

UME Monthly Update: May 2022

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) continue to collaborate on the response to the manatee unusual mortality event occurring along the Atlantic Coast. The Service and FWC Unified Command priorities focus on manatee rescue/rehabilitation, carcass recovery & necropsy, UME Investigation, Manatee Rehabilitation Partnership and enhancing external communications.

This month, staff continue to evaluate monitoring information and debrief with partners on activities that occurred this winter and early spring at the Temporary Field Response Station.

The St. Johns Water Management District completed water quality sampling at the response station. Our assessment of the sampling data indicates the temporary feeding trial had no appreciable effects on Indian River Lagoon water quality.

An overarching, multifaceted investigation of the declared UME is ongoing and informed by multiple response, research and monitoring efforts. Similar to last year, carcass numbers decreased in the late spring as manatees are no longer experiencing the additional stressor of cold and have moved to areas where forage is more available. The FWC continues to document findings of chronic malnutrition in manatees and that is expected to persist as long as there is a seagrass shortage in the Indian River Lagoon. Other health threats like watercraft-related injuries remain a concern.

FWC biologists continue to respond to manatees in need of rescue and FWC law enforcement officers are continuing enhanced patrols and response to the areas with the highest concentrations of manatees.

We encourage people to continue reporting sick, injured or dead manatees to the FWC's Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-3922 so trained experts can respond and assess the situation. People should never push a stranded marine mammal back into the water.