

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANNUAL REPORT ISSUED ON MARINE MAMMALS

Although most of the marine mammal populations monitored by the Interior Department remained relatively stable during the nine months ending last March, biologists expressed continued concern about the manatee, or sea cow, an annual report to Congress by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service says.

The publication covers the period from June 22, 1977, to March 31, 1978, to coincide with the March annual report closing date of the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service. The two agencies share jurisdiction for protecting marine mammals, with the Fish and Wildlife Service having responsibility for the polar bear, sea and marine otters, walrus, dugong, and three species of manatees.

One of these manatees, the West Indian species, concentrates seasonally in the rivers, estuaries, and coastal areas of Florida. It is facing the most serious problem of any of the eight marine mammal species, according to the report. Numbering about 1,000, and with a low reproductive rate, the manatee population has suffered losses in Florida waters from encounters with human paraphernalia. Wounds inflicted by motorboats and barges are a major cause of manatee mortality. Encounters with flood control structures, fishing nets and hooks, water pollution, industrial contaminants, and herbicides also contribute to the animals' plight and affect their habitat and food supplies.

The report describes the Service's intensified efforts to identify causes of death and to reduce manatee mortality and injury. Various cooperative Federal, State, and private conservation efforts were launched including formation of a representative "manatee working group;" a workshop attended by more than 60 national and international manatee specialists, government officials, and conservationists; and expansion of the Service's Manatee Recovery Team to include international experts.

The report also summarizes the following status information for each of the eight species: distribution and migration, abundance and trends, general biology, ecological and allocation problems, and current research.

Administrative actions are also outlined, including the status of Alaska's request that management of nine marine mammals be returned to the State, proposed regulations on care and maintenance standards, law enforcement activities, scientific research and public display permits, Service research activities, endangered species, the Outer Continental Shelf Environmental Studies Program, ecological characterizations of United States coastal areas, and international activities.

Limited numbers of the report are available to the public, and single copies may be obtained from the Director (WA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Availability of the report was announced in the January 24, 1979, Federal Register.

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