



Save The Manatee Club Newsletter

NOVEMBER 1994



MANATEES WIN BIG IN VOLUSIA COUNTY—AGAIN!

As members, you know there have been nearly three years of legal challenges to Volusia County boat speed regulations for manatee protection. As a result, the Volusia rule has undergone some changes.

Although the rule has been ultimately upheld in every instance, last year the state weakened protection in some Volusia County waterways as a concession to Volusia County government and a local boaters' group called Citizens for Responsible Boating (CRB). This "compromise" rule was repealed this year and the original rule was reinstated, though it included all of the concessions made in the "compromise" rule but one.

The only concession not included in the current version of the Volusia rule was a 25-mph channel through the Norris Dead River, in the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge. The Norris Dead River, once again a slow speed zone (5-7 mph) throughout its length, is known to support substantial manatee use. Manatees wintering in Blue Spring State Park frequently travel between the spring and the refuge. As you know, Sweetgums was recovered from the Norris Dead River in 1991.

Volusia County and CRB asked Florida's Governor and Cabinet, sitting as the Florida Land and Water Adjudicatory Commission (FLWAC), to restore the weaker "compromise" version of the boat speed rules. CRB wanted to reduce protection even further, asking FLWAC to require higher speed corridors through all slow speed and idle speed manatee zones in Volusia County.

In a unanimous vote, the governor and Cabinet approved the current Volusia rule. This means our adopted manatees will continue to be protected from speeding boats on the Norris Dead River.

Governor Lawton Chiles is to be commended for this major step forward. Also deserving of our commendations are Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Secretary Virginia Wetherell and her staff, as well as the Florida Cabinet and their staff.

SMC HELPS TO RESCUE MANATEE IN MARYLAND

A male manatee who strayed too far north and forgot to head home was successfully rescued in Maryland. The rescue took place on Saturday, October 1, 1994, in the headwaters of Queenstown Creek, in Chesapeake Bay. The manatee's health was assessed at the National Aquarium in Baltimore, MD, before he was transported back to Florida and released on October 7, 1994.

The manatee was first sighted in the northern Chesapeake Bay in July of this year. As you know, manatees are a migratory species. They can sometimes be found outside Florida in the summer months, but usually only as far north as Virginia and the Carolinas. Manatees are susceptible to cold-related diseases and are normally found in Florida in the winter. "It is extremely unusual for a manatee to be this far north, this time of the year," said Jim Valade, Assistant Manatee Coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Jacksonville, FL. "Individual manatees wandering that far north would probably start heading south in August or early September," said Patti Thompson, SMC Staff Biologist.

During the last week of September, after determining that the manatee was not going to head south on his own, the USFWS decided to attempt a rescue. A team that included experts from USFWS offices in Jacksonville and Annapolis, Sea World of Florida, the National Aquarium in Baltimore, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources was assembled. **Financial support for the rescue was provided by Save the Manatee Club (thanks to you, our members!).**

As you know, manatees usually cannot tolerate water temperature much lower than 68 degrees. At the time of the rescue, the water temperature was between 70 and 72 degrees. "As the cold weather progressed, the odds that this animal could survive were becoming slimmer and slimmer," said Valade. "It was a difficult situation." Chesapeake Bay is a large body of water. Even though

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"Chessie" is tagged with a transmitter before being released in Florida waters. (Photo credit: Sea World of Florida)



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MANATEE RESCUE

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manatees are large, locating one in a water body that size is the equivalent of looking for a needle in a haystack. Fortunately, Maryland residents took a lot of interest in the endangered mammal and many sightings were reported, aiding in locating the animal. There are over 600 SMC members in Maryland, and many of them called SMC to let us know about the Chesapeake Bay manatee.

The manatee was observed by boat and aircraft, in order to get a handle on movement patterns and to look for a good capture situation. Rescue efforts were hampered by foul weather conditions for a few days. Finally, on Saturday, October 1, 1994, the manatee was located near the headwaters of Queenstown Creek. Rescuers blocked off the creek with a net and, after a 4-hour effort, were able to successfully capture the manatee. This was no small feat, considering the manatee weighs 1416 pounds and is over 10 feet long. "This manatee is really smart," said Valade. "I have never seen one so adept at eluding rescuers."

The wayward manatee was transported to the National Aquarium in Baltimore, where he rested quietly after all the fuss over him. He was then flown back to Florida by the U.S. Coast Guard and held for observation at Sea World of Florida in Orlando, before being tagged with a transmitter and released into the wild on October 7, 1994 at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge near Cape Canaveral, FL.

"Incidents such as this are one of the reasons why Save the Manatee Club exists," said Judith Vallee, SMC Executive Director. "Part of our funds have gone to past rescue and rehabilitation efforts; however we have determined a need for an Emergency Rescue Fund so we always have money dedicated for this purpose. Our thanks go out to everyone who helped rescue this manatee, especially team leader Jim Valade. We are so appreciative of their efforts and the support from our members that allowed SMC to fund the rescue. With only about 1,800 manatees left in the U.S., each individual animal is literally priceless."

Emergency Rescue Fund

If you would like to contribute toward SMC's newly established Emergency Rescue Fund, please make your check out to: Save the Manatee Club - Rescue, and send to: 500 N. Maitland Ave., Maitland, FL 32751. If you would like more information, just give us a call at 1-800-432-JOIN. These funds will only be spent on manatee rescue efforts.

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KEY COUNTY UPDATE

St. Lucie County

In the last newsletter, we reported that FDEP's (Florida Department of Environmental Protection) boat speed rule for manatee protection in St. Lucie County was at the public hearing stage. SMC supported the rule, but we maintained there were a few weak areas which we had hoped the state would correct as a result of public input. HOWEVER, after the public hearing, the state actually weakened the rule in a couple of key areas. Although something is better than nothing, this rule will not have our full support until these problems are addressed.

Brevard County

In other news, FDEP proposed a strong manatee protection rule for the Port Canaveral Barge Canal which cuts across eastern Brevard County connecting the inlet, the port, and the Indian River and Banana River lagoons, and also transecting Sykes Creek. Such protection was strongly warranted in the canal and in Sykes Creek, two of the deadliest waterways for manatees in the state. At least 29 manatees have been killed by watercraft in these waterways since records have been kept. Unfortunately, the Brevard County Commission voted

not to endorse the state's rule. The state then came up with a "compromise" Barge Canal Rule that is, in essence, a series of alternate slow speed and 25 mph zones. This is especially disappointing because the scientific evidence clearly shows a slow speed zone is warranted in this area. Rest assured, we will be looking into this and will keep you posted to take further action.

Lee County

Thanks to all of you who wrote letters and made phone calls on the Lee County "Take Action" from the last SMC Newsletter. Our position on the proposed rule remains the same. However, once again, the rule is being held up. As of the end of August, Lee County leads the state with 10 manatee watercraft mortalities this year — five of these have been in the Caloosahatchee River. With the high number of manatee watercraft mortalities this year, and with Lee County leading the pack, it is important the state make passing a rule in Lee County their highest priority.

In light of escalating watercraft mortality, please continue to write those letters and make those calls.



TAKE ACTION!

Please write to Virginia Wetherell, Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard, Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000. Phone 904-488-1554, FAX 904-488-7093. Let her know the state's Lee County boat speed zone package should include slow speed outside the marked navigation channel and a 25 mph speed limit inside the channel in the Caloosahatchee River. Also, all county waters should have a 25 mph upper speed limit where not more strictly regulated. And please ask her to move toward rule adoption quickly. Thanks for your help.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

The legislative session won't start until February, but we would like to ask all Florida members to call or write their legislators now on several issues. If they hear from enough of us, perhaps it will encourage them to sponsor bills on these and other manatee issues. Let them know you want to see legislation for a boat operator's license, a statewide waterway speed limit, and appropriations for additional

If you do not know who your Florida state senator is, you may call:
Florida Senate President's Office:
(904) 487-5229 or
Florida Senate Secretary's Office:
(904) 487-5270

When calling to find out who your legislators are, please give your district number from your voter's registration card or your street address. Thanks for your help!

Florida Marine Patrol law enforcement officers, introduced and passed during the Spring, 1995 session. Also, let them know you support full restoration of the Oklawaha River (see story on page 8). Manatee deaths from watercraft collisions are once again on the rise and these measures will offer additional protection, not only to manatees, but also to people. Thanks for your help.

If you do not know who your Florida state representative is, you may call:
Florida State Representative Clerk's Office:
(904) 488-1157