



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Raleigh Field Office

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GUIDELINES FOR AVOIDING IMPACTS TO THE WEST INDIAN MANATEE

Precautionary Measures for Construction Activities in North Carolina Waters

The West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), also known as the Florida manatee, is a Federally-listed endangered aquatic mammal protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C 1461 *et seq.*). The manatee is also listed as endangered under the North Carolina Endangered Species Act of 1987 (Article 25 of Chapter 113 of the General Statutes). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the lead Federal agency responsible for the protection and recovery of the West Indian manatee under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act.

Adult manatees average 10 feet long and weigh about 2,200 pounds, although some individuals have been recorded at lengths greater than 13 feet and weighing as much as 3,500 pounds. Manatees are commonly found in fresh, brackish, or marine water habitats, including shallow coastal bays, lagoons, estuaries, and inland rivers of varying salinity extremes. Manatees spend much of their time underwater or partly submerged, making them difficult to detect even in shallow water. While the manatee's principal stronghold in the United States is Florida, the species is considered a seasonal inhabitant of North Carolina with most occurrences reported from June through October.

To protect manatees in North Carolina, the Service's Raleigh Field Office has prepared precautionary measures for general construction activities in waters used by the species. Implementation of these measures will allow in-water projects which do not require blasting to proceed without adverse impacts to manatees. In addition, inclusion of these guidelines as conservation measures in a Biological Assessment or Biological Evaluation, or as part of the determination of impacts on the manatee in an environmental document prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, will expedite the Service's review of the document for the fulfillment of requirements under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. These measures include:

- 1 The project manager and/or contractor will inform all personnel associated with the project that manatees may be present in the project area, and the need to avoid any harm to these endangered mammals. The project manager will ensure that all construction personnel know the general appearance of the species and their habit of moving about completely or partially submerged in shallow water. All construction personnel will be informed that they are responsible for observing water-related activities for the presence of manatees.

2. The project manager and/or the contractor will advise all construction personnel that there are civil and criminal penalties for harming, harassing, or killing manatees which are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

3. If a manatee is seen within 100 yards of the active construction and/or dredging operation or vessel movement, all appropriate precautions will be implemented to ensure protection of the manatee. These precautions will include the immediate shutdown of moving equipment if a manatee comes within 50 feet of the operational area of the equipment. Activities will not resume until the manatee has departed the project area on its own volition (i.e., it may not be herded or harassed from the area).

4. Any collision with and/or injury to a manatee will be reported immediately. The report must be made to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (ph. 919-856-4520), the National Marine Fisheries Service (ph. 252-728-8762), and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (ph. 252-448-1546).

5. A sign will be posted in all vessels associated with the project where it is clearly visible to the vessel operator. The sign should state:

CAUTION: The endangered manatee may occur in these waters during the warmer months, primarily from June through October. Idle speed is required if operating this vessel in shallow water during these months. All equipment must be shut down if a manatee comes within 50 feet of the vessel or operating equipment. A collision with and/or injury to the manatee must be reported immediately to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (919-856-4520), the National Marine Fisheries Service (252-728-8762), and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (252-448-1546).

6. The contractor will maintain a log detailing sightings, collisions, and/or injuries to manatees during project activities. Upon completion of the action, the project manager will prepare a report which summarizes all information on manatees encountered and submit the report to the Service's Raleigh Field Office.

7. All vessels associated with the construction project will operate at "no wake/idle" speeds at all times while in water where the draft of the vessel provides less than a four foot clearance from the bottom. All vessels will follow routes of deep water whenever possible.

8. If siltation barriers must be placed in shallow water, these barriers will be: (a) made of material in which manatees cannot become entangled; (b) secured in a manner that they cannot break free and entangle manatees; and, (c) regularly monitored to ensure that manatees have not become entangled. Barriers will be placed in a manner to allow manatees entry to or exit from essential habitat.

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Figure 1. The whole body of the West Indian manatee may be visible in clear water; but in the dark and muddy waters of coastal North Carolina, one normally sees only a small part of the head when the manatee raises its nose to breathe.

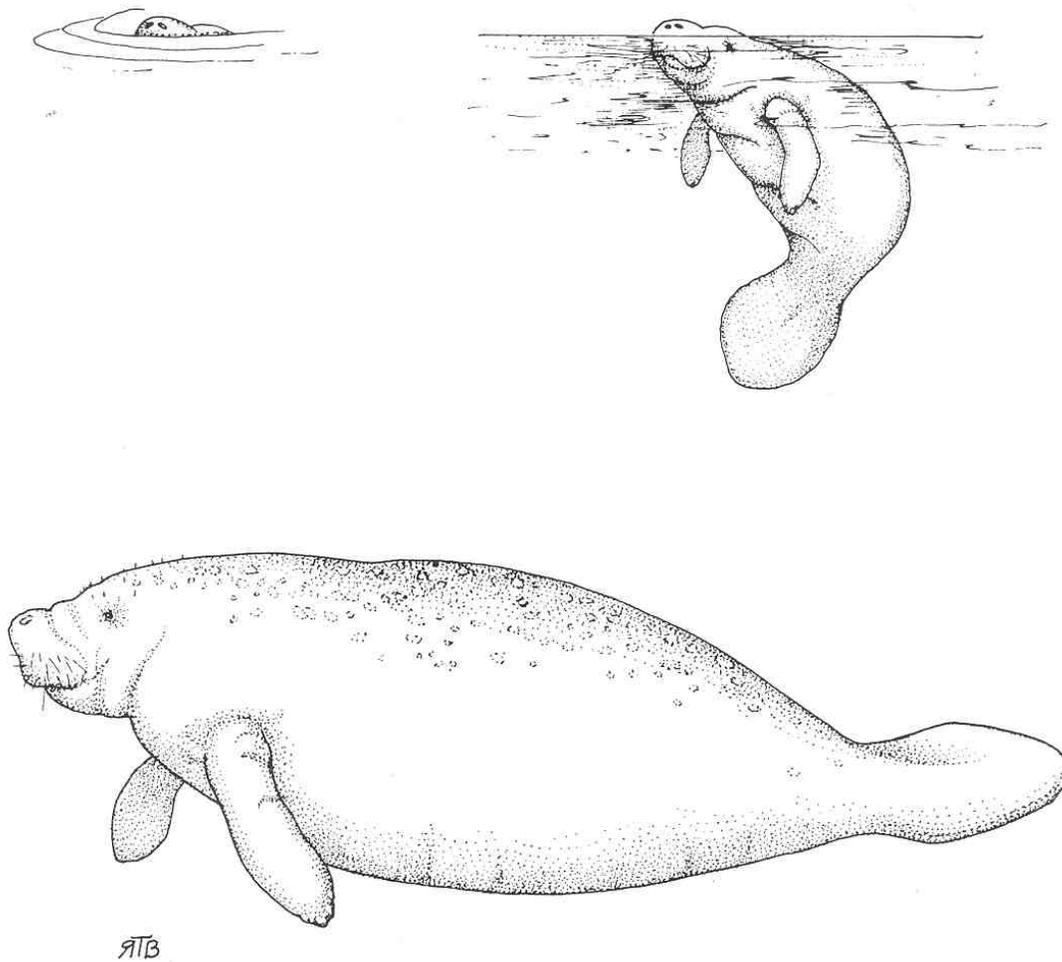


Illustration used with the permission of the North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences.

Source: Clark, M. K. 1987. Endangered, Threatened, and Rare Fauna of North Carolina: Part I. A re-evaluation of the mammals. Occasional Papers of the North Carolina Biological Survey 1987-3. North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences. Raleigh, NC. pp. 52.