

## **Kings Bay Manatee Refuge**

### **Location**

The Service designates the waters of Kings Bay as a manatee refuge. These waters include that tract of submerged land that includes all waters of Kings Bay, including all tributaries and adjoining waterbodies, upstream of the confluence of Kings Bay and Crystal River, described by a line that bears North 53°00'00" East (True) from the northeasternmost point of an island on the southwesterly shore of Crystal River (approximate latitude 28° 53'32" North, approximate longitude 82°36'23" West) to the southwesternmost point of a peninsula of Magnolia Shores (approximate latitude 28°53'38" North, approximate longitude 82°36'16" West). See Map "Kings Bay Manatee Refuge".

The manatee refuge encompasses seven existing Federal manatee sanctuaries, described in 50 CFR 17.108. The manatee refuge measures would be in effect in Kings Bay as described below.

### **Manatee Refuge Measures**

The manatee refuge measures, described in more detail below, include:

- Maintaining the seven existing manatee sanctuaries where all waterborne activities are prohibited November 15 through March 31;
- Regulating watercraft speeds throughout the manatee refuge at all times;
- Prohibiting anchorage (other than emergency anchorage) of watercraft in the high-speed (25 mph) area from June 1 through August 15;
- 12 specifically prohibited activities throughout the manatee refuge at all times;
- Temporary 'no-entry' areas adjacent to existing sanctuaries and specified additional springs during the manatee season (November 15 through March 31);
- Temporary 'no-entry' areas prior to or after the manatee season during unusual cold events; and
- Exceptions for adjoining property owners and their designees.

### ***Existing Manatee Sanctuaries***

All seven currently existing manatee sanctuaries in Kings Bay (Banana Island Sanctuary (including King Spring), the Sunset Shores Sanctuary, the Magnolia Springs Sanctuary (including Gator Hole), the Buzzard Island Sanctuary, the Tarpon Springs Sanctuary, the Warden Key Sanctuary, and the Three Sisters Springs Sanctuary), where all waterborne activities are prohibited November 15 through March 31, will remain in effect.

### ***Watercraft Speeds and Anchorage***

To prevent the take of one or more manatees killed and injured by high-speed watercraft, operating speeds in Kings Bay are regulated throughout the year. Watercraft operation is restricted to slow speed throughout the manatee refuge unless otherwise marked. In some portions of the manatee refuge, State or local regulations require watercraft to travel at idle speed. For example, during summer holiday weekends, local ordinances and USCG regulations can require watercraft to travel at restricted speeds throughout Kings Bay due to human safety concerns regarding the high volume of watercraft activity, regardless of posted zones allowing greater speed. This rule allows watercraft to travel at speeds up to 25 mph during daylight hours (slow speed at night) in a portion of the manatee refuge from June 1 through August 15. The intent of regulating watercraft speeds

**Refer to 50 CFR 17.108 or 77 FR 15617 for details.**

and slowing all watercraft down in areas most frequented by manatees is to prevent the take of one or more manatees in Kings Bay from compliant watercraft operation. Some manatees in Kings Bay are known to approach anchored boats and, therefore, anchoring boats in the high-speed (25 mph) area is prohibited from June 1 through August 15. By prohibiting anchorage of boats in the high-speed (25 mph) area during this time period, manatees will not be attracted into harm's way by seeking cover around the boats, being attracted to the discharge of bilge water, chewing on anchor lines, etc.

***Manatee Viewing and Other Waterborne Activities***

To prevent the take of manatees by individuals engaged in waterborne activities while in the water, in boats, or on-shore within the Kings Bay Manatee Refuge, we specifically identify and prohibit the following activities:

- (i) Chasing or pursuing a manatee(s).
- (ii) Disturbing or touching a resting or feeding manatee(s).
- (iii) Diving from the surface onto a resting or feeding manatee(s).
- (iv) Cornering or surrounding or attempting to corner or surround a manatee(s).
- (v) Riding, holding, grabbing, or pinching or attempting to ride, hold, grab, or pinch a manatee(s).
- (vi) Poking, prodding, or stabbing or attempting to poke, prod, or stab a manatee(s) with anything, including your hands and feet.
- (vii) Standing on or attempting to stand on a manatee(s).
- (viii) Separating a mother and calf or attempting to separate a mother and calf.
- (ix) Separating a manatee(s) from a group or attempting to separate a manatee(s) from a group.
- (x) Giving a manatee(s) anything to eat or drink or attempting to give a manatee(s) anything to eat or drink.
- (xi) Actively initiating contact with a belted and/or tagged manatee(s) and associated gear, including any belts, harnesses, tracking devices, or antennae.
- (xii) Interfering with rescue and research activities.

The following activities are prohibited within Three Sisters Springs from November 15 through March 31:

- a. All waterborne activities in Three Sisters Springs from sunset to sunrise.
- b. Scuba diving.
- c. Fishing, including but not limited to fishing by hook and line, by cast net, and by spear.

***Prohibited Anchoring in the High-speed Area of Kings Bay***

Some manatees in Kings Bay are known to approach anchored boats. To minimize the potential for attraction (manatees seeking cover, bilge water, etc.) into harm's way, anchorage (other than emergency anchorage) of watercraft is prohibited in the high speed (25 mph) area from June 1 through August 15.

***Temporary No-entry Areas (November 15 Through March 31)***

Because there is insufficient space in the existing sanctuaries for all manatees that use Kings Bay to shelter, rest, and feed, free from harassment, we will create temporary no-entry areas outside of and adjacent to the existing sanctuaries to ensure adequate room for manatees wanting to access these sites when space is needed during the manatee season (between November 15 and March 31). This rule allows for creation of no-entry areas around one or more of the existing sanctuaries, as appropriate. The creation and removal of the temporary no-entry areas will be based on manatee usage data (such as aerial survey or on-the-water observations), current weather, and other sources of substantial information. We will also create no-entry areas around House Spring, Jurassic

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Spring, and Idiot's Delight Number 2 Spring when these springs are occupied by manatees in need of shelter free from harassment. With this rule, we have the ability to create temporary no-entry areas around any or all sanctuaries and specified springs for the manatee season, but we do not envision this will be necessary in all years. Temporary no-entry areas will be created at the distances specified in this rule to accommodate manatee biological needs as they use Kings Bay during cold events. The temporary no-entry areas will be posted for as long as they are necessary within the manatee season.

***Temporary No-entry Areas (April 1 Through November 14)***

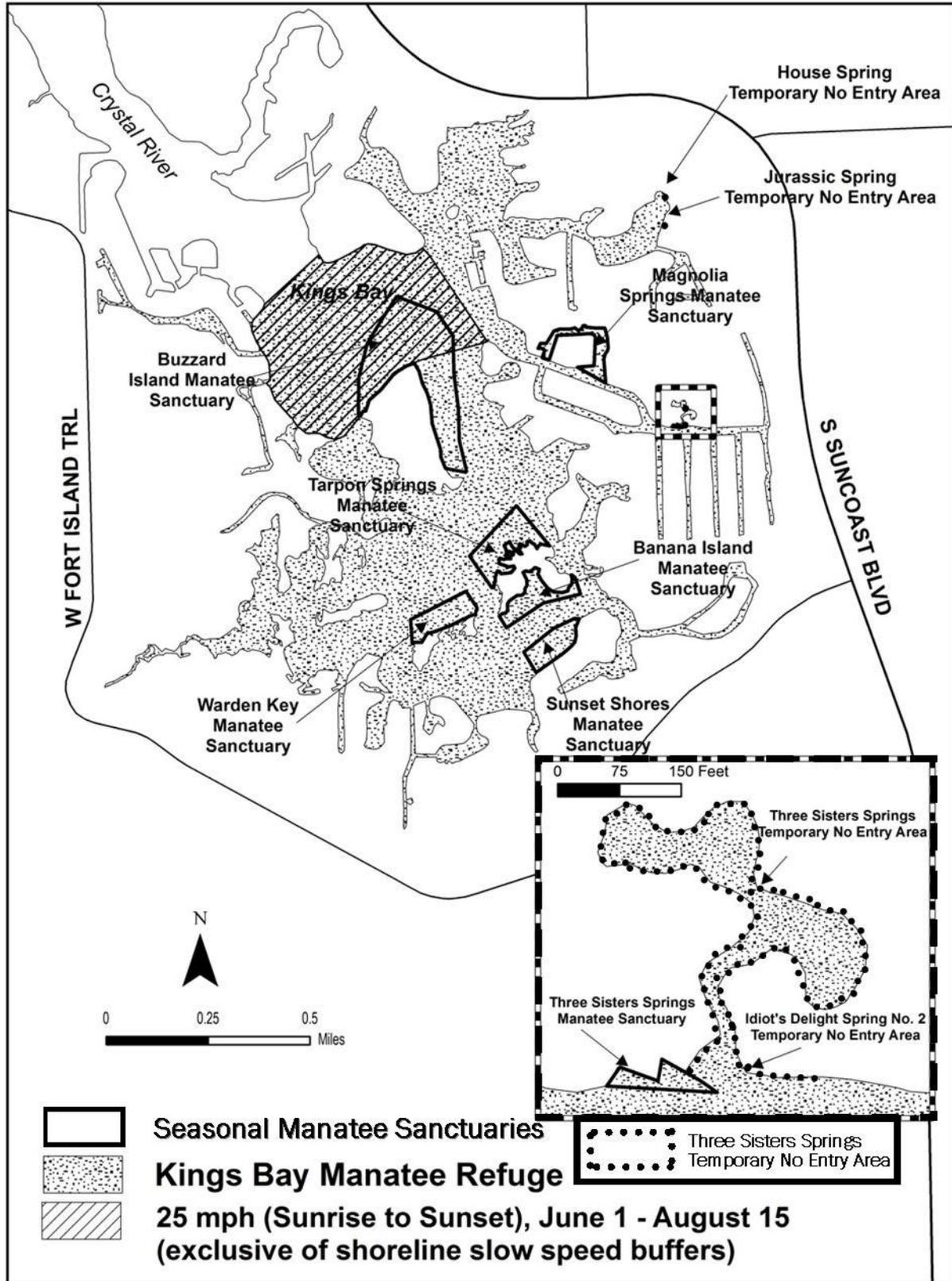
To prevent the take of manatees sheltering in Kings Bay from cold weather that occurs outside of the manatee season (November 15 through March 31), temporary no-entry areas under this rule can be put in effect during early onset and protracted cold weather events that occur outside of the manatee season. Manatees that appear in Kings Bay during cold fronts that pre-date the start of the manatee season are especially vulnerable to harassment because none of the sanctuaries and no-entry areas are in effect prior to November 15. Similarly, none of these measures are in effect after March 31, during those times when cold weather continues beyond this period of time. In April 2010, the Service asked the public to voluntarily stay out of existing manatee sanctuaries after the close of the manatee season due to protracted cold weather and the continued presence of manatees at these sites. While the public generally complied with the request, some people did not and manatees were harassed.

By designating temporary no-entry areas prior to November 15 and after March 31 during cold fronts when manatees are present, manatee harassment that could occur during these times can be prevented. Designations would remain in effect for the duration of a cold front and only when there is regular manatee use; manatee presence at warm-water sites during unseasonal cold events typically lasts for several days or less. Temporary designations would remain in effect for no longer than 14 consecutive days.

***Exceptions for Adjoining Property Owners and Their Designees***

Public and private property owners who own property that adjoins designated no-entry areas, their guests, employees, and designees (including but not limited to contractors and lessees) will continue to be able to access their property by obtaining, at no charge, an exception from the Crystal River NWR that will allow them to operate watercraft within the adjoining no-entry area for purposes of access and property maintenance. The Crystal River NWR will continue to provide adjoining property owners and their designees with a no-cost sticker or letter of authorization that identifies their watercraft as authorized to access no-entry areas. Watercraft owned by excepted owners will be required to be marked by stickers and operate at idle speed while within a designated no-entry area. Designees with a letter of authorization would be required to have a copy of the letter in their possession and required to operate at idle speed while within a designated no-entry area.

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Note: Map is for representational purposes only.  
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