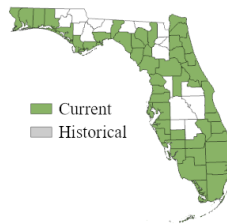


## FLORIDA MANATEE

*Trichechus manatus latirostris*



**Order:** Sirenia  
**Family:** Trichechidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G2G3T2/S2S3  
**U.S. Status:** Threatened  
**FL Status:** none

**Description:** A large (182 - 400 lbs. = 400 - 900 kg), gray, nearly hairless, walrus-like aquatic mammal. Tail is broad, rounded, and flattened. Front limbs are flipper-like, with three nails; hind limbs are absent. Head is broad and undifferentiated from body. Upper lip deeply cleft and bearing stiff bristles. Eyes are small. No external ears.

**Similar Species:** Dolphins (Delphinidae) have dorsal fins and long, cylindrical snouts. Mermaids have long, flowing hair.

**Habitat:** Coastal waters, bays, rivers, and (occasionally) lakes. Requires warm-water refugia such as springs or cooling effluent during cold weather. Sheltered coves are important for feeding, resting, and calving.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Wide-ranging during warm months; restricted to springs and other warm-water areas during the winter.

**Florida Distribution:** State range includes all coastal waters as well as lower portions of many rivers. Currently, the species is rare in the western half of the Panhandle, with the Wakulla River (Wakulla County) supporting the western-most regularly occurring population.

**Range-wide Distribution:** During warm-water periods, coastal waters from Texas to North Carolina, but restricted to Florida during the winter.

**Conservation Status:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has listed the West Indian manatee as endangered since 1967 until its downlisting to threatened in 2017 (USFWS 2017). The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978 established Florida as a refuge and sanctuary for manatees. The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act protects manatees from injury, disturbance, harassment, or harm in the waters of Florida

and allows for enforcement of boat speeds and operations in areas where manatees are concentrated. Manatees are also protected in the U.S. by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. All eight primary power plant discharges on the Atlantic Coast and Gulf Coast, the Coral Gables Waterway, and multiple springs around the state have been protected as manatee sanctuaries/no-entry areas in an ongoing effort to protect warm water refugia (USFWS 2017). In addition, there are 16 Florida counties with FWC-approved Manatee Management Plans (MPPs). However, manatees are still having high mortality rates from harmful algal blooms.

**Protection and Management:** Adequate management of water quality and flow rates at winter refugia sites will be critical to the long-term future of the Florida manatee population (USFWS 2007). The restoration of natural shorelines (e.g. mangroves, oyster bars) and seagrass beds throughout the site will enhance manatee habitat while also protecting the state from the effects of sea-level rise. Greatly reduce effluents coming from Lake Okeechobee going to both coasts to reduce algal blooms and red tide events (Phlips et al. 2014). Facilitate manatee recovery through public awareness and education.

**References:** Brown 1997, Hall 1981, Humphrey (ed.) 1992, USFWS 2017, Whitaker 1996



