

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **CURRENT SPECIES STATUS**

Endangered. The near and long term threats from human-related activities are the reasons for which the Florida manatee currently necessitates protection under the Endangered Species Act. The focus of recovery is not on how many manatees exist, but instead the focus is on implementing, monitoring and addressing the effectiveness of conservation measures to reduce or remove threats which will lead to a healthy and self-sustaining population. The Florida manatee could be considered for reclassification from endangered to threatened provided that threats can be reduced or removed, and that the population trend is stable or increasing for a sufficient time period.

### **HABITAT REQUIREMENTS AND LIMITING FACTORS**

The Florida manatee lives in freshwater, brackish and marine habitats. Submerged, emergent, and floating vegetation are their preferred food. During the winter, cold temperatures keep the population concentrated in peninsular Florida and many manatees rely on the warm water from natural springs and power plant outfalls. During the summer they expand their range and on rare occasions are seen as far north as Rhode Island on the Atlantic coast and as far west as Texas on the Gulf coast.

The most significant problem presently faced by manatees in Florida is death or injury from boat strikes. The long-term availability of warm-water refuges for manatees is uncertain if minimum flows and levels are not established for the natural springs on which many manatees depend, and as deregulation of the power industry in Florida occurs. Their survival will depend on maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and habitat sufficient to support a viable manatee population.

### **RECOVERY GOAL**

The goal of this revised recovery plan is to assure the long-term viability of the Florida manatee in the wild, allowing initially for reclassification to threatened status and, ultimately, removal from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife.

### **RECOVERY CRITERIA**

This plan sets forth criteria, which when met, will ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of manatees in Florida by reducing or removing threats to the species' existence.

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The following criteria must be met prior to **reclassification of the Florida manatee from endangered to threatened (downlisting)**:

1. Reduce threats to manatee habitat or range, as well as threats from natural and manmade factors by:
  - identifying minimum spring flows;
  - protecting selected warm-water refuge sites;
  - identifying for protection foraging habitat associated with the warm-water refuge sites;
  - identifying for protection other important manatee areas; and
  - reducing unauthorized human caused “take.”
  
2. Achieve the following population benchmarks in each of the four regions over the most recent 10 year period of time:
  - statistical confidence that the average annual rate of adult survival is 90% or greater;
  - statistical confidence that the average annual percentage of adult female manatees accompanied by first or second year calves in winter is at least 40%; and
  - statistical confidence that the average annual rate of population growth is equal to or greater than zero.

The following criteria must be met prior to **removal of the Florida manatee from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife (delisting)**:

1. Reduce or remove threats to manatee habitat or range, as well as threats from natural and manmade factors by enacting and implementing federal, state or local regulations that:
  - adopt and maintain minimum spring flows;
  - protect warm-water refuge sites;
  - protect foraging habitat associated with select warm-water refuge sites;
  - protect other important manatee areas; and
  - reduce or remove unauthorized human caused “take.”
  
2. Achieve the following population benchmarks in each of the four regions for an additional 10 years after reclassification:
  - statistical confidence that the average annual rate of adult survival is 90% or greater;
  - statistical confidence that average annual percentage of adult female manatees accompanied by first or second year calves in winter is at least 40%; and
  - statistical confidence that average annual rate of population growth is equal to or greater than zero.

**ACTIONS NEEDED**

1. Minimize causes of manatee disturbance, harassment, injury and mortality.
2. Determine and monitor the status of the manatee population.
3. Protect, identify, evaluate, and monitor manatee habitats.
4. Facilitate manatee recovery through public awareness and education.

**DATE OF RECOVERY**

Currently, in some regions of the state, there are only reliable population data for the past 6 years. Therefore, full recovery may not be possible for at least another 14 years in order to meet the standard of assessing the population over the most recent 10 years of data for reclassification from endangered to threatened status and for an additional 10 years after reclassification for removal from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife. Time is also needed to establish and implement management initiatives to reduce or remove the threats.

**TOTAL ESTIMATED COST OF RECOVERY**

Based on information provided by our recovery partners, current annual estimated budget expenditures for recovery approach \$10,000,000.