

MANATEE RESCUE AND VERIFICATION

**FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
COMMISSION CONTRACT 03193
FINAL REPORT**



Submitted to: Dr. Elsa M. Haubold
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI)
100 8th Avenue Southeast
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Submitted by: Mote Marine Laboratory
Center for Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Research
1600 Ken Thompson Parkway
Sarasota, FL 34236
(941) 388-4441
(941) 388-4317 FAX

Deborah Fauquier and Gretchen Hurst

Mote Marine Laboratory, 1600 Ken Thompson Pkwy, Sarasota, FL 34236

6 June 2005

Mote Marine Laboratory Technical Report Number 1018

Title of Project: Manatee Rescue and Verification

Principal Investigators: Deborah Fauquier, Gretchen Hurst

Mote Marine Laboratory, 1600 Ken Thompson Parkway, Sarasota, FL 34236-1096

Goals of the Project:

To provide 24-hour response to all reports of sick, injured or dead manatees in Manatee and Sarasota counties, on the central west coast of Florida.

Introduction:

Efforts to decrease natural or human-induced manatee mortality depend in part on how quickly and efficiently trained individuals respond to reports of injured or distressed animals. Likewise, the timely recovery of dead animals might allow for more detailed post-mortem investigations that may determine cause of death. Working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute's Marine Mammal Pathobiology Laboratory in St. Petersburg and the Southwest Field Station in Port Charlotte, the Stranding Investigations Program at Mote Marine Laboratory (MML SIP) provides response to all reports of sick, injured, or dead manatees for Manatee and Sarasota counties. This study reports on manatee rescue and verification activities from July 2004 through April 2005.

Methods:

The MML SIP maintains 24-hour paging and cellular phone services, and a three member staff who coordinate with local and state law enforcement agencies to provide appropriate responses for verifications of manatee-related reports. These services include assisting FWC with rescues of live and recovery of dead manatees as needed. Reports of distressed or dead manatees were received through MML SIP offices or the 24-hour pager. These reports were logged into an incident report form, which reflects the same data collected by personnel at the FWC field stations. The data presented here reflect only the incidents actually received by MML SIP and may not represent all manatee-related responses in the counties serviced (i.e., reports of dead manatees or manatees in distress may have been sent directly to FWC and not to MML SIP).

Results:

During the months of July 2004 through April 2005, a total of 123 reports were received from Manatee (27%), Sarasota (56%), and surrounding counties (17%) (**Table 1**). The largest number of calls were reported in March 2005 (**Table 2**), corresponding to a severe red tide event in southwest Florida waters. Twenty-four percent of all calls (n=18) related to dead animals (**Table 1**), up from fifteen percent during this time period last year. Fifty-two percent of the dead manatees were reported in March 2005, during the aforementioned red tide event in southwest Florida. MML SIP helped tow and recover carcasses for FWC throughout the year and particularly during this time period. Thirteen of all reports related to known animals or animals equipped with tags/radio transmitters that were part of on-going studies of distribution and movements. MML SIP staff also assisted FWC personnel in August 2004 with the rescue of a manatee with a pectoral flipper entanglement in Philippi Creek in Sarasota county. The

manatee was rescued, the entangled rope was removed (leaving only superficial scars) and a brief health assessment was performed prior to releasing the animal on site. MML SIP staff was crucial in observing and following this manatee's movements while FWC was en route to the site to initiate the rescue.

Discussion:

During this time period, the increased number of dead manatees reported is most likely due to a red tide event in southwest Florida waters during March 2005. Necropsy results of manatees recovered during this time period are still being investigated for possible red tide intoxication and other factors. As in previous years, most of the reports received of manatees in distress or injured could not be substantiated. In 50 of the 123 reports logged during the period July 2004 through April 2005, no response was required because the animals reported to be in distress were determined to be exhibiting normal behaviors, or the animals were gone on arrival of MML SIP staff to the scene (**Table 1**). These **Figures** indicate that many of the manatees initially reported to be in severe distress or seriously injured are actually animals that may be resting, feeding or engaging in reproductive behavior.

Conservation Benefits:

Efforts to decrease natural or human-induced manatee mortality depend on how quickly and efficiently trained personnel respond to reports of injured or distressed animals. Likewise, the timely recovery of dead animals might allow for more detailed post-mortem investigations. As the human population of Florida continues to grow and/or as the public becomes better educated about the threats to manatees, calls from concerned citizens about animals potentially in distress will continue to be on the rise. When interacting with the public during manatee-related calls, MML SIP staff has the opportunity to educate residents and visitors about manatee

behavior and general biology. These efforts, though on a small scale, might contribute to the cause of protecting and preserving wild manatees, thereby promoting recovery of the species (US Fish and Wildlife, 2001).

Literature Cited:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Florida Manatee Recovery Plan, (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*), Third Revision. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Atlanta, Georgia. 138 pp.

List of Tables:

Table 1. Summary of manatee-related stranding investigations, per category by county, July 2004 – April 2005.

Table 2. Summary of manatee-related stranding investigations, by month, July 2004 – April 2005.

Table 1. Summary of manatee-related stranding investigations, per category by county, July 2004 – April 2005¹.

CATEGORY	COUNTY							TOTAL
	Manatee	Sarasota	Charlotte	Hillsborough	Lee	Pinellas	Pasco	
Dead	9	17	2	0	1	0	0	29
Rescued	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gone on arrival	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	5
Mating Herd	1	9	1	0	0	0	0	11
Known animal sighting	5	8	3	0	0	0	0	16
No response required	16	26	1	0	1	0	1	45
Passed info	0	5	5	2	2	2	0	16
TOTAL	33	69	12	2	4	2	1	123

¹ As of April 23, 2005

Table 2. Summary of manatee-related stranding investigations, by month, July 2004 - April 2005¹.

MONTH	TOTAL
July	22
August	20
September	9
October	8
November	8
December	12
January	3
February	4
March	25
April	12
May ¹	
TOTAL	123

¹ As of April 23, 2005