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3rd Revision to Florida Manatee Recovery Plan Completed

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today the completion of the revised recovery plan for the Florida subspecies of the West Indian manatee, an endangered species native to the coastal and intercostal waterways of the southeastern United States.

This is the third revision of the recovery plan for Florida manatees. The original plan was approved in 1980 and revised in 1989 and 1996. An 18-member recovery team assisted the Service in updating the plan, which is based on peer-reviewed scientific information. The public also had two opportunities to comment on this revision and significant changes were made as a result of this process.

In this revision, the Service presents criteria for potential future reclassification of the Florida manatee to threatened status as well as for removal from the list of threatened and endangered species. The criteria set benchmarks for standard population demographics such as survival and growth rate, that are a means to evaluate the success of conservation measures to remove existing and long-term threats to recovery. While measurable progress has been made in recovering the manatee, recovery criteria have not been fully achieved and the Service does not believe reclassification or delisting is warranted at this time.

“This recovery plan represents a significant step forward in planning for the recovery of the Florida manatee,” said Sam D. Hamilton, the Service's Southeast Regional Director. “However, much still needs to be accomplished to address both the short and long term threats to this animal.”

The most prevalent threat continues to be injuries and deaths caused by watercraft-related activities. The plan addresses the need for adequate protection in areas where manatees and humans coexist, and recommends monitoring of key population statistics, such as adult survival rates, as a means for determining how well such protection measures are working. The Service lists

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the greatest long-term threat as the need to maintain adequate sources of warm water for the species to survive the cold in winter. The plan recommends protection of flow rates at key natural springs and other warm water sources. It also recommends a careful evaluation of those areas where manatees have become dependent on power plant discharges for winter survival.

In this revision to the manatee recovery plan, the Service acknowledges that the species may warrant reclassification to threatened status in the future, if recovery criteria are met and threats are reduced or removed. However, even under the best circumstances, complete recovery of the species is difficult to predict. Resolving long-term threats may take many years.

“Recovery of a listed species is a long-term effort requiring the understanding, cooperation and support of all of our partners and stakeholders,” Hamilton said. “Changes made in this revision provide us a solid blueprint which can help us ensure the survival of the Florida manatee for future generations of Americans.”

Recovery plans are required for all listed species under the Endangered Species Act. They represent a collaborative effort to work with local, state, and federal agencies, the scientific community, and the public to provide a non-regulatory framework to achieve recovery.

The Florida Manatee Recovery Plan, 3rd Revision, is available for download at our web site at <http://northflorida.fws.gov>. A fact sheet, as well as answers to the most frequently asked questions, are also available at the web site. Paper copies of the revised plan may be requested in writing at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 6620 Southpoint Dr., South, Suite 310, Jacksonville, FL 32216-0958, by telephone at 904/232-2580 extension 101, or by e-mail at fw4_es_jacksonville@fws.gov

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 535 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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