

IF YOU LOVE ME



PLEASE DON'T  
TOUCH ME

**MANATEE  
PROTECTION TIPS  
FOR  
DIVERS, SWIMMERS  
AND BOATERS**



# MIND YOUR MANATEE MANNERS



***Passive observation*** (observing from a distance) is the best way to protect manatees and all wildlife. If you see manatees while swimming, diving or boating, please follow these suggestions:

- ❖ **DO NOT ENTER DESIGNATED MANATEE SANCTUARIES FOR ANY REASON**
- ❖ **“Look, but don’t touch” – observe manatees from the surface of the water and at a distance**
- ❖ **Avoid excessive noise and splashing**
- ❖ **Use snorkel gear when attempting to watch manatees – the sound of scuba gear may cause them to leave the area**
- ❖ **Please don’t feed manatees or give them water**

Call 1-888-404-FWCC (3922) # FMP or \* FMP, or use VHF Channel 16 on your marine radio if you see an injured, dead, tagged, or orphaned manatee, or if you see a manatee being harassed.

You actually have the most to gain by remaining at a distance. By quietly observing manatees, you will get a rare opportunity to see the natural behavior of these unique animals.

*West Indian manatees are endangered animals. It is estimated there are about 3,000 manatees left in the United States. About 45% of all manatee mortalities since 1976 have been attributed to human activity, where cause of death could be determined. Because human-related manatee deaths are preventable, this is the most logical place to begin in order to reduce mortalities.*

# MANATEE Q & A

## Why do manatees gather at places like Crystal River and Blue Spring?

Modern manatees evolved in the tropics and subtropics, so in spite of their size, they have very little body fat. They also have a very slow metabolism. These factors may account for their susceptibility to cold water. In the winter, usually November through March, manatees congregate at warm water sources such as natural springs or warm water effluents of power plants. Water temperatures below 70° (F) usually cause manatees to move into these warm water refuge areas. Individual manatees often return to the same wintering areas year after year.

## What's a manatee sanctuary?

A manatee sanctuary is an area that is off-limits to human activity such as boating, swimming, diving and fishing. Sanctuaries are created based on scientific research which identifies certain areas that are critical for manatee survival – particularly warm water or feeding areas. Sanctuaries are places where manatees can rest and feed undisturbed.

## As a diver, I think the best way for people to appreciate manatees is to see them up close and personal. It's a way to get people interested in helping them.

Save the Manatee Club is not opposed to people being in the water when manatees are present. However, we are concerned about people interacting with manatees. Interactions include:

- ❖ approaching manatees
- ❖ touching them
- ❖ riding them
- ❖ poking them
- ❖ feeding manatees or giving them water
- ❖ any actions that might separate a mother and calf
- ❖ chasing manatees
- ❖ surrounding them

## Is it against the law to disturb manatees?

All of the forms of interactions listed above may be considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Manatees are an endangered species, protected under the federal Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection Acts and the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act. Conviction on the federal level is punishable by a fine of up to \$100,000 and/or one year in prison. Anyone convicted of violating the state law faces a possible maximum fine of \$500 and/or imprisonment for up to 60 days. The State of Florida can also pursue prosecution under federal law. *Even more important than breaking the law is that human interactions with*



Resting manatee

*manatees can cause them harm.* Manatees can be observed without violating the provisions of these laws.

**I don't understand how interacting with manatees can be harmful to them. They're so big! I could never hurt them and besides, if they don't like it, they could just swim away.**

Human interaction with manatees can alter their behavior in the wild, perhaps causing them to leave warm water areas, making them susceptible to potential harm. When manatees are in colder water, they expend valuable energy just to keep warm. This leaves little energy left for other important body functions, such as digestion. Also, pursuing a manatee while diving, swimming or boating may inadvertently separate a mother and calf.

## Why is it so bad if a mother and calf get separated?

Manatee calves are dependent on their mothers for up to two years. Not only do mothers feed their calves, but they also teach them all the things they need to know to survive on their own. Calves who are separated from their mothers may get lost. For example, if a mother swims away while a calf is being petted, the calf may not find his way back to her and could ultimately die without her. In recent years, dependent calf mortality has increased considerably. This may be due, in part, to mother and calf separation.

**I've been diving before with manatees and some of them come right up to me and roll over to have their bellies scratched. It seems to me like they enjoy it.**

Manatees who exhibit this behavior may have been "tamed" from previous interactions with other divers. As neat as it is to interact with manatees, we have to always keep in mind what is best for the manatee. For their own protection, wild animals need to stay wild to survive.

## MANATEE "No-No's"

### TOUCHING



### SURROUNDING



### RIDING





## **GET INVOLVED!**

**For more information on manatees, contact:**

**Save the Manatee® Club**

500 N. Maitland Ave., Maitland, FL 32751

1-800-432-JOIN (5646) • [www.savethemanatee.org](http://www.savethemanatee.org)

**Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge**

1502 SE Kings Bay Drive, Crystal River, FL 34429

(352) 563-2088 • [crystalriver.fws.gov](http://crystalriver.fws.gov)

**While in the Crystal River area, be sure to visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manatee Education Center at:**

**Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park**

4150 S. Suncoast Blvd. (U.S. Hwy. 19)

Homosassa, FL 34446 • (352) 628-5343

[www.nccentral.com/hswildlife.htm](http://www.nccentral.com/hswildlife.htm)

**For information on diving and dive training contact:**

**Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI)**

(800) 729-7234 or (949) 858-7234

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*[www.projectaware.org](http://www.projectaware.org) • e-mail: [aware@padi.com](mailto:aware@padi.com)*