

Monthly Manatee UME Update

September 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 and rehabilitation, carcass recovery and necropsy, the UME investigation, the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership, and enhancing external communications.

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 over the warmer months as manatees are no longer experiencing the additional stressor of cold and have been able to move to areas where forage is more available. The FWC continues to document findings of chronic malnutrition in manatees, which is expected to persist while there is a seagrass shortage in the Indian River Lagoon. Other health threats like watercraft-related injuries remain a concern.

Manatees can be difficult to detect when they are underwater, so it is important for operators of boats and personal watercrafts to be vigilant. People can help protect manatees by following these simple guidelines:

- Wear polarized sunglasses to help spot manatees.
- Avoid boating in shallow areas where manatees graze on seagrass.
- Look for a snout sticking up out of the water or large circles on the water, also known as manatee footprints, indicating the presence of a manatee below.
- Observe posted manatee zones while boating.
- FWC biologists respond to manatees in need of rescue and FWC law enforcement officers conduct enhanced patrols and response to the areas with the highest concentrations of manatees.

As of mid-September, there are 81 manatees in rehabilitation at 13 critical care or rehabilitation/holding facilities: 69 in FL, two in GA, nine in OH, and one in PR. All but 15 animals are considered releasable and are slated for return to the wild.

We encourage people to report 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.