



photo: Masa Ushioda



photo: Keith Ramos/USFWS



photo: Keith Ramos/USFWS



photo: Joyce Kleen/USFWS

# Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge

Established in 1983, Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is the only refuge created specifically for the protection of the endangered Florida manatee. The refuge manages 177 acres, including several islands and 40 acres of winter manatee sanctuaries within the spring-fed waters of Kings Bay in Crystal River, Florida. Crystal River NWR is one of over 550 national wildlife refuges which have been established throughout the United States for the protection of wildlife and natural areas.

## Where are the manatees?

The Florida manatee, a subspecies of the West Indian manatee, is native to Florida. Their summer range extends along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Manatees are sensitive to cold water temperatures and, like humans, are susceptible to hypothermia in the winter months. Kings Bay, the headwaters of Crystal River, encompasses more than 70 natural springs which produce a constant flow of 72°F water. Combined with areas of shallow water, the abundance of natural springs provide a winter haven for hundreds of manatees once waters in the Gulf of Mexico drop below 68°F.

Manatees often return to the same wintering areas year after year. Therefore protecting warm-water wintering habitat, like that found in Kings Bay, is key to protecting and recovering this endangered species.

## How are manatees protected in Kings Bay?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provides three levels of protection for manatees within Kings Bay.

A National Wildlife Refuge is created by an act of Congress and is part of a larger system of federally owned lands and waters set aside to conserve fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the benefit of the American public.

A Manatee Refuge is a special protected area created by an administrative act of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is an area where some activities in the water may be restricted to prevent the taking (by harm or harassment) of one or more manatees. No federal land or water ownership results from establishing a manatee protected area.

A Manatee Sanctuary is a federally designated area which restricts all activities, including human entry, during the winter months. The sanctuaries in Kings Bay are in effect from November 15 through March 31. Seven of these sanctuaries are in place each year. Temporary no entry areas may be established at House, Jurassic or 3 Sisters spring at the discretion of the refuge manager (see map on reverse of tearsheet).

The State of Florida also provides protection for manatees by establishing and enforcing slow and idle speed zones in public waterways.

## Manatee Viewing Guidelines and Prohibitions

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service encourages passive observation, which means not initiating contact with manatees and calmly observing from a distance and at the surface. Any contact should be initiated by the manatee, not the person.

### The following activities are prohibited within all waters of Kings Bay, including Three Sisters Springs:

- Chasing or pursuing a manatee
- Disturbing or touching a resting\* or feeding manatee
- Diving from the surface onto a resting or feeding manatee
- Cornering or surrounding a manatee
- Riding, holding, grabbing, pinching, poking, prodding, or stabbing a manatee with anything, including your hands and feet
- Standing on a manatee
- Separating a mother and calf or separating a group of manatees
- Giving manatee(s) anything to eat or drink
- Actively initiating contact with belted/tagged manatee(s)
- Interfering with rescue and research activities

\*A resting manatee is mostly motionless, but rises from the water bottom, the water column, or the water's surface to breath and may make minor movements while resting in order to roll or compensate for drift.

## Visiting Crystal River NWR

Except for the areas closed as winter manatee sanctuaries, Crystal River NWR is open to the public during daylight hours. The Kings Bay area is unique for its increasingly high abundance of wintering manatees. The refuge boasts the largest concentrations of manatees in the world within a natural winter habitat, with densities exceeding 550 manatees on extremely cold days.

People come from around the world to experience the Florida manatee at Crystal River NWR. The best times for viewing manatees are late November through early March, when manatees congregate around warm water springs. The refuge encourages visitors who wish to snorkel with manatees to plan ahead and make reservations with one of the many local dive shops or marinas.



**How can you help?**

There are many ways you can help the refuge protect the endangered Florida manatee:

- Follow the regulations in this tearsheet and practice passive observation
- Report manatee violations or injuries to the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline (888/404 3922)
- Join the Friends of Crystal River NWR, Inc. via their website (<http://friendsofchazz.org/>)
- Help improve the quality and quantity of spring water for manatees and other native Florida wildlife by conserving water and limiting the use of fertilizers.

The refuge headquarters is located on SE Kings Bay Drive, off of Hwy 19 in Crystal River. Office hours are from 8 am – 4 pm Monday through Friday.

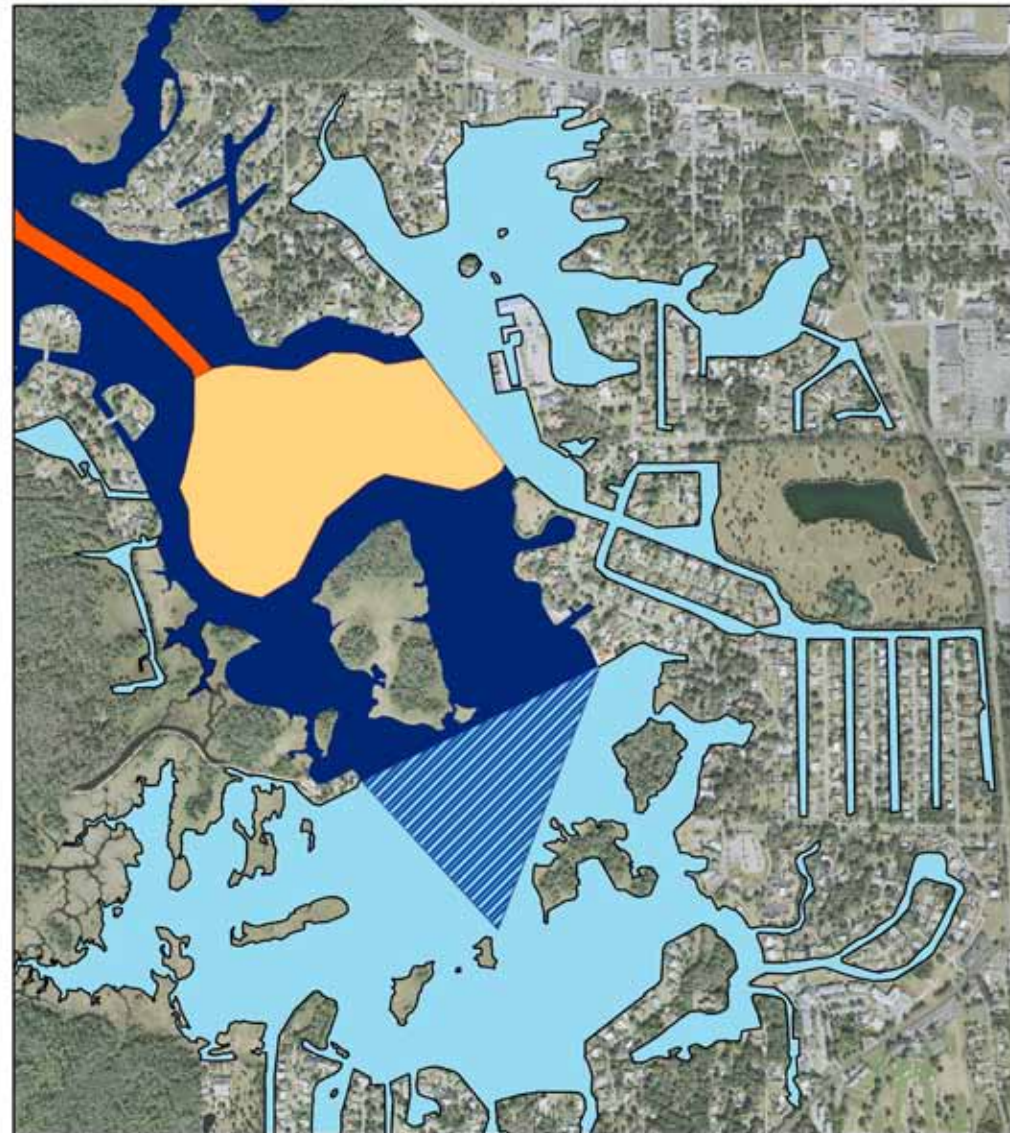
**For more information about this refuge, the refuge system, or volunteer opportunities, please contact:**

Refuge Manager  
 1502 SE Kings Bay Dr.  
 Crystal River, FL 34429  
 Phone: 352/563 2088  
 Fax: 352/795 7961  
 Email: [CrystalRiver@fws.gov](mailto:CrystalRiver@fws.gov)

Tune into AM1600 in Crystal River on your local radio

Visit us at [www.fws.gov/crystalriver](http://www.fws.gov/crystalriver)

Like us on facebook at [www.facebook.com/CrystalRiverComplex](http://www.facebook.com/CrystalRiverComplex)



**Speed Zones in Kings Bay**

	Idle Speed Year Round
	Idle Speed (Sept 1 - April 30) / Slow Speed Remainder of Year
	Slow Speed Year Round
	25 MPH Day - Slow Speed Night, No Anchorage (June 1 - Aug 15) / Slow Speed Remainder of Year
	25 MPH within Channel

NORTH

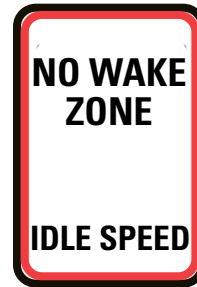

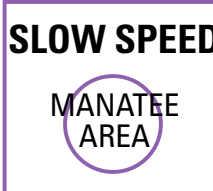



**Manatee Protection Areas in Kings Bay**

	Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge
	Federal Manatee Refuge
	Federal Manatee Sanctuary
	Temporary No Entry Areas. Closed at manager's discretion.
	Headquarters

NORTH



 <p><b>NO WAKE ZONE</b> IDLE SPEED</p>	<p><b>Idle speed:</b> No wake. Minimum speed that will maintain the steerage of a motorboat.</p>	 <p><b>Closed Manatee Sanctuary Area</b> Nov. 15 to Mar. 31</p> <p>These buoys mark manatee sanctuaries in Kings Bay. There is no fishing, boating, swimming, or public use allowed in these areas while sanctuaries are in effect.</p>	 <p><b>SLOW SPEED MANATEE AREA</b></p> <p><b>Slow speed:</b> The speed of a vessel at which it is completely off plane, is settled into the water, and is producing minimum wake. A motorboat operated with an elevated bow is not proceeding at slow speed. No specific speed is assigned to slow speed.</p>	 <p><b>NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE</b> UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY PROHIBITED</p> <p>This sign marks the refuge boundary. Public access is limited to areas designated open for public use.</p>	<p><b>No lifeguard on duty at Crystal River NWR. Swim at your own risk.</b></p> <p><b>King Spring:</b> Parts of this cavern are potentially unstable. Falling rocks can cause death. Avoid small passages beneath fractured rocks.</p>
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