

PORT OF JACKSONVILLE

Manatee Awareness and Protection

Designated the official state marine mammal in 1975, Florida manatees are listed as a threatened species and migrate into the St. Johns River ecosystem each year. The animals are brown or grey in color, averaging 8-10 feet in length, and weigh about 1,000 pounds. Manatees migrate along the Atlantic coast and Intracoastal Waterway from South Florida to coastal Georgia. Although typically solitary, manatees do congregate in groups (as many as 20 animals) when mating, usually from spring through fall. They are commonly found near shorelines in calm water, feeding on submerged and floating aquatic vegetation, salt marsh grass, and algae attached to natural and artificial surfaces. Florida manatees inhabit the waters of Jacksonville throughout the year, with the highest numbers occurring from March to November, with a few animals reported during the winter months. During the winter, some manatees occasionally remain at warm water sources in the area instead of migrating south. These animals can suffer from cold stress and often need to be rescued. Manatee deaths are also a concern due to their slow-moving nature. There are prevention methods vessel operators can take to avoid collision with a manatee.

PURPOSE

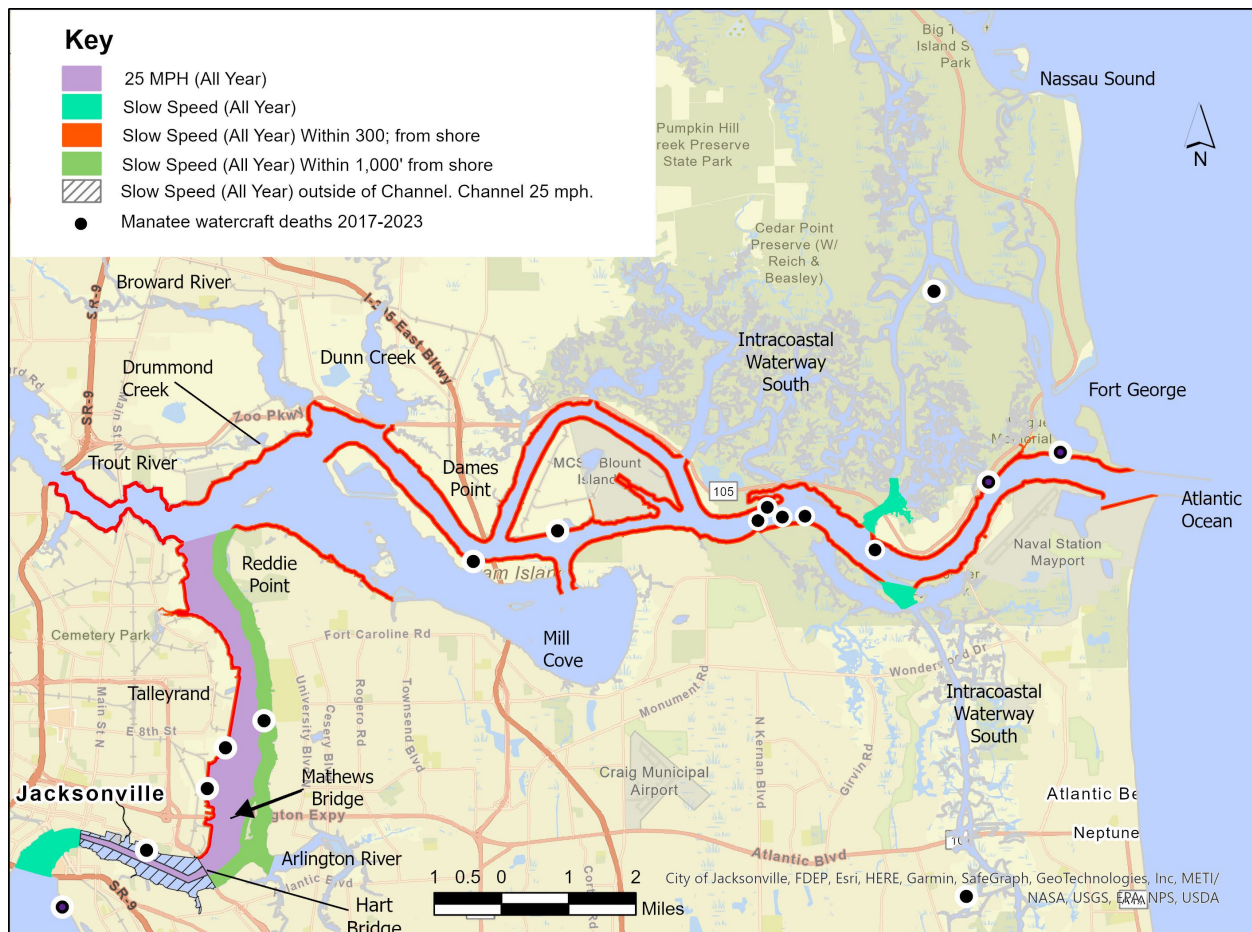
To inform commercial and recreational interests about manatee awareness, provide guidance to help reduce the likelihood of manatee injury or death by vessels, and to encourage mariners to adopt manatee watch protocols as part of routine voyage planning.

THE LAW

Manatees are protected under Federal and State laws. There are two federal laws that make it illegal to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal: The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and The Endangered Species Act of 1973. Convictions under federal law are punishable by fines of up to \$100,000 and/or one year in prison. Manatees are also protected by State law under the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978, which states: "It is unlawful for any person, at any time, intentionally or negligently, to annoy, molest, harass or disturb any manatee." Convictions for violating Florida State law include a maximum fine of up to \$500 and/or imprisonment for up to 60 days.

MANATEE PROTECTION ZONES

There are both Federal and State manatee protection speed zones within the St. Johns River and some of its tributaries. Most slow-speed, minimum wake zones encompass shorelines and extend from 300 to 1,000 feet into the river. A 25-mph limit zone is located within the shipping channel between the Hart Bridge and Reddi Point. The type of zone and its boundary are identified by white and red signage attached to posts and other structures. A reference to a map of these zones is provided here and below: <https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/wildlife/manatee/data-and-maps/>



PROTECTIVE ACTIONS

Before departure or prior to docking:

1. Check the following websites for a map of recent manatee sightings to see if manatees have been reported in your area:



<http://www.ju.edu/marco/latest-sightings.php>

2. For docked vessels, inspect areas around the dock and vessel (including around propellers) to see if any manatees are present at least 30 minutes before moving the vessel or conducting any equipment checks (engine, telegraph, throttle, etc.).
3. For docking vessels, inspect areas off the bow and alongside the ship, including areas between the hull and dock, for manatees. (All boats engaged in a docking operation, including the docking vessel and tugs and tow boats, should be on the lookout, and all should be informed of the presence and location of manatees when sighted).
4. When looking for manatees:
 - Use polarized sunglasses during daylight hours because they provide the best visibility into the water.
 - Some signs that manatees may be in the area include swirls at the water's surface, the presence of mud trails, noses, tails, backs, and other body parts on the water's surface.

5. If a manatee is observed within 50 feet of the vessel, DO NOT move your vessel or conduct any equipment checks until the manatee has left the area. DO NOT attempt to herd animals away; this is considered harassment under both Federal and State laws.
 6. Vessel and dock operators should include manatee watch protocols in operational plans and practices for departing and docking vessels. At a minimum, protocols should include the steps described above.
 7. If manatees are observed during your manatee watch, please report your sightings to the JU Manatee Hotline: (904) 256-7575.
 8. To report manatee deaths, injuries, orphaned calves, tag sightings, or harassment please contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC):
Phone: 1-888-404-FWCC (1-888-404-3922)
Cell: *FWC or #FWC
Radio: VHF Channel 16
- Indicate the following information when reporting sightings:
 - Your name, vessel name, and your contact number/email.
 - Number of animals observed, location (Lat/Long), time of sighting.
 - Manatee activity (traveling direction, resting, feeding, or mating).
- Your reports will help other vessel operators working in the area to avoid injuring manatees.

While underway:

1. Observe and obey speed zone signs posted in manatee habitats or manatee travel corridors.
2. Always remain in the deepest part of the channel.
3. Help protect manatees in your immediate area by informing other nearby vessels of manatees you have seen. Sightings should also be reported to the JU Manatee Hotline, and manatee deaths, injuries, orphaned calves, tag sightings, or harassment should be reported to FWC, as described above.

Signs to look for:

Head and snout



Arching back



Nose



Head and Flippers



Tail (Fluke)

