild manatees that reach adulthood, only about half are expected to survive into their early 20s.

What do manatees eat?

Often referred to as “sea cows” because of their grazing habits, manatees are herbivores that eat seagrasses and other species of freshwater floating or submerged aquatic plants. A manatee can consume plant material up to 9 percent of its body weight per day. Protection of aquatic habitats where manatees forage for food benefits not only manatees but many other species as well.



Manatees are unique aquatic mammals that live in Florida’s waterways. Terri Calleson, USFWS.

Should people give food or water to manatees?

Under state and federal law, it is illegal to attract manatees to an area by purposely providing a source of freshwater or by offering food. Besides, manatees lured to unsafe areas may be in greater danger of being struck by vessels in these areas. Manatee harassment is defined in 68C-22.002 Florida Administrative Code 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.”

How can I do my part to ensure a healthy future for Florida’s manatees?

- Give a proper lookout when boating and using personal watercraft in Florida – look for manatees in front of or near your vessel.
- Watch manatees from a distance.
- Slow down and obey posted signs on the waterways.
- Participate in coastal cleanup events.
- Recycle monofilament fishing line (Do not discard fishing line in Florida’s waterways!).
- Attend boating safety classes or take online courses from MyFWC.com.
- Educate others about manatees.
- Send a donation to the FWC “Save the Manatee Trust Fund.”

- If you plan to move to Florida or are already a resident, show your support for manatee conservation by purchasing a “Save the Manatee” specialty license plate for your vehicle. Anyone can donate \$5 for a manatee decal for your vehicle or vessel (available at Florida tax collector offices or online).

Recycle fishing line!



Place used fishing line in recycling bins found near marinas, boat ramps and bait shops. To find bins near you, go to the Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program web site: mrrp.MyFWC.com.

Where are Florida's manatees?

The Florida manatee lives in Florida's waterways; however, its summer ranges may extend beyond Florida along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. On rare occasions, manatees may be sighted as far north as Massachusetts and as far west as Texas. Manatees live in many aquatic habitats, both fresh and salt water; preferring rivers, estuaries, bays and canals found throughout Florida. These aquatic mammals cannot endure water temperatures below 68 degrees for extended periods. Florida's natural springs and warm-water discharge canals near power plants provide necessary refuges for manatees during the colder months.

The rest of the year, manatees inhabit and may be observed at many different areas in Florida's waterways. In addition to these areas, some manatees are on display at oceanaria/rehabilitation facilities after recovering from injuries or sicknesses and prior to release back into the wild. During rehabilitation, these animals share space with other manatees that are permanent residents at these facilities. Florida provides many opportunities to observe these gentle aquatic mammals.

What is the best way to observe the Florida manatee?

To help protect Florida's wildlife, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) encourages you to watch manatees from a distance and to use binoculars or zoom lenses to extend your view. When you get too close to wild animals, problems may arise. Manatees may leave warm-water habitat, which exposes them to cold waters, or they may leave safe environments, which puts them in harm's way in busy waterways. Calves may also separate from their mothers, which may jeopardize their chance for survival. Please maintain a safe distance when observing manatees.

View wild manatees at these locations (winter viewing):

Blue Spring State Park - Florida Park Service (FPS)
(386) 775-3663

Orange City

Seasonal manatee programs held during winter months when manatees are in the spring run.

Entrance fee.

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)
(US Fish & Wildlife Service - crystalriver@fws.gov)
(352) 563-2088

Crystal River

View manatees near warm water sanctuaries in Kings Bay or from a boardwalk near Three Sisters Spring. In-water tours or boat rentals available. Follow USFWS viewing guidelines.

Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park (FPS)
(850) 561-7276

Wakulla Springs

Year-round opportunity to look for manatees from the diving platform near the headwater or in various areas of the river via the park's tour boats. Fees for park entry and boat tour.

Fanning Springs State Park (FPS)
(352) 463-3420

Fanning Springs

Manatees occasionally visit Fanning Springs. Entrance fee.

Lee County Manatee Park
(239) 690-5030

Fort Myers

Hundreds of manatees visit Orange River and the Florida Power & Light (FPL) discharge canal. Parking fee. Gates close at sunset.

Manatee Lagoon – FPL Eco-Discovery Center
(561) 626-2833 (561-Manatee)

West Palm Beach

Observation deck to view manatees in the nearby FPL warm-water outflow canal. Center features hands-on exhibits about manatees and local habitat. Picnic area. Free entrance and parking.

Manatee Observation and Education Center

(772) 429-6266

Fort Pierce

The center is open year-round. Occasional manatee sightings during winter in Moore's Creek and the Indian River Lagoon. Entrance fee.

Manatee Springs State Park (FPS)

(352) 493-6072

Chiefland

Manatees may be seen in the spring or spring run. Entrance fee.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS)

(321) 861-0667

Merritt Island

View manatees from platform overlooking Haulover Canal. Entrance fee.

Spring Bayou near Craig and Coburn Parks

(727) 937-6109

Tarpon Springs

Manatees visit this freshwater spring bayou located near small community parks. Parking limited in this historic district.

Tampa Electric Company (TECO)

Manatee Viewing Center

(813) 228-4289

Apollo Beach

This site has a visitor center, gift shop, overlook and boardwalk where visitors learn about and see hundreds of manatees in TECO's warm-water discharge canal. Free entrance and parking.

Manatees at rehabilitation/ educational facilities:

Walt Disney World's Epcot Center

(407) 824-4321

Orlando

Manatees are in "The Seas with Nemo and Friends" exhibit on second level. Parking and entrance fees.

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs

Wildlife State Park (FPS)

(Manatee rehabilitation center)

(352) 628-5343

Homosassa

Park staff or volunteers present daily educational programs. Wild manatees visit headwaters of Homosassa Spring during winter. Enclosed underwater viewing area available. Resident manatees year-round. Entrance fee.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

(Florida manatee and aquatic center/hospital)

(813) 935-8552

Tampa

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo has manatee exhibit observation area and on-site hospital used for manatee rehabilitation. Entrance fee.

Miami Seaquarium

(USFWS Manatee critical care facility)

(305) 361-5705

Miami

Miami Seaquarium has outside and underwater manatee viewing areas. Facility's trained rescue and rehabilitation teams are recognized as national leaders in marine mammal care. Entrance fee.

Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium

(941) 388-2451

Sarasota

Mote Marine Lab exhibits manatees and other aquatic wildlife at its research facility. Research includes manatee biology, health, behavior and conservation efforts. Entrance fee.

SeaWorld of Florida

(Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation Program)

seaworldparks.com

Orlando

SeaWorld has a theme park manatee program and viewing area. Marine Mammal Keeper Experience program offered to individuals. Parking, entrance and program fees.

Parker Manatee Aquarium

(Second stage manatee rehabilitation facility)

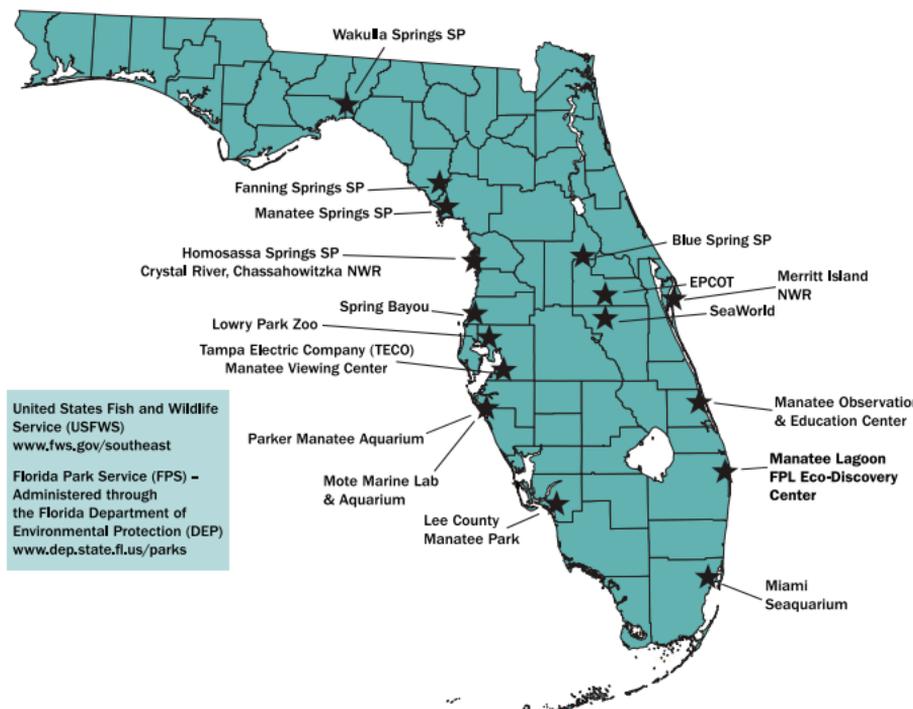
941-746-4131

Bradenton *(Located in the South Florida Museum)*

Parker Manatee Aquarium is home to Snooty, oldest known captive manatee in the world. Volunteers can sign up to assist with care of Snooty and other manatees. Entrance fee.



Aerial survey teams fly over warm water sites to count the manatees that gather in these areas.



What protections are in place for the Florida manatee?

Manatees are protected by the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act (F.S. 379.2431(2)), the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act and the federal Endangered Species Act. It is illegal to feed, harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, annoy or molest manatees.

What FWC programs are in place to conserve manatees?

The FWC Imperiled Species Management section is responsible for the management of the manatee program, which includes outreach and education, permitting, habitat management, regulations and manatee speed zone laws and administration of the manatee management plan. The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute conducts



Manatee rescue

research to monitor and study manatees, performs rescues of distressed manatees, provides statistics for manatee mortality and studies the ecology of the manatee. The FWC Division of Law Enforcement patrols the waterways where manatees exist and enforces speed zone laws.

How are manatee conservation activities funded?

Vehicle owners who voluntarily pay extra for the Florida "Save the Manatee" specialty license plates provide support for Florida's manatee conservation efforts. Money collected from the specialty license plates are deposited into the Save the Manatee Trust Fund (s. 320-08058(1)(b), Florida Statutes). A portion of vessel registration fees and manatee decal sales, along with various other donations, are also deposited in the trust fund. These funds are used for manatee research and management activities.

If I live out of state, how can I contribute to manatee conservation efforts?

Manatee decals are available for a \$5 donation at all Florida county tax offices or may be ordered online from MyFWC.com/Manatee.

Manatee program and research information:

FWC Imperiled Species Management Section
(850) 922-4330

MyFWC.com/Manatee

FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
727-896-8626

MyFWC.com/Research

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation
Imperiled Species Management Section
620 South Meridian Street, 6-A
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1600

To report deaths, injuries, harassment, accidents, orphaned or distressed manatees:

Call the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) #FWC or *FWC on cell phone, or text Tip@MyFWC.com

For on-water emergencies, use Radio VHF Channel 16



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