

From: [Calleson, Teresa](#)
To: [Hinzman, Roxanna](#); [Mena, Lourdes](#); [Basili, Gianfranco D](#)
Cc: [Calleson, Charles S](#); [Dziergowski, Annie](#); [Underwood, Chuck](#); [McRae, Gil](#)
Subject: RE: Issues with high capacity at manatee facilities
Date: Monday, May 9, 2022 9:25:00 AM
Importance: High

Thanks, Rox! In my opinion, we have to get the two other primary critical care facilities, ZooTampa and Miami Seaquarium, back open and in play to provide additional relief to Sea World and the MRP overall. Other options presented in the last week are going to take time (maybe 1-2 years) to provide relief. Disney might be able to provide additional help with stable manatees sooner but it means moving some animals around at The Seas. Should we have a red tide event and not have any West Coast capacity, we would be in dire straits. At this point, I think getting ZooTampa back online would be the highest priority.

ZooTampa:

Over the last year, there has been a continual situation at ZooTampa of opening and closing to incoming cases that makes it exceedingly difficult for the FWC, USFWS and others to manage a geographically-based rescue program – recent closures were frequently for water quality problems (specifically high coliform levels, from what I understand) and sometimes for space issues. I’ve been told that they have addressed the water quality issues with ozone and other improvements. But, now they are closed to incoming cases again due to space concerns. There have been other issues in the interim since the major closure for life support upgrades and then the substantial veterinary concerns at the federal level that followed. They currently have 15 manatees in their care but have previously indicated a capacity of 20-24 (see below). We may need to schedule a meeting between the Service, FWC and Zoo staff in order to come to some resolution.

My concerns here are as follows:

- For manatees rescued in SW Florida, I’m concerned for longer travel times for distressed manatees and FWC or other MRP partners’ staff that may be transporting them. This isn’t an optimal situation for the manatees or the people to have to travel further due to closures.
- Since the 2017/2018 state funding of life support system upgrades (around \$3 million, I believe), ZooTampa is taking fewer manatees than before. On site visits and in the federal permit application process, we have been told they could take between 20-24 manatees. USDA numbers based on the pools would likely be in the 40+ manatee(s) ballpark based on recent conversations with USDA’s national staff. There were conversations with zoo leadership last summer where they told us they were closed due to funding constraints. No matter the reason for the closures, we need the Zoo to understand the situation and be willing to provide the regional support required to support our statewide response network. For this, I think a meeting with the Zoo that involves higher level staff from the agencies would be helpful.
- The situation is resulting in continued pressure on Sea World that is now the only entity taking manatee critical care cases anywhere inside or outside of Florida. Sea World had to

take 3 manatees this past Friday alone (two from the West Coast that would normally have been routed to ZooTampa and one from the East Coast).

- There is a large manatee named Belissima from ZooTampa that is medically cleared for release; however, staff at the facility told the MRP last week that getting this manatee out would not result in them being able to take another rescued manatee.
- My understanding is that ZooTampa may be getting state money for the neonate pool (which they need) but also a bridge over their manatee hospital. My understanding is that the bridge may be \$1.5 million. If there is any flexibility for that bridge money to go for something that further increases capacity, that would be preferable for the program. I'll need to see the designs but there have already been concerns expressed from our Division of Management Authority (DMA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) because of public display limitations for the Florida manatee due to coverage under the ESA and MMPA.

Miami Seaquarium:

This week, I will be traveling with (b)(6) to meet with Miami Seaquarium and their new management to try to discuss the path forward and how this facility can be a help to the MRP. Our meeting is Tuesday morning. While they have long been a critical care facility, they requested to back down to a holding facility in November following a manatee incident at their park. This week, I will inspect the manatees in their collection including four under the purview of the USFWS and two Pre-Act manatees, the overall facilities and speak with staff but given what transpired at the end of last winter, they simply cannot resume critical care with the setup and staff that they have. In order to proceed and resume being a critical care facility, they need to ensure they can provide adequate care including but not limited to the following: Installation of false bottom floors for all pools containing critical care manatees so they can perform care (such as tubing fluids and food in accordance with the federal permit conditions), the ability to heat their pools, a lifting device to get manatees into and out of pools, adequate filtration, shade structures and an experienced manatee critical care veterinarian. I've already spoken with DMA staff and USDA regarding this, especially in light of the manatee issues associated with the recent USDA investigation and related reviews. I'm happy to discuss the manatee-related problems that occurred in November 2021, if anyone needs that for awareness. The new management appears to be willing to address concerns but we will know more after the upcoming site visit.

For these permits, I deal directly with USFWS-HQ. These permits are issued by DMA. Right now, I'm having tremendous cooperation there and that was part of my taking DMA and USDA staff with me on site visits last week (Sea World, Jacksonville Zoo, Disney and a manatee release near Blue Spring). All in all, we find ourselves in a much better place on permits, and both offices told me last week that they are elevating our permits to the top of the stack to try to help us.

On a positive note, the Welaka National Fish Hatchery trial is going well, once the manatees settled in. Sea World is also managing this test at the hatchery to see if this situation is viable as emergency holding space for stable manatees but regardless, this setup will likely be seasonally challenging without improved heating capacity in the winter.

My apologies for the length of this email but there is a bit of history that has lead to the problems that we are facing right now. I will have limited access to email this coming week. I'll be on the MSQ trip Monday/Tuesday and then mostly off the remainder of the week.

Thanks for your efforts to help – and I'm sure that I'm not alone when I say that we could not have the success with manatee rescue and rehabilitation that we are having without the outstanding cooperation and collaborative relationship with Sea World Orlando. Again at Disney last week, their Vice President made sure that everyone knew that "Sea World is the real hero of this story", and I could not agree more. Their efforts to help FWC and USFWS by keeping their doors open despite high capacity has allowed this rescue/rehab program to keep moving forward. By my calculations, they have already taken in over 40 rescued manatees in 2022 alone.

Please let me know if you would like to discuss further. I think that the situation could be improved with more ability to rehab manatees at ZooTampa, and perhaps a meeting with them would be a logical next step.  and I will start work with Miami Seaquarium this week, but that option will likely take considerably more time due to the nature of the necessary improvements.

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Sent: Saturday, May 7, 2022 1:17 PM
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Subject: Re: Issues with high capacity at manatee facilities

Thanks for the update Terri.

Chuck can we make sure the May press call addresses the need for people to slow down and watch for manatees when boating? Put it in the context of the UME etc.

Gil should we chat about critical care capabilities short and long term. We can probably get Leo's support with permits but should have a plan once Terri and MRP folks have an idea of what will be best path forward.

Glad to hear Welaka is going well! Sounds like we are going to need these kinds of options. Here's hoping for no red tide events this year.

Thanks
Rox

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Subject: Issues with high capacity at manatee facilities

Hi all,

FYSA – having issues with manatee capacity due to high number of rescues and two of the recent watercraft-related rescues for the MRP were injured females with calves (so net increase of 2 for each of these). The situation is exacerbated by the fact that three of the other primary critical care facilities (Miami Seaquarium, ZooTampa and Jacksonville Zoo) are closed to incoming patients, and Sea World is having to take all the incoming critical care cases (again). To me, we are seeing a higher number of watercraft cases coming in and bad injuries – propeller cuts to the head (see attached) – this manatee has a fractured skull but is eating at Sea World and looked surprisingly ok to me when I saw him last week while there for the AMMPA meeting. Looking at past years – we are similar to last year (but have facility closures we didn't last year at this time) but running about 20 manatees or so higher for rehab than the years prior to 2021.

Sea World was able to release 2 manatees this week but received 3 new incoming patients on Friday alone. Two of the manatees (the watercraft injured mother with the calf) they received would normally have been routed to ZooTampa as they were from Lee County.

Welaka National Fish Hatchery – we did it! 😊 two male manatees were released into Pond 4 at Welaka NFH on Friday (photo attached – thanks, Lourdes!). The manatees seem to have settled in now and are enjoying the romaine. There was a significant storm that passed through last night but the report this morning was that all is going well. For the safety of the manatees and the Sea World staff on site, we are telling everyone to keep this “close to the vest” for the next couple of weeks. Will make a great story, we hope – but in due time. This will initially be a 2-week trial.

Manatees in Captivity (5/6): 88 (72 in FL, 2 in GA, 12 in OH, 1 in TX and 1 in PR)

Critical Care Facility Status:
Sea World (33) – OPEN

ZooTampa (15) – CLOSED, space/water quality issues

Jacksonville Zoo (3) – CLOSED, extremely critical watercraft-injured manatee from St. Augustine taking up the medical pool because has to be at shallow depth

Miami Seaquarium – CLOSED and asked to go back to a holding facility (cannot provide critical care and does not have an experienced manatee critical care vet)

Following my presentation last week and my meeting with Disney's management on Thursday, we have some additional offers of assistance on the table that are going to take me some time to try to evaluate and discuss with MRP leadership and Headquarters/USDA because it would involve federal permitting – they are at Disney, Gulfarium, White Oak, and possibly Dolphin Research Center. They would be options that won't provide immediate help – perhaps over a 1-2 year horizon. Disney's may be more helpful due to staff with manatee experience, financial considerations and proximity to Sea World (i.e. easy for them to take stable manatees from this partner facility in Orlando). They want to continue to help the MRP with taking stable manatees – UME cases or otherwise. At a lunch meeting I had last Tuesday, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium has also offered staffing and financial assistance with Welaka or elsewhere, if that would be helpful.

Let me know if you have questions – should be interesting over the next month, especially with the Memorial Day holiday on the horizon. I will be out of the country May 21-27 but will be letting the facility partners know and will touch base with the manatee vets.

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