

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A Proposal to Reclassify the West Indian Manatee from Endangered to Threatened

*Open House & Formal Public Hearing
February 20, 2016
Orlando, FL*

Original Photo Credit: U.S. Geological Survey Sirenia Project



List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife (from 50 CFR 17.11, January 29, 2016)

Species		Historic Range	Vertebrate population where endangered or threatened	Status	When listed	Critical habitat	Special rules
Common name	Scientific name						
Mammals							
Manatee, West Indian	<i>Trichechus manatus</i> *	U.S.A. (southeastern), Caribbean Sea, South America	Entire	Endangered	1967 1970	Designated ¹	Adopted ²
*Includes both subspecies, the Florida (<i>Trichechus manatus latirostris</i>) manatee and the Antillean manatee (<i>Trichechus</i>							
¹ Critical habitat was designated in 1976. See 50 CFR 17.95(a) for description.							
² Manatee refuges and sanctuaries have been designated. See 50 CFR Subpart J 17 for descriptions.							

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to reclassify the West Indian manatee.
- Manatees are currently listed as endangered throughout their range in the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Species.



- The listing for the West Indian manatee includes both the Florida and Antillean subspecies.
- The Florida subspecies can be found in the southeastern United States and the Antillean subspecies is found in Mexico, Central and South America, and in the Lesser and Greater Antilles (including Puerto Rico).

Status Definitions

An “**Endangered Species**” is a species which is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

A species that is in danger of extinction is one that is currently on the brink of extinction in the wild.

A “**Threatened Species**” is any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

Not on the brink of extinction but threats remain and must be addressed for full recovery.

- In the Service’s status review, the agency concluded that the status of the West Indian manatee better fits the definition of a threatened species and not that of an endangered species. That is, we believe that this is a species which is no longer in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range.
- The Service interprets “in danger of extinction” to mean “currently on the brink of extinction in the wild.” Our threats analysis and review of current biological information confirm that this is not the case.

ESA THREATS EVALUATION

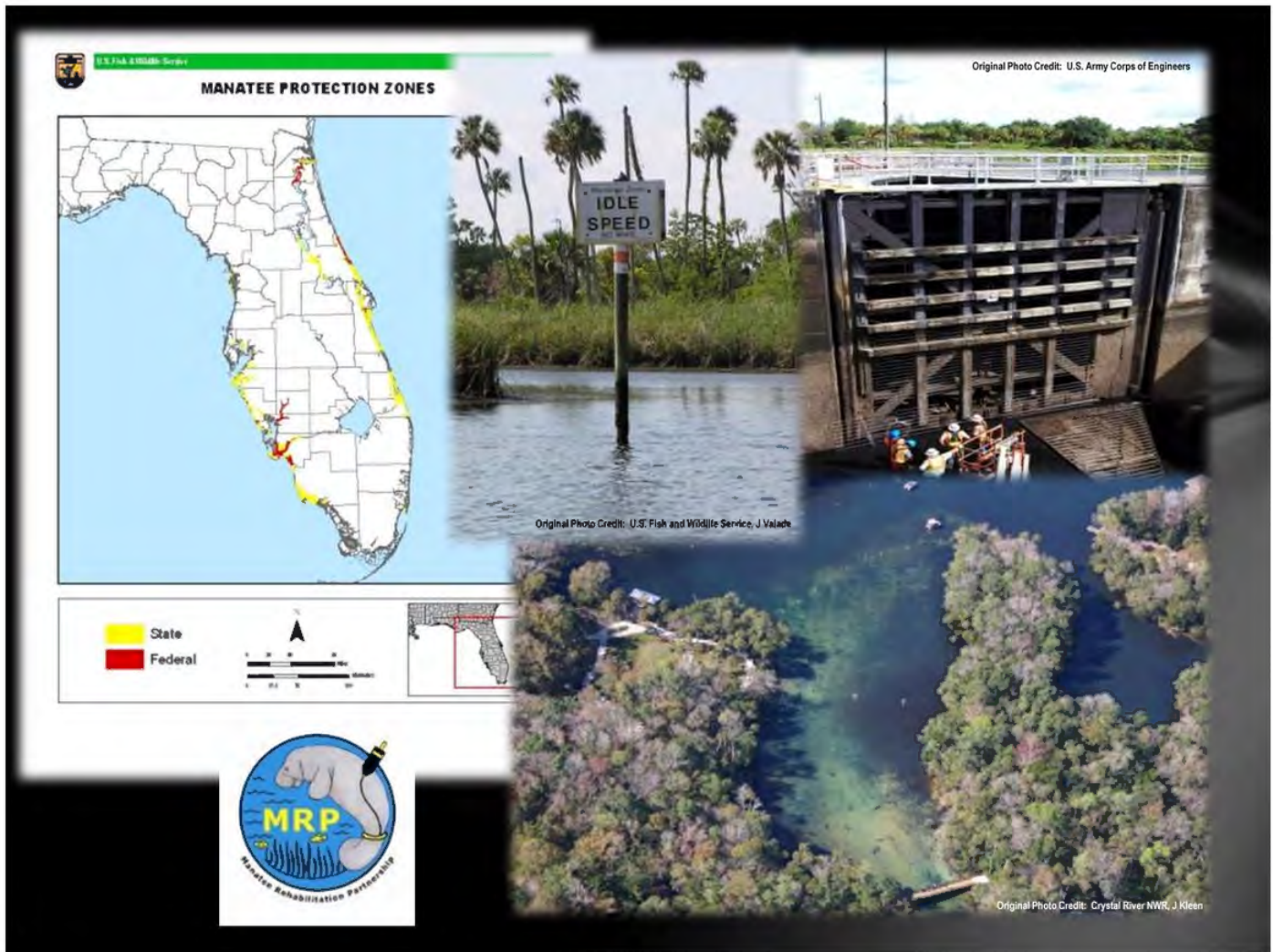
- (A) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
- (B) Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- (C) Disease or predation;
- (D) The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms;
- (E) Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

Under the Endangered Species Act, we are required to conduct a threats analysis when evaluating the status of a species. The threats analysis addresses five threat categories:

- (A) The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range;
- (B) Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes;
- (C) Disease or predation;
- (D) The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms;
- (E) Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.



- The results of our review conclude that habitat fragmentation and loss is the most widespread and significant threat throughout the species' range.
- In the southeastern U.S., the loss of winter, warm water refuges – power plant outfalls and springs – is the most significant habitat threat.
- Other human-related threats outside the U.S. include entanglement in fishing gear, poaching, and other activities.
- Within the U.S., watercraft collisions are the most significant human-related threat to the species.



- Significant efforts have been made and are being made to address these threats.
- For example, in the southeastern U.S., manatee protection areas have been adopted to restrict boat speeds and boat access in sensitive manatee use areas.
- Actions are being taken to protect and restore springs and government agencies are working with industry to insure the future of warm water habitat.




The West Indian manatee population exceeds 13,000 manatees and includes about 6,350 manatees in the southeastern United States and 532 manatees in Puerto Rico.

Original Photo Credit: Innovative Health Associates

- Our review of current biological information identifies a West Indian manatee population of over 13,000 animals. Recent analyses identify a Florida manatee population of 6,350 manatees and a Puerto Rico population of 532 manatees.



- Models describe a range wide population with positive growth and a Florida population with a less than 2.5% possibility that that population will fall below 4,000 individuals over the next 100 years.



Based on our analysis and review of current information, the Service believes the West Indian manatee no longer fits the definition of endangered and as such proposes to change the species' status to threatened.

Original Photo Credit: U.S. Geological Survey Sirenia Project

- In conclusion, the Service proposes to identify the West Indian manatee as a threatened species.
- The manatee is not currently on the brink of extinction, although it could become endangered in the foreseeable future if actions addressing threats do not continue.
- A reclassification to threatened does not mean that existing rules will be removed or peeled back nor does it mean that no new rules will be adopted. As a threatened species, manatees will continue to be protected under the ESA and MMPA.

What changes now or if status is changed?

Simply put, regardless of status on the list of threatened and endangered species...**nothing!**

ALL federal manatee protection and conservation measures remain unchanged, and additional measures can be added if warranted.

ALL manatee protection areas (speeds zones and sanctuaries) remain enforced and compliance mandatory.

Project consultation processes remain unchanged.

Manatee conservation efforts will continue into the foreseeable future.

What changes occur now or if status change is finalized?

Simply put...**nothing**...regardless of manatee's status on the list of threatened and endangered species.

ALL federal manatee protection and conservation measures remain unchanged, and additional measures can be added if warranted.

ALL manatee protection areas (speeds zones and sanctuaries) remain enforced and compliance mandatory.

ALL project consultation and permit review processes remain unchanged.

ALL manatee conservation efforts will continue into the foreseeable future.

ALL efforts to minimize, mitigate or eliminate threats to recovery will continue undiminished.

Then why make the change?

Based on our analysis and review of current information, the Service believes the West Indian manatee **no longer fits the definition of endangered** and as such proposes to change the species' status to threatened as outlined in the ESA.

Public Open Comment Period
January 8, 2016 through April 7,
2016

All comments and information received, including those received at tonight's formal hearing, are reviewed and consider by Service staff in making their final decision.

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You may submit information by one of the following methods:

- (1) Electronically:** Go to the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov/>. In the Keyword box, enter Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2015-0178. Then, in the Search panel on the left side of the screen under the Document Type heading, click on the Proposed Rules link. You may submit a comment by clicking on "Send a Comment or Submission."
- (2) U.S. mail or hand-delivery:** Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R4-ES-2015-0178, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Headquarters, MS: BPHC, 5275 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041-3803

**SUBMISSIONS MUST BE RECEIVED
ON OR BEFORE APRIL 7, 2016.**

All comments and information submitted during the open comment period, regardless of which submission method is selected, will be reviewed and considered by Service staff prior to making a final decision. Additionally, comments submitted electronically don't need to be mailed. Comments submitted by mail need not be sent electronically. Oral comments given at the public hearing were captured by a court reporter as part of the official hearing transcript and need not be submitted by other methods. All comments and transcripts will post to the proposal's Docket FWS-R4-ES-2015-0178 at <http://www.regulations.gov> and be available for download and review.

Please note that submissions merely stating support for or opposition to the action under consideration without providing supporting information are noted, but will not be considered in making the determination. The Endangered Species Act says determinations about whether any species is threatened or endangered must be made "solely on the basis of the best scientific and commercial data available."