

Honoring a career in service to the endangered manatee

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Sometimes recognition comes when it's least expected.

Manatee expert and Blue Spring State Park Service Specialist Wayne Hartley was surprised with it Dec. 14.

He was expecting the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Sirenia Project team from Gainesville for a routine visit, to check the status of the park's manatee visitors. "Sirenia" refers to the order of animals known as sea cows or manatees.

Instead, the team came armed with a certificate of appreciation and a plaque, honoring Hartley's 26 years of contributions to manatee research and conservation.

USGS wildlife biologist Cathy Beck told of Hartley's contributions, collecting data and observing manatees at Blue Spring.

She spoke of "an incredible amount of information archived," thanks to Hartley's efforts and detailed notes.

"Wayne's data is the basis of three really important research studies," Beck said.

The data included observations on reproduction and cow-calf associations, Hartley's contributions to manatee survival rates through his efforts, and his studies of the population at Blue Spring. This, along with Hartley's notations on individual manatees, helped the state set minimum flow rates and levels at Blue Spring.

Hartley knows more than 400 of the gentle creatures by name.

Beck credited Hartley for setting a model for manatee handling at springs around the state.

"Blue Springs is the only population for which we have been able to get survival rates for both sub-adults and calves — nowhere else in the state have we been able to get that," Beck said.

His next "landmark contribution" will be on the exchange rate, or movement of manatees from East Coast manatee populations to and from Blue Spring, she added.

USGS team member Cathy Langtimm told Hartley, "You've left a legacy. We're going to be retired and dead, and people are still going to be using your data on climate changes, distribution changes, and environmental changes."

Blue Spring State Park Manager Bob Rundle came in from vacation to attend the presentation. Assistant Park Manager David Foster, park biologist Megan Keserauskis and former park employee Richard Harris, now with Volusia County Land Management, came to Blue Spring for the surprise, also.



BEACON PHOTO/PAT HATFIELD

Caught off guard — Blue Spring State Park Service Specialist Wayne Hartley, right, greets members of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Sirenia Project team from Gainesville Dec. 14, not suspecting the surprise they have in store. From left are team members Gaia Maigs-Friend, Amy Teague, Cathy Beck, Susan Butler and Cathy Langtimm.



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Sharing a moment — Former co-worker Richard Harris, left, Blue Spring State Park biologist Megan Keserauskis, Park Manager Bob Rundle, and Assistant Park Manager David Foster join in congratulating Park Service Specialist Wayne Hartley, center, for his 26 years' service studying and protecting the endangered manatee. Hartley was recognized for making an invaluable contribution to the species' preservation.