

Monthly Manatee UME Update

October 2022

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) continue to collaborate on responding to the manatee Unusual Mortality Event (UME) on 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. Like last year, carcass numbers decreased over the warmer months as manatees no longer experiencing the additional stressor of cold moved to areas where forage is more available. FWC researchers expect findings of chronic malnutrition in manatees to persist so long as there remains a seagrass shortage in the Indian River Lagoon. Other health threats, like watercraft-related injuries and cold stress, remain a concern. 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.

Manatees can be challenging to detect when they are underwater. Hence, operators of boats and personal watercraft need to be extra 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 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.

As of mid-October, there are 82 manatees in rehabilitation at 13 critical care or rehabilitation/holding facilities: 72 in FL, two in GA, six in OH, and one in PR. All but 15 animals are considered releasable and are scheduled for return to the wild. Since the last report, partners within the Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership have released one manatee back 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.