

**USFWS Florida and Antillean Manatee Proposed Listing Public Meeting  
and Hearing**

**Virtual Public Meeting Transcript**

**February 26, 2025, 5:00-7:00 PM Eastern Time**

00:00:03.880 --> 00:00:15.230

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hello, everyone! I'd like to welcome you all to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Florida and Antillean Manatee Proposed Listing Public Meeting and Hearing.

00:00:15.540 --> 00:00:34.589

Megan Stone - AECOM: We're going to give folks a few minutes here to join the meeting, and then we'll begin the Powerpoint presentation shortly, so please stay tuned. I do want to note that closed captioning is available by clicking the Live Transcript button on your Zoom toolbar and then selecting "show subtitles."

00:00:34.810 --> 00:00:39.910

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you everyone for your patience as we give folks a few minutes here to join.

00:01:21.890 --> 00:01:32.500

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, welcome everyone to this evening's meeting. We're going to give folks another minute here to join, so please stay tuned, and we'll start the presentation shortly.

00:01:32.750 --> 00:01:43.200

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, I do want to note that closed captioning is available by clicking the Live Transcript button on your Zoom toolbar and then selecting "show subtitles."

00:02:09.630 --> 00:02:14.100

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, we'll go ahead and get started and move to the next slide.

00:02:19.420 --> 00:02:25.960

Megan Stone - AECOM: We're pleased to offer Spanish translation for the presentation and Q&A session today.

00:02:26.320 --> 00:02:34.670

Megan Stone - AECOM: Before we get started, I'll explain how to select your language if you prefer to listen in Spanish rather than English.

00:02:34.980 --> 00:02:44.339

Megan Stone - AECOM: This meeting will include live Spanish translation, and attendees are welcome to ask questions in Spanish or provide comments in Spanish.

00:02:44.620 --> 00:02:55.919

Megan Stone - AECOM: To access Spanish language interpretation, please click on the globe icon and select Spanish. Those continuing in English do not need to do anything.

00:02:56.240 --> 00:03:01.899

Megan Stone - AECOM: To hear the interpreted language only, you'll click "mute original audio."

00:03:02.300 --> 00:03:11.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: We do appreciate your patience while our interpreters work to make sure everyone is able to hear and understand the meeting proceedings.

00:03:11.720 --> 00:03:17.400

Megan Stone - AECOM: There may be short periods of silence in the meeting while interpretation is taking place.

00:03:17.640 --> 00:03:25.210

Megan Stone - AECOM: And with that, we'll turn it over to our interpreter, Cynthia, to translate these instructions for everyone on the call.

00:03:29.560 --> 00:03:30.770

Interpreter Cynthia: Thank you, Megan.

00:03:31.230 --> 00:03:51.719

Interpreter Cynthia: Saludos a todos y todas. Nos place ofrecer el servicio de traducción en español tanto para la presentación principal, como para la sesión de pregunta y respuesta durante esta noche. Antes de comenzar, voy a explicar como seleccionar el idioma y se que caso- en el caso de que usted prefiere escucharlo en español, en vez de en inglés.

00:03:51.940 --> 00:04:01.990

Interpreter Cynthia: Para esta reunión se estará incluyendo el servicio de traducción simultanea en español. Y se da la bienvenida a todas las participantes que desean hacer sus preguntas en español.

00:04:02.230 --> 00:04:13.539

Interpreter Cynthia: Para tener acceso al interpretación del idioma español, por favor haga clic en el icono del globo y allí puede seleccionar español.

00:04:13.910 --> 00:04:19.149

Interpreter Cynthia: Aquellos que desean continuar escuchando el seminario en inglés no necesitan seguir estas instrucciones.

00:04:19.459 --> 00:04:26.510

Interpreter Cynthia: También, si lo desean - escuchar solamente al interpretación en español, pueden seleccionar -

00:04:26.810 --> 00:04:31.219

Interpreter Cynthia: Hacer clic en el audio original, silenciar el audio original

00:04:32.080 --> 00:04:43.490

Interpreter Cynthia: agradecemos su paciencia mientras las interpretes trabajan para asegurarse de que todo el mundo pueda escuchar lo que se discuta en esta en esta presentación - en esta reunión y lo pueden entender también

00:04:44.000 --> 00:04:51.060

Interpreter Cynthia: puede que hay algunos periodos breve de silencio durante la reunión mientras la interpretación esta ocurriendo

00:04:53.710 --> 00:04:54.840

Interpreter Cynthia: Thank you, Megan.

00:05:01.350 --> 00:05:09.370

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. For the remainder of the meeting, if you'd like to hear Spanish, again, please click that globe icon and select Spanish.

00:05:09.730 --> 00:05:14.720

Megan Stone - AECOM: And with that we'll just take a moment to make sure our interpreters are all set up.

00:05:21.720 --> 00:05:25.490

Interpreter Cynthia: Megan, this is Cynthia. We'll need to be set up as interpreter again.

00:05:27.160 --> 00:05:28.120

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you.

00:05:28.130 --> 00:05:29.090

Interpreter Cynthia: Thank you.

00:05:32.540 --> 00:05:36.299

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we should be good to go now. Next slide, please.

00:05:40.420 --> 00:05:45.150

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Now that we've gone over how to access the language interpretation

00:05:45.260 --> 00:05:52.940

Megan Stone - AECOM: we'll go ahead and get started. On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I would like to thank you all for joining us.

00:05:53.060 --> 00:06:11.899

Megan Stone - AECOM: We appreciate your time and participation. My name is Megan Stone, with AECOM, a contractor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I'm going to be one of your meeting facilitators tonight. Additionally, I have several members of the Service with me on the meeting who will be introduced in a moment.

00:06:12.110 --> 00:06:25.550

Megan Stone - AECOM: On the screen is our expected agenda for the evening. I'll first go over a brief orientation to Zoom, and some ground rules for this evening's meeting. The Service will welcome you all and provide introductions.

00:06:25.950 --> 00:06:32.970

Megan Stone - AECOM: Then the Service will provide a presentation on the proposed listing, which will last approximately 30 minutes.

00:06:33.340 --> 00:06:54.970

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll follow that with a question-and-answer session to answer any questions you might have about the presentation and proposed listing during a 45-minute Q&A session. For the remainder of the meeting, we will accept verbal public comments for approximately 45-50 minutes, sorry, and then we'll provide closing remarks.

00:06:55.400 --> 00:06:56.890

Megan Stone - AECOM: Next slide, please.

00:07:00.100 --> 00:07:09.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. So for some brief ground rules. First, this meeting is being recorded as part of the project record and will be posted later on.

00:07:09.660 --> 00:07:26.120

Megan Stone - AECOM: Second, your microphones and videos will be turned off for the duration of the meeting tonight. You will only be unmuted if and when I unmute you during the question-and-answer session, if you are a phone caller (as phone callers don't have access to the Zoom chat),

00:07:26.360 --> 00:07:30.609

Megan Stone - AECOM: or during the verbal public comment session if you are commenting.

00:07:30.800 --> 00:07:43.329

Megan Stone - AECOM: Third, questions will be addressed during the Q&A session after the presentation. We'll begin with questions submitted through registration, so there is no need to resubmit those questions.

00:07:43.570 --> 00:07:47.709

Megan Stone - AECOM: We will then move on to live questions coming in through the Zoom chat.

00:07:47.950 --> 00:07:56.990

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll do our best to address the questions in the order they come in to allow everyone an opportunity to voice their questions this evening.

00:07:57.290 --> 00:08:05.929

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll then move on to the public comment portion, during which we will accept verbal public comments from participants who have joined.

00:08:06.310 --> 00:08:17.499

Megan Stone - AECOM: If you registered before the start time of tonight's meeting and indicated that you wanted to offer a verbal public comment tonight, you are on our list of pre-registered commenters.

00:08:17.650 --> 00:08:22.499

Megan Stone - AECOM: We will call on pre-registered commenters in the order of registration.

00:08:22.680 --> 00:08:25.520

Megan Stone - AECOM: If you registered after the meeting started

00:08:25.750 --> 00:08:33.120

Megan Stone - AECOM: we'll do our best to reserve some time for you to have an opportunity to offer your verbal public comment after.

00:08:33.620 --> 00:08:38.299

Megan Stone - AECOM: If you do not get the opportunity to offer your verbal public comment tonight

00:08:38.470 --> 00:08:49.659

Megan Stone - AECOM: written public comments can be submitted at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). And we will provide further information on how to submit your written public comments at the end of the presentation.

00:08:50.160 --> 00:08:54.689

Megan Stone - AECOM: The Service will review all public comments, written and verbal.

00:08:54.970 --> 00:09:04.510

Megan Stone - AECOM: Lastly, we want to note that the slides being presented this evening are available on the Fish and Wildlife Service's website, and we'll put that link in the chat.

00:09:04.710 --> 00:09:20.319

Megan Stone - AECOM: And like I said earlier, this meeting is being recorded and transcribed. Please do know it will take time to post the recording as the Service ensures all documents posted are accessible and compatible with screen readers.

00:09:20.500 --> 00:09:26.320

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that, I'll now turn it over to Gian Basili with the Service to welcome you all.

00:09:36.340 --> 00:09:38.579

Gian Basili - USFWS: Could you go to the next slide, please?

00:09:40.900 --> 00:09:48.858

Gian Basili - USFWS: Thank you. And I don't see my camera on. I'm not sure if someone needs to—I've got it on, but I'm not seeing

00:09:49.470 --> 00:09:50.580

Gian Basili - USFWS: me there, but—

00:09:50.580 --> 00:09:51.250

Megan Stone - AECOM: You've got it on.

00:09:51.440 --> 00:09:52.789

Gian Basili - USFWS: It's on. Great!

00:09:53.418 --> 00:10:08.210

Gian Basili - USFWS: Good evening, everyone. My name's Gian Basili. I am the Deputy State Supervisor for the Florida Ecological Services Office, and I'm based in Jacksonville, Florida, this evening, and it's my privilege

00:10:08.620 --> 00:10:37.860

Gian Basili - USFWS: tonight to introduce our manatee listing team. And from the Caribbean Ecological Services Field Office we have a suite of folks. They're all based in Puerto Rico this evening. We have JP Zegarra, who is the recovery lead for the Antillean manatee, and you'll hear from JP as he reviews the status of that subspecies. We have

00:10:38.010 --> 00:10:52.107

Gian Basili - USFWS: Lourdes Mena, the Field Supervisor for that Caribbean Field Office, and Jose Cruz-Burgos, who's the T and E Species Program Coordinator

00:10:53.080 --> 00:10:56.410

Gian Basili - USFWS: for that region or field office as well.

00:10:56.750 --> 00:11:13.369

Gian Basili - USFWS: For the Florida Ecological Services Field Office, we have Terri Calleson, who's the recovery lead for the Florida manatee, and you'll be hearing from Terri in our presentation on the Florida manatee status.

00:11:13.620 --> 00:11:19.290

Gian Basili - USFWS: And with Terri, we have Billy Brooks, who's a

00:11:19.940 --> 00:11:44.740

Gian Basili - USFWS: seasoned senior biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Scott Calleson as well, all are on on the call this evening, and we have Nikki Colangelo with us as well, who is the Supervisor for our Division of Classification and Recovery here in Florida. And from our Southeast Regional Office we have Chandler Eaglestone,

00:11:44.940 --> 00:11:57.414

Gian Basili - USFWS: who is a biologist, and Kristi Young, who is our acting manager for the Division of Conservation and Classification, and she's going to help us with any policy questions

00:11:57.990 --> 00:12:00.080

Gian Basili - USFWS: that come up this evening.

00:12:01.050 --> 00:12:07.609

Gian Basili - USFWS: So with that, I'm gonna pass it over to JP down in Puerto Rico.

00:12:11.190 --> 00:12:15.530

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Thank you, Gian. You can go to the next slide. Am I coming in clear?

00:12:17.180 --> 00:12:17.580

Gian Basili - USFWS: Yes.

00:12:17.580 --> 00:12:18.320

Megan Stone - AECOM: You are.

00:12:18.880 --> 00:12:20.200

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Perfect. Thank you.

00:12:22.590 --> 00:12:41.020

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So I'm going to go ahead and start with the presentation for tonight. My name is Jan Zegarra, or JP, and I will be presenting a very brief summary of the species background, the proposed listing action, the current condition, and the summary for the Antillean manatee information.

00:12:42.930 --> 00:13:03.359

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The West Indian manatee species is comprised of two subspecies, the Florida manatee and the Antillean manatee, and since 2017 the West Indian manatee has been listed as a threatened species throughout its entire range. And you can see a picture of the two subspecies on the screen. Next slide.

00:13:08.370 --> 00:13:14.290

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Just a little bit about the species' biology: manatees are considered a wide-ranging marine mammal

00:13:14.490 --> 00:13:20.970

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: and they use a variety of freshwater, estuarine, and marine habitats for their survival and life history needs.



00:13:21.320 --> 00:13:25.810

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: For example, for feeding, drinking fresh water, traveling, resting,

00:13:25.920 --> 00:13:29.649

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: thermoregulation, mating, and raising their calves as well.

00:13:30.260 --> 00:13:35.259

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Manatees mostly feed on seagrass and other submerged, floating, and emergent vegetation.

00:13:35.900 --> 00:13:47.819

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Some of the differences between the subspecies include their range, their general size and weight, skeletal measurements, genetics, and some threats and conservation needs as well.

00:13:48.880 --> 00:14:02.199

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Their distribution and ecological needs also vary by region. For example, Florida manatees inhabit the northern limits of the species' range, and therefore require stable long-term sources of warm water.

00:14:03.270 --> 00:14:04.480

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:14:08.750 --> 00:14:22.400

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: In this map you can clearly see the general northern and southern range for both subspecies, in orange for the Antillean manatee distribution and in darker blue for the Florida manatee distribution.

00:14:22.810 --> 00:14:29.310

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: There are some areas of potential overlap between the two subspecies, but these are not shown on this map.

00:14:29.540 --> 00:14:35.350

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And the purpose of this map was just to show the general distribution of the subspecies' range.

00:14:35.450 --> 00:14:36.520

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:14:41.498 --> 00:14:45.089

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Going on to the proposed listing action summary.

00:14:45.540 --> 00:14:53.600

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The Service recognizes the Antillean and the Florida manatee subspecies as separate listable entities under the Endangered Species Act.

00:14:53.980 --> 00:14:59.990

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Therefore, the Service is proposing to list the two subspecies of the West Indian manatee separately.

00:15:01.170 --> 00:15:09.849

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: We're proposing to list the Antillean manatee as endangered, and the Florida manatee as threatened with a blanket 4(d) Regulation.

00:15:10.560 --> 00:15:18.290

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Blanket 4(d) Regulations provide additional protections to a threatened species that are automatically given to endangered species

00:15:18.500 --> 00:15:27.529

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: and allows the Service to apply all of the section 9 prohibitions of the Endangered Species Act to a threatened species.

00:15:28.460 --> 00:15:37.669

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: This regulation is consistent with the current management strategies, since the West Indian manatee is currently protected by the same blanket 4(d) Rule.

00:15:39.620 --> 00:15:40.700

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:15:45.740 --> 00:15:55.410

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Continuing with the proposed listing actions. This proposed listing action is informed by the Species Status Assessment Reports for both subspecies.

00:15:56.175 --> 00:16:02.930

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And both of those are available for public review. You can see a screenshot of the

00:16:03.100 --> 00:16:08.520

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: first page of those Species Status Assessments on your screen.

00:16:10.010 --> 00:16:18.829

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: For information on previous federal actions for the manatee, please refer to the proposed listing rule. And you can see the reference and date for that rule on the slide.

00:16:20.130 --> 00:16:27.700

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Critical habit is being revised as a separate rulemaking action. And you can see the reference and date for that one as well on the slide.

00:16:30.660 --> 00:16:42.920

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Today's meeting will only concern the proposed listing actions that will also serve as our 12-month findings on two manatee petitions, and also as our completed 5-year review for the West Indian manatee.

00:16:45.190 --> 00:16:48.009

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Now on to our current condition summary.

00:16:49.130 --> 00:17:00.309

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So to assess the current condition for both the Antillean and Florida subspecies, we delineated resiliency units based on data availability, connectivity, and ecological and dispersal patterns.

00:17:00.590 --> 00:17:10.719

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And in simple terms, resiliency is the ability to sustain populations through the natural range of both favorable and unfavorable conditions.

00:17:11.680 --> 00:17:21.739

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So maintaining sufficiently resilient populations across a range of a species increases the ability of that species to adapt to the natural selection processes

00:17:22.119 --> 00:17:26.760

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: and would increase the chances that the species will persist in a changing world.

00:17:28.160 --> 00:17:35.210

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So for the current condition assessment for both subspecies, all units received a resiliency score from low to high.

00:17:36.040 --> 00:17:37.180

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:17:39.440 --> 00:17:43.580

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Now I will present a brief summary for the Antillean manatee. Next slide.

00:17:45.610 --> 00:17:51.829

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: On this map you can see the 14 Antillean manatee resiliency units we used for the current condition assessment.

00:17:52.160 --> 00:18:00.980

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The picture units are meant to portray the general extent of each unit, and are not meant to reflect the areas of presence and absence within each unit.

00:18:01.440 --> 00:18:09.830

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: These 14 units for the Antillean manatee span 19 countries within the Caribbean and Central and South America.

00:18:11.390 --> 00:18:12.610

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:18:15.650 --> 00:18:22.920

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: For each of the Antillean units, the main contributing factor to score resiliency was population trend.

00:18:23.380 --> 00:18:28.139

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Thus, a declining population equals a low resiliency score.

00:18:29.000 --> 00:18:41.519

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: In summary, the abundance estimates for the Antillean manatee populations are mostly considered highly uncertain, and the information indicates abundance is declining across most of the subspecies' range.

00:18:42.680 --> 00:18:51.010

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The relative abundance estimates for each of these units range from 20 manatees to no more than 1,400 individuals

00:18:52.700 --> 00:19:03.529

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: and the reported declines are due to ongoing threats, such as watercraft collisions, habitat loss and modification, poaching, lack of effective enforcement, and other threats.

00:19:03.950 --> 00:19:05.060

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:19:08.800 --> 00:19:13.989

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: This table shows the current condition results for the Antillean manatee assessment

00:19:14.240 --> 00:19:20.159

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: sorted in descending order of estimated relative abundance, which you can see on the second column.

00:19:20.290 --> 00:19:25.729

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And it's based upon the assessment of population trend and the certainty of that information.

00:19:25.950 --> 00:19:36.310

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: You can see the names of the 14 units in the first column, the trend category on the fourth column, and the current resiliency score on the last column, shaded in gray.

00:19:36.850 --> 00:19:46.539

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Note that the largest populations for the Antillean manatee occur in Brazil and in the Caribbean, Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala habitats.

00:19:46.810 --> 00:19:58.010

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The smallest populations occur in Lake Maracaibo, in Venezuela, the island of Jamaica, and the Panama Canal. Next slide.

00:20:01.630 --> 00:20:09.680

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: What you're seeing on screen is an image representation for the results of the resiliency scores for the 14 Antillean manatee units.

00:20:10.590 --> 00:20:21.489

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: The Puerto Rico unit is the only unit with moderate resiliency. The rest of the 13 units all scored a low resiliency due to a declining trend or unknown trend.

00:20:23.450 --> 00:20:24.600

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Next slide.

00:20:27.770 --> 00:20:44.319

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So, to conclude our summary of the current condition for the Antillean manatee, our review of the best available information indicates that the Antillean manatee meets the Act's definition of an endangered species that is in danger of extinction throughout all of its range.

00:20:45.290 --> 00:20:59.299

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And based on the proposed endangered status for the Antillean manatee, we did not undertake an analysis of a potential distinct population segment for the Puerto Rico population, as proposed by one of the petitions we received.

00:21:01.560 --> 00:21:08.139

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: And now I pass it over to Terri Calleson, and she will be presenting the summary information for the Florida manatee.

00:21:08.780 --> 00:21:09.980

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Thank you everyone.

00:21:15.430 --> 00:21:17.060

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Right, next slide.

00:21:20.310 --> 00:21:36.600

Terri Calleson - USFWS: All right. Thank you, JP, and again, I'm Terri Calleson. I'm the Florida Manatee Recovery Lead, and I'm going to give you a little bit of a window into the world of the Florida manatee, and go through a lot of the summary information in a similar fashion to what JP just went through.

00:21:36.730 --> 00:21:37.960

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So next slide.

00:21:41.340 --> 00:21:50.450

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And just a refresher for specific characteristics that I think are gonna be relevant to some of the additional information that we'll present.

00:21:50.590 --> 00:22:05.109

Terri Calleson - USFWS: For the Florida manatee subspecies, we are dealing with a wide-ranging marine mammal. The distribution varies significantly by season. They exhibit strong seasonal migratory behavior, because warm water is so critical for their survival.

00:22:05.210 --> 00:22:12.909

Terri Calleson - USFWS: They are found at the northern limits of the range, and that is why the warm water becomes so increasingly important.

00:22:13.140 --> 00:22:25.770

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And we put a very big focus on foraging habitat as well, and depending on where these manatees are found, they may forage on seagrass, eelgrass, or other types of submerged, floating, and emergent vegetation.

00:22:26.550 --> 00:22:27.870

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide, please.

00:22:32.630 --> 00:22:55.820

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So again, to assess the current condition for the Florida manatee, we assessed resiliency within two resiliency units: generally, the East Coast and the Gulf Coast. That reflects their warmer-warm season distribution, and you'll notice the Gulf Coast extending as far west as Texas, and the East Coast extending all the way up to the northern limits around Delaware Bay.

00:22:55.860 --> 00:23:20.579

Terri Calleson - USFWS: These resiliency units were also comprised of two management units for the East Coast—that would be the Atlantic and the Upper St. Johns River—and then the Gulf Coast, the Northwest and the Southwest units. These four management units that we utilized in our analysis are consistent with those that have been historically used in state and federal manatee management efforts, and those are based on extensive

00:23:20.580 --> 00:23:30.120

Terri Calleson - USFWS: data collection through abundance or distribution, or through telemetry, tracking data, such as an animal there in the bottom middle of the screen,

00:23:30.510 --> 00:23:32.659

Terri Calleson - USFWS: and also mortality data.

00:23:33.680 --> 00:23:34.980

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide, please.

00:23:38.320 --> 00:24:02.489

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So let's see how the Florida manatee measures up. A few of the more critical items that we looked at during our evaluation: we did consider the most recent population estimate for

the Florida manatee, which is between 8,350 and 11,730 individuals, and that is data obtained from FWC during 2021 to 2022 surveys.

00:24:02.530 --> 00:24:10.279

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Our resiliency evaluation included four condition factors: population trend between 2011 and 2020,

00:24:10.410 --> 00:24:22.600

Terri Calleson - USFWS: looking at regional foraging habitat condition, also looking at winter foraging habitat condition, and winter warm-water refugia and the quality of those warm-water sites.

00:24:22.810 --> 00:24:31.010

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Resiliency ranged from moderate to high when evaluating the subspecies at each of the management unit and coastal resiliency unit levels.

00:24:31.670 --> 00:24:50.799

Terri Calleson - USFWS: The Atlantic unit is considered low for the time period 2021 to 2023 due to the Atlantic Coast Unusual Mortality Event. And that's an event where we lost over 1,300 animals, due to the catastrophic loss of seagrass, and we had animals suffering from malnutrition, and it was a starvation event.

00:24:51.080 --> 00:25:18.199

Terri Calleson - USFWS: I would like to note that additional data evaluation and population modeling efforts are ongoing and those are both retrospective and projecting forward. So we are awaiting modeling efforts from the integrated population model as well as the core biological model that many of you may be familiar with. Those will give us different looks at exactly what's going on with the Florida manatee. And those efforts are ongoing.

00:25:18.860 --> 00:25:19.860

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide.

00:25:23.370 --> 00:25:48.739

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Okay, so here is our Florida manatee resiliency summary. And essentially, we're looking at, as JP mentioned, the adaptive capacity to changing environmental conditions. Again, we assessed at two seasonal scales. So you see, sort of the colder distribution as well as the two units for the warm season distribution, and we evaluated foraging and available warm-water habitat.



00:25:49.110 --> 00:26:02.560

Terri Calleson - USFWS: With the management unit look, you'll see that that ranged from moderate to high. But during that '21 to '23 timeframe for the Atlantic unit, you'll see that that resulted in low resiliency during our evaluation.

00:26:02.830 --> 00:26:20.499

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Overall, when looking at the East and the Gulf Coasts, those were still moderate to high, with the East Coast having a moderate resiliency, again, due to the diminished nature of forage in that particular area. So that was the consideration there.

00:26:21.080 --> 00:26:28.650

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And population trends are stable or increasing in three of those four management units. Next slide, please.

00:26:31.570 --> 00:26:57.249

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So to go over current, and give you a view into future, condition. The Florida manatee does not meet the definition of an endangered species, because it is not currently at risk of extinction in all or a significant portion of its range. Based on an assessment of future conditions, the Florida manatee meets the definition of a threatened species; that is, one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

00:26:58.290 --> 00:26:59.820

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide, please.

00:27:04.130 --> 00:27:11.000

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And so, in consideration of our proposed, threatened listing for the Florida manatee,

00:27:11.160 --> 00:27:25.690

Terri Calleson - USFWS: we looked at numerous primary threats, and I'd like to draw your attention to some of those key primary threats. Those were watercraft collisions, habitat loss including seagrass loss and modification from coastal development, unusual mortality events,

00:27:25.690 --> 00:27:46.930

Terri Calleson - USFWS: natural processes including cold weather events and harmful algal blooms, human interaction, and loss of warm-water refugia. Looking forward, we have extensive concern for the loss

of some of the industrial sites. As many of you know, about 60% of the Florida manatees are right now reliant on industrial warm-water sites.

00:27:47.730 --> 00:27:49.080

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide, please.

00:27:52.970 --> 00:28:12.680

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So just sort of the take-homes from our evaluation. How does the proposed rule affect this subspecies? What would be the changes? The change would be that the listed entity changes to the subspecies level. And then, what stays the same? The listing status would overall stay the same at threatened if this rule was finalized.

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Terri Calleson - USFWS: But those protections would remain in place from both the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and our management efforts, which are significant, would continue.

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Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide.

00:28:27.490 --> 00:28:47.780

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So since I mentioned our management efforts, I wanted to highlight a number of our key Florida manatee conservation efforts. We have a significant amount of research activities going on. These are done by the state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other partners that are working on abundance and distribution, health surveillance,

00:28:47.780 --> 00:29:09.159

Terri Calleson - USFWS: mortality investigations, population modeling, and other very important efforts. We have a very robust rescue and rehabilitation program. We have a cooperative of 24 organizations, major partners for the Fish and Wildlife Service that are organized to rescue, rehabilitate, and release manatees, and they are called the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership.

00:29:09.430 --> 00:29:16.159

Terri Calleson - USFWS: They have rescued already over 2,600 manatees and counting, and I believe a few were rescued today.

00:29:16.800 --> 00:29:29.910

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Also, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2020 finalized the Warm-Water Habitat Action Plan to prepare for the eventual loss of these industrial warm-water sites.

00:29:29.920 --> 00:29:50.690

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And we have begun our process to evaluate and move forward, chart a path forward, and that is through regional partnership teams. We have launched the Atlantic North and the Atlantic South teams. As I mentioned, we had more concern with the Atlantic unit. We opted to start there, and we will soon be launching the Southwest unit.

00:29:51.300 --> 00:30:02.179

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Spring and habitat restoration efforts will continue, and those are good—you know, what's good for manatees is good for the entire ecosystem. So more good news there. Next slide.

00:30:07.510 --> 00:30:20.740

Terri Calleson - USFWS: We have our Florida Manatee Recovery Plan, the Florida Manatee Management Plan by the state, and our annual Stock Assessment Report. So there's still much management going on and much monitoring.

00:30:20.960 --> 00:30:39.739

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Our manatee protection strategies will continue at state, federal, and local levels. We're extremely fortunate to have so many close partnerships in all aspects for the Florida manatee. There are manatee protection zones, countywide manatee protection plans. Sixteen coastal counties have those.

00:30:39.870 --> 00:30:55.639

Terri Calleson - USFWS: We will be proceeding with other things like protections for water control structures and project consultations through the section 7 consultation process and enforcement and educational initiatives are exceedingly important, and those will continue as well moving forward.

00:30:56.200 --> 00:30:57.210

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide.

00:31:00.480 --> 00:31:12.170

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So next steps. Now that we've gotten together here, what will be next? Well, we will be accepting comments received or postmarked on or before March 17th, 2025

00:31:12.530 --> 00:31:24.149

Terri Calleson - USFWS: and then the Fish and Wildlife Service will review those comments on the proposed listing actions. We want to hear from you and evaluate the new information and respond to substantial comments in the final rule.

00:31:25.510 --> 00:31:26.880

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Next slide, please.

00:31:29.470 --> 00:31:40.630

Terri Calleson - USFWS: So I'd like to thank you for your interest in the meeting tonight and specifically for the information pertaining to the Florida manatee. And with that I'm going to pass this over to Megan. Thank you everybody.

00:31:42.030 --> 00:31:55.410

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Terri, and thank you, Jan, for those presentations. We'll go ahead and get started with our question-and-answer session. Again, my name is Megan Stone, and I'll be the facilitator for the Q&A.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll go ahead and get started with the Q&A, which will last about 45 minutes.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: The intent of this question-and-answer session is to answer any substantive questions you have for the Service on the presentation and proposed listing.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: Before I go over instructions on how to submit questions, we wanted to thank folks for submitting questions when they registered for this evening's meeting.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: We did want to note that we'll start with those questions in a moment, so there's no need to resubmit those.

00:32:30.000 --> 00:32:32.169

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Next slide, please.

00:32:36.800 --> 00:32:45.259

Megan Stone - AECOM: I'll first go over instructions for how to submit a question if you are joining us on the Zoom web platform or Zoom app.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: At this time, if you have a question and you're using the Zoom web platform or Zoom app,

00:32:51.660 --> 00:33:12.070

Megan Stone - AECOM: please go ahead and click on the chat icon at the bottom of your Zoom screen. If you hover your mouse over the bottom of your Zoom screen, the icon should appear. You may need to exit your full screen view in Zoom to see the chat icon. I've included a graphic on the screen of where you can find that icon. That's on the left.

00:33:12.390 --> 00:33:17.810

Megan Stone - AECOM: You can then type your question in the chat box, and please send it to hosts and panelists.

00:33:18.010 --> 00:33:27.249

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll then read the question aloud for all participants to hear, and a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service team member will respond to your question aloud.

00:33:27.570 --> 00:33:36.929

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll do our best to answer those questions in the order that they come in, and to respond to all of the substantive questions we receive this evening.

00:33:37.120 --> 00:33:43.329

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, please save any comments you have for the verbal public comment portion of today's meeting

00:33:43.650 --> 00:33:46.019

Megan Stone - AECOM: which will be after the Q&A.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: And I don't see that we have any phone callers joining us. But we'll leave this instruction up on the screen and monitor to see if we have any phone callers, so we can give them instructions on how to submit a question.

00:34:01.640 --> 00:34:06.950

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that we'll go ahead and get started with our first pre-registered question

00:34:07.070 --> 00:34:29.970

Megan Stone - AECOM: which was, "Please discuss OE, and how we can minimize its spread across monarch populations." So since that question is related to monarch butterflies, it's outside of the scope of this meeting, but we will follow up with that registrant with a link to the monarch butterfly page with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

00:34:30.510 --> 00:34:38.000

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that, we'll move on to the next pre-registered comment-question, excuse me, and this is for Scott.

00:34:38.489 --> 00:34:48.450

Megan Stone - AECOM: "If the Florida seagrass critical habitats that support Florida manatees has been granted additional protections, why haven't Florida manatees?"

00:34:48.710 --> 00:34:51.099

Megan Stone - AECOM: And again, we'll turn that over to Scott.

00:34:53.230 --> 00:35:11.469

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thanks, Megan, and thanks everybody for attending the hearing tonight. Answer to that question-first off, the critical habitat is proposed at this point, but it's not yet final. So the proposal would expand the amount of critical habitat in Florida and add critical habitat in Puerto Rico. But it's only

00:35:11.580 --> 00:35:16.549

Scott Calleson - USFWS: proposed at this point. As far as protections for seagrass, that already exists.

00:35:16.660 --> 00:35:30.489

Scott Calleson - USFWS: And what we're proposing tonight with the listing rules, what we're talking about tonight, wouldn't change any of the protections for seagrass, but they would continue to be protected there. The listing status itself-

00:35:30.560 --> 00:35:49.499

Scott Calleson - USFWS: manatees are already receiving the same protections as an endangered species. As we discussed earlier, they're currently listed at the West Indian manatee species level with a blanket 4(d) Rule and the changes being proposed would continue to have that level of protection

00:35:49.700 --> 00:35:54.279

Scott Calleson - USFWS: for the Florida manatee, so there wouldn't be any change as far as that goes. Thank you.

00:35:55.730 --> 00:35:59.319

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott. We've got another question here for you.

00:35:59.560 --> 00:36:05.809

Megan Stone - AECOM: "If listed as threatened or endangered, would the public be able to swim with them in the wild?"

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Scott Calleson - USFWS: Good question. So swimming with manatees is not specifically prohibited now. What is prohibited is any action that harasses or injures manatees, and, you know, swimming could certainly do that in some circumstances. But it's not specifically prohibited.

00:36:27.650 --> 00:36:29.844

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Nope. Sorry, missed my notes there.

00:36:31.270 --> 00:36:46.819

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge is where most of the organized swimming takes place now. It has its own specific regulations that apply to swimming with manatees and other activities that occur on the water, and none of what we're proposing tonight would change any of that. So, essentially, no change.

00:36:48.960 --> 00:36:50.220

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott.

00:36:50.580 --> 00:37:04.020

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, we'll move on to our next question, which is for Terri. "Can you please summarize potential impacts to the agricultural industry related to this proposed listing, if it comes to fruition?"

00:37:06.230 --> 00:37:07.500

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Hey there! Thank you.

00:37:08.057 --> 00:37:17.860

Terri Calleson - USFWS: If this moves forward, the proposed listing change would not change any protections or current activities, so there should be no impacts for agriculture.

00:37:18.850 --> 00:37:22.070

Terri Calleson - USFWS: That's sort of the simple answer to that one. Thank you.

00:37:23.080 --> 00:37:24.360

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thanks, Terri.

00:37:24.810 --> 00:37:36.269

Megan Stone - AECOM: We also got the following question. "Will the State of Florida actually finally propose the required new rule and definitions, so that our springs will be cleaner?"

00:37:36.390 --> 00:37:40.190

Megan Stone - AECOM: So this question is outside of the scope of this meeting.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: This question would be best directed to the Florida Department of Education—sorry, Environmental Protection, and the water management districts.

00:37:49.630 --> 00:37:55.969

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll go ahead and move on to our next pre-registered question, which is for Kristi.

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Megan Stone - AECOM: "What scientific considerations are being made by the Service that justify their decision to keep the manatee status as threatened?"

00:38:11.540 --> 00:38:31.400

Kristi Young - USFWS: Yeah. So Terri went through this a little bit in the presentation. But just to summarize: for Florida manatees, we did determine that they're affected by watercraft collisions, habitat loss, modifications from coastal development, the UME, of course, and other stressors,

00:38:31.770 --> 00:38:40.210

Kristi Young - USFWS: but that all of the winter management units and the coastal resiliency units exhibit either moderate or high current condition

00:38:40.690 --> 00:38:44.660

Kristi Young - USFWS: and that they support that and that supports the viability of the subspecies.



00:38:44.890 --> 00:38:50.730

Kristi Young - USFWS: So we do acknowledge that the UME is impacting the Atlantic winter management unit

00:38:51.240 --> 00:38:57.000

Kristi Young - USFWS: but the magnitude and severity of that has not yet been determined, and the other three winter management units

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Kristi Young - USFWS: exhibit, and are continuing to exhibit, strong, stronger, positive growth compared to that Atlantic. So, therefore, the species did not meet the definition of an endangered species.

00:39:08.930 --> 00:39:10.360

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Kristi.

00:39:10.660 --> 00:39:13.709

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. We have another question for Terri.

00:39:13.830 --> 00:39:22.489

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Since the Indian River Lagoon continues to provide inadequate food and habitat for the Florida manatee, how can we fix this?"

00:39:24.130 --> 00:39:47.539

Terri Calleson - USFWS: That's a great question. And I think we, you know, we certainly have some good news. We've seen a lot of improvements to forage quality and quantity that are occurring in that northern Indian River Lagoon area. And we've seen that really starting in late '22 and into '23 into the present. That's being monitored by St. Johns River Water Management District and other conservation partners

00:39:47.550 --> 00:40:02.380

Terri Calleson - USFWS: which is important because it's an area which, you know, hundreds of manatees depend on that, and there's manatee use through there at all times of the year. We've seen really good news with our manatee health assessments that were done in December.

00:40:02.390 --> 00:40:27.959

Terri Calleson - USFWS: And you know there's a lot of—I think one of the great things about what has happened is there's a lot closer partnerships with so many of these groups, not just St. Johns, but the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, Brevard County is just

doing fantastic work to try to improve the Indian River Lagoon, and, as I mentioned, with other things, things that are good for manatees are certainly very good for the ecosystem.

00:40:27.960 --> 00:40:51.909

Terri Calleson - USFWS: We've seen a lot of partners. Even some of our rescue rehab partners like Brevard Zoo, that are working on a number of projects to improve water quality and water clarity, so that some of these restoration projects can move forward, and we can certainly provide contacts at each one of those important partner organizations, if that would be helpful moving forward. So thank you.

00:40:54.110 --> 00:40:58.420

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. We'll go ahead and move on to our next question, which is

00:40:58.760 --> 00:41:10.009

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Ocklawaha River critical habitat area be extended northward up to Blue Spring and Marion Blue Spring, which are three mag springs."

00:41:10.260 --> 00:41:22.519

Megan Stone - AECOM: So this question--again, thank you for that question. It is outside of the scope of this meeting, as this meeting is related to the proposed listing rather than the proposed critical habitat rule.

00:41:22.840 --> 00:41:27.880

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll go ahead and move on to our next question, which is:

00:41:30.800 --> 00:41:41.150

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Being treated as an endangered species, this should not affect the proposed critical habitat for the Antillean manatee." Correct, and we'll turn that over to JP.

00:41:42.700 --> 00:41:47.769

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Yes, thank you for the question. Yes, that is correct. If the status

00:41:48.070 --> 00:41:51.899

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: for the Antillean manatee is finalized

00:41:52.100 --> 00:41:59.250

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: as endangered, it should not affect the proposed critical habitat for that species, or for the population in Puerto Rico.

00:42:02.590 --> 00:42:04.960

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Jan. All right.

00:42:05.200 --> 00:42:19.289

Megan Stone - AECOM: Our next question is, "In Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, there is a project, Esencia, proposed to be developed near manatee waters. What are the potential risks?" And again, that's for you, JP.

00:42:19.910 --> 00:42:21.030

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Yeah, thank you.

00:42:21.480 --> 00:42:24.939

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Thank you for the question again.

00:42:25.190 --> 00:42:33.789

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So potential effects to manatees are evaluated through our Endangered Species Act section 7 consultation process.

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Jan Zegarra - USFWS: We are aware—the Service is aware of the project under the name Esencia, but we haven't yet received a consultation package for that project.

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Jan Zegarra - USFWS: So during a section 7 consultation process, we will be able to evaluate any potential direct or indirect effects

00:42:53.160 --> 00:42:58.139

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: that the proposed project may have on the Antillean manatee and its habitat.

00:42:58.841 --> 00:43:04.410

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: With this proposed rule—that will not affect our consultation process for this project.

00:43:06.820 --> 00:43:11.300

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you. All right. Our next question is also for you.

00:43:11.730 --> 00:43:19.710

Megan Stone - AECOM: "What measures are being taken to bolster monitoring of coastal development near manatee-inhabited zones?"

00:43:21.420 --> 00:43:30.050

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Thank you as well for that question. Sort of along the same lines as the previous question, we evaluate potential effects

00:43:30.380 --> 00:43:36.679

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: to manatees from coastal development through the Act's section 7 consultation process

00:43:37.000 --> 00:43:49.160

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: and the proposed rule will not change that consultation process. We also evaluate potential threats to manatees as part of any species status review, as was done for this existing proposal.

00:43:52.310 --> 00:43:53.670

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you again, Jan.

00:43:54.540 --> 00:43:58.040

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll move on to our next question, which is for Scott.

00:43:58.250 --> 00:44:05.130

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Is there an anticipated publication date for the integrated population model for the Florida manatee?"

00:44:07.800 --> 00:44:36.499

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Okay, thanks for the question. So the integrated population models, referred to as IPMs, they're actually—they're a State of Florida project being developed primarily by the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, part of FWC, with others helping also. The authors of the first IPM that was produced, which was for the Southwest unit of Florida—that was published in 2021, as what people would expect as a typical peer-reviewed paper.

00:44:36.500 --> 00:44:52.240

Scott Calleson - USFWS: An update to that IPM and an IPM for the Atlantic management unit are both being worked on now by FWI and others. We don't know for certain if those IPMs will be published in the same way that 2021 report was published,

00:44:52.320 --> 00:44:56.639

Scott Calleson - USFWS: but we do expect all of those reports, once they're finalized, to be publicly available.

00:44:59.000 --> 00:45:08.359

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Thank you, Scott. We'll go ahead and move on to our last pre-registered question, and then we'll move into live questions coming in through the chat.

00:45:08.660 --> 00:45:14.070

Megan Stone - AECOM: Our last pre-registered question is for Terri.

00:45:14.180 --> 00:45:22.810

Megan Stone - AECOM: "With all the hardships and high mortality of the Florida manatee, why are they only being listed as threatened and not endangered?"

00:45:24.600 --> 00:45:49.780

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Yeah, no, no, that's a good question. And there was much careful consideration through our process. We assessed both current condition and future threats, but still determined that the Florida manatee was best characterized as a threatened species, one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. And again, we were looking at warm-water habitat and foraging habitat very closely.

00:45:49.830 --> 00:46:02.739

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Our review did include a comprehensive review of all the best available data at that time, and that was both scientific and commercial, and included the threats and population analysis.

00:46:03.212 --> 00:46:30.589

Terri Calleson - USFWS: The proposed listing rule, if it moves—you know, if that's finalized, it would still result in the same protections for the Florida manatee as it would if it was endangered. So that's a really good question, but we certainly feel like this determination is appropriate, and I did want to make sure that folks were aware that, as proposed, it would still result in the same protections for the Florida manatee. Thank you.

00:46:31.400 --> 00:46:43.700

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Terri. All right. At this time we're gonna go ahead and move into our questions that are coming in live through the chat. So again, you're welcome to submit those questions through the chat feature.

00:46:44.040 --> 00:46:54.460

Megan Stone - AECOM: I'll go ahead and check. I don't think we have any phone callers on, but again, we'll keep an eye out to see if they join, so we can make sure they know how to ask a question.

00:46:54.570 --> 00:46:59.440

Megan Stone - AECOM: But with that we'll go ahead and get started with our first question from the chat

00:46:59.690 --> 00:47:01.360

Megan Stone - AECOM: which is for Nikki.

00:47:01.730 --> 00:47:10.850

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Will there be a presentation concerning the proposed critical habitats for the two subspecies? If so, is there a date decided on yet?"

00:47:13.040 --> 00:47:26.829

Nikki Colangelo - USFWS: Yeah, thanks for that question. No, we will not be having a presentation regarding the proposed critical habitat, because we did not receive any public hearing requests by the date specified in the proposed rule.

00:47:28.500 --> 00:47:29.900

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Nikki.

00:47:30.180 --> 00:47:40.210

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Our next question is, "What would change if the Florida manatee were uplisted back to endangered?" And we'll turn that over to Kristi.

00:47:44.920 --> 00:47:51.090

Kristi Young - USFWS: Terri just kind of covered this a little bit. Because the species currently

00:47:51.560 --> 00:47:59.970

Kristi Young - USFWS: listed as the West Indian manatee has the blanket protections. So it's the same protections as an endangered species.

00:48:00.603 --> 00:48:08.139

Kristi Young - USFWS: And we were—our proposal includes those same blanket protections for threatened species.

00:48:08.430 --> 00:48:23.680

Kristi Young - USFWS: So if we were to determine that, actually, the Florida subspecies meets the definition of an endangered species, the management, in terms of the protections, they really wouldn't change because they are already getting the same protections as an endangered species right now.

00:48:25.400 --> 00:48:26.860

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Kristi.

00:48:27.300 --> 00:48:33.889

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, we'll go to our next question, which I know Scott touched on this a little bit

00:48:34.000 --> 00:48:35.680

Megan Stone - AECOM: but the question is

00:48:35.810 --> 00:48:44.369

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Terri mentioned two other population models she's working on. Will any final listing decision wait until those are completed?"

00:48:44.500 --> 00:48:46.639

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll turn that over to Scott.

00:48:47.650 --> 00:48:49.292

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thank you, Megan.

00:48:50.470 --> 00:49:05.790

Scott Calleson - USFWS: So the answer is, yes, we will be considering those. The two models that I'm pretty sure are being referred to, one is the integrated population models that came up with the previous question. And then the other one is the core biological model that has gone through multiple iterations over the last

00:49:06.370 --> 00:49:26.439

Scott Calleson - USFWS: 15 or more years. The CBM, the core biological model, was used during the 2017 reclassification. And it's being updated. Currently, we're working with the USGS-U.S. Geological Survey, FWRI, and others to update the core biological model.

00:49:26.480 --> 00:49:40.190

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Also, we expect those results, you know, sometime in the next few months or so. We don't know exactly when, but those results will be in, and will be considered before any final decision is made on this proposal.

00:49:41.980 --> 00:49:43.060

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thanks Scott.

00:49:43.750 --> 00:49:51.069

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right! At this time we are caught up with our questions that have been coming in live through the chat.

00:49:51.450 --> 00:49:57.390

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll continue to monitor to see if we have some more questions coming in.

00:49:58.030 --> 00:50:17.550

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, a reminder. We have this instruction slide up on the screen for anyone who would like to ask a question. You can use that chat button and type your question in, or if we have phone callers, the way to ask the question would be by pressing \*9, since they don't have access to that chat feature.

00:50:18.150 --> 00:50:31.630

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll go ahead and give it a moment here. We do have another 20 minutes or so in our question-and-answer session this evening, and then we'll go into accepting public comments.

00:51:10.240 --> 00:51:13.699

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, everyone, for your patience as we get

00:51:13.840 --> 00:51:18.240

Megan Stone - AECOM: those questions coming in and identifying folks to respond.

00:52:37.820 --> 00:52:44.269

Megan Stone - AECOM: They just let us know in the chat that the link for submitting comments was broken.

00:52:44.350 --> 00:53:12.530

Megan Stone - AECOM: I did just test it out. And it looks like it's working. So we'll go ahead and re-paste that in there and see if that helps. Another method would be to just go to regulations.gov and search the docket number, so we'll provide that information as well in the chat. Do let us know if there's an issue with that, and thank you everyone for your patience, as we have

00:53:12.940 --> 00:53:15.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: more questions coming in the chat.



00:53:48.040 --> 00:54:01.049

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. We do have a question in the chat, which is "What number of human population growth was considered in determining the stresses on habitat?" And we'll turn that over to Scott.

00:54:04.510 --> 00:54:20.340

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thank you, Megan. So the core biological model that I mentioned before includes multiple scenarios where they test changes and different threats, you know, such as watercraft-related collisions and other things. And those models,

00:54:20.770 --> 00:54:34.339

Scott Calleson - USFWS: those scenarios, do consider changes in those threats, you know, potential increase in the rate of watercraft-related collisions, potential changes in red tide to the extent that might be affected by human activities. So in that sense

00:54:34.580 --> 00:54:43.510

Scott Calleson - USFWS: the CBM for Florida manatees does sort of consider human population changes, but it's not tied to a specific level of population growth.

00:54:43.680 --> 00:54:54.659

Scott Calleson - USFWS: My understanding of what the analyses were done for the Antillean is that they didn't have the same kind of model. So they did not specifically address human population growth.

00:54:57.070 --> 00:54:58.240

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott.

00:54:58.590 --> 00:55:01.870

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. This next question is for Jan.

00:55:02.040 --> 00:55:07.020

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Can you please clarify what you said about listing in Puerto Rico or not?"

00:55:09.500 --> 00:55:11.289

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: Yes, thank you for the question.

00:55:11.600 --> 00:55:18.029

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: I think you mean when I mentioned the-

00:55:19.350 --> 00:55:28.769

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: one of the proposed petitions that we received was to designate the Puerto Rico population

00:55:28.940 --> 00:55:35.100

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: as a distinct population segment, and we did not undertake that analysis

00:55:35.210 --> 00:55:38.000

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: because when we were doing

00:55:38.180 --> 00:55:43.019

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: the assessment for the Antillean manatee subspecies, we determined

00:55:43.220 --> 00:55:55.789

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: that the species should be listed as an endangered species. So, since the Antillean manatee subspecies throughout its entire range is being

00:55:55.930 --> 00:56:08.510

Jan Zegarra - USFWS: proposed as listed as an endangered species, we did not look at the analysis to potentially list the Puerto Rico population as a distinct population segment.

00:56:12.210 --> 00:56:13.410

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Jan.

00:56:19.120 --> 00:56:20.590

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right.

00:56:21.330 --> 00:56:29.139

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll go ahead and continue to monitor for more questions coming in through the chat. Thank you, everyone for your patience.

00:56:34.300 --> 00:56:50.289

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Our next question is, "Will the existing species determination keys for the West Indian manatee still be able to be used to make effect determinations for the Florida manatee?" And we'll turn that over to Scott.

00:56:52.550 --> 00:57:08.410

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thank you again, Megan. Short answer is yes. As we said, nothing will be changing with the protections that are provided to Florida manatees under the change. So our existing

consultation key that we have for manatees, we can still continue to use.

00:57:10.510 --> 00:57:11.660

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott.

00:57:22.540 --> 00:57:34.990

Megan Stone - AECOM: We have around 10 minutes or so left in our question-and-answer session. We're going to do our best to get caught up with the questions coming in through the chat. But again, if anyone does

00:57:35.110 --> 00:57:43.329

Megan Stone - AECOM: want to submit any further questions, you can do so by chatting us, or pressing \*9 to raise your hand if you're a phone caller.

00:57:43.520 --> 00:57:48.490

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you again, everyone, for your patience, as we make sure we haven't missed anything.

00:57:58.680 --> 00:58:13.910

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Our next question is, "The House Natural Resources Committee met today re: manatees, re: MMPA and ESA. Did anything change?" And we'll go ahead and turn that over to Kristi.

00:58:17.850 --> 00:58:34.699

Kristi Young - USFWS: Yeah. As the question mentioned, there was a meeting of the subcommittee today. No changes that we're aware of. It just was a hearing to discuss the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

00:58:37.690 --> 00:58:38.670

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you.

00:59:10.270 --> 00:59:23.279

Megan Stone - AECOM: Looks like we did have one more question, which was a follow up to the initial question of what number of human population growth was considered in determining the stresses on habitat.

00:59:23.540 --> 00:59:25.300

Megan Stone - AECOM: The follow up is:

00:59:25.990 --> 00:59:44.390

Megan Stone - AECOM: "For example, Alachua County did a study for climate change over the next 20 years and surmised our growth rate would bring more than 30,000 people to our country. Within 20 years that's 30,000 over the present growth rate additional." And we'll turn that over to Scott.

00:59:47.104 --> 00:59:49.160

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thanks. So I think

00:59:49.690 --> 00:59:59.219

Scott Calleson - USFWS: the way I would answer that is what we're trying to assess with manatees is how the threats and how the stressors might change over time. So clearly

00:59:59.580 --> 01:00:13.530

Scott Calleson - USFWS: human population growth could change certain of those stressors like I mentioned. You know, watercraft operation: if there are more boats out on the water, that could change that risk level. So the core biological model does try to address those issues

01:00:14.890 --> 01:00:31.890

Scott Calleson - USFWS: in the scenarios it runs. It's just not tied to a specific population change like in the example of Alachua County increasing the human population. That would have to be translated into something that we could assess what the stressor might change for manatees. And I think that's,

01:00:31.920 --> 01:00:45.909

Scott Calleson - USFWS: at least currently, not the way that the core biological model works, and would be difficult to tie to a specific human population growth rate. But human population in general, and how it affects the stressors, that is what we try to model.

01:00:48.420 --> 01:00:55.689

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott. We'll just go ahead and see if there was anything anyone else would like to add on that question.

01:00:59.420 --> 01:01:03.780

Billy Brooks - USFWS: Yes, hello! This is Bill Brooks, and I'd like to follow up also in regards to

01:01:04.614 --> 01:01:32.809

Billy Brooks - USFWS: that human growth aspect. In regards to that there are county protection plans, boating protection plans, and zones that provide protection. And then Scott also mentioned as through

development, and the impacts of development, those are addressed through consultation processes. So those are ways that growing human population within Florida is being addressed.

01:01:35.270 --> 01:01:36.539

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Billy.

01:01:40.040 --> 01:01:46.209

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right! We'll give it a moment here and see if we have any additional questions coming in.

01:01:46.370 --> 01:01:48.400

Megan Stone - AECOM: We do have another

01:01:48.810 --> 01:02:01.560

Megan Stone - AECOM: 10 minutes or so, again, before we go ahead and get started with accepting comments this evening. Thank you everyone so much for submitting those questions so far and for your participation.

01:02:07.850 --> 01:02:11.000

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, we do have a new question in the chat.

01:02:11.840 --> 01:02:20.799

Megan Stone - AECOM: "Has the new administration proposed changes to endangered or threatened species protections that could affect manatees?"

01:02:21.090 --> 01:02:23.300

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll turn that over to Kristi.

01:02:25.930 --> 01:02:36.069

Kristi Young - USFWS: Yes, we're still getting kind of a handle on what changes may occur with the Endangered Species Act and with our regulations.

01:02:36.710 --> 01:02:39.840

Kristi Young - USFWS: We did, because the proposed rule

01:02:40.000 --> 01:03:01.559

Kristi Young - USFWS: was published on January 14th, we did apply, or are proposing to apply, the blanket rule for the 4(d) Rule. We would need to consider—that is one of the things that is being looked at in terms of removing that blanket rule exception. So we'd have to think about that in terms of

01:03:01.670 --> 01:03:10.980

Kristi Young - USFWS: if we finalize the rule, as is, and with the Florida population as threatened, how we would consider a 4(d) Rule for the species.

01:03:11.320 --> 01:03:13.950

Kristi Young - USFWS: But no, no real information on that yet.

01:03:16.690 --> 01:03:18.059

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Kristi.

01:03:18.720 --> 01:03:25.790

Megan Stone - AECOM: At this time we are all caught up with the pre-registered and live questions coming in through the chat.

01:03:26.220 --> 01:03:37.109

Megan Stone - AECOM: A reminder that we are currently in the Q&A session. We'll go ahead and have the Q&A for a couple more minutes here, and then we'll move into the public comment session.

01:03:37.240 --> 01:03:41.849

Megan Stone - AECOM: So if you do have any further questions, please submit those in the chat

01:03:42.050 --> 01:03:45.339

Megan Stone - AECOM: and we'll do our best to get some responses for you.

01:05:36.220 --> 01:05:46.430

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you again, everyone, for your questions and participation and your patience as we compile the last few questions here.

01:05:58.370 --> 01:06:01.539

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Our next question is:

01:06:02.220 --> 01:06:11.990

Megan Stone - AECOM: "More offshore drilling is likely in U.S. waters. Is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considering this impact?" And we'll turn it over to Scott.

01:06:14.855 --> 01:06:17.542

Scott Calleson - USFWS: Thank you. Fair question.

01:06:19.140 --> 01:06:45.019

Scott Calleson - USFWS: It kind of depends on where the drilling's proposed. So any activities that occur that could affect manatees should be covered by a section 7 ESA consultation. So we just have to see what the proposal is, and if manatees are likely to be affected. If they're likely to be affected, then we would expect to do a consultation on them. Any drilling that occurs miles offshore is unlikely to directly affect manatees, so we might not see those

01:06:45.580 --> 01:06:47.439

Scott Calleson - USFWS: for manatees specifically.

01:06:49.840 --> 01:06:51.020

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Scott.

01:06:53.280 --> 01:07:02.379

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Looks like we probably have time for one more question here before we go ahead and move into the official public hearing portion.

01:07:03.530 --> 01:07:16.399

Megan Stone - AECOM: Our last question that we'll go ahead and get to is, "Will the Department consider the use of water lettuce as forage for the manatees instead of listing it as invasive?"

01:07:16.790 --> 01:07:20.260

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll go ahead and turn that over to Terri.

01:07:22.480 --> 01:07:31.900

Terri Calleson - USFWS: Thank you, Megan, and thanks for the question. I'll take for sure the first part of it, which is about water lettuce as forage for manatees.

01:07:32.030 --> 01:07:48.899

Terri Calleson - USFWS: That is a pretty routine forage for them in the spring systems, in particular, in areas like the St. Johns River, and we do have extensive coordination with a lot of the agencies in certain places to make sure that that

01:07:49.340 --> 01:08:15.439

Terri Calleson - USFWS: stays in and around warm-water sites, particularly in the winter months. So we have a lot of conversations with not just Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, but the Corps of Engineers and others. I'm not aware of the listing as an

invasive, but it is strongly considered. It's one of the main types of forage that manatees utilize in the St. Johns River area.

01:08:18.790 --> 01:08:22.000

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Terri. All right.

01:08:22.189 --> 01:08:26.359

Megan Stone - AECOM: Looks like we have caught up with the questions in the chat.

01:08:27.029 --> 01:08:32.819

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll go ahead and get started with the public comment session this evening.

01:08:33.170 --> 01:08:35.730

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll go ahead and go to the next slide.

01:08:40.890 --> 01:08:51.139

Megan Stone - AECOM: As I mentioned, we'll officially get started with the verbal public hearing portion of tonight's meeting to receive comments related to the proposed listing.

01:08:51.319 --> 01:08:58.560

Megan Stone - AECOM: It's currently 4:10 Eastern Time—I'm sorry, Mountain Time. 6:10 Eastern Time.

01:08:58.710 --> 01:09:12.279

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, this verbal public comment session, along with your comments, is being recorded as part of the official record. As a reminder, your camera and mic control settings are restricted during this time.

01:09:12.390 --> 01:09:26.599

Megan Stone - AECOM: You will only be able to talk if and when you are unmuted, so please remember to speak when prompted. The Service wants to hear from all members of the public, so we'll be using the following guidelines today.

01:09:26.720 --> 01:09:34.149

Megan Stone - AECOM: First, please be mindful of the length of your comment, so that everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity to do so.

01:09:34.310 --> 01:09:52.699



Megan Stone - AECOM: We ask that you keep your comment limited to 3 minutes today. We're going to do our best to get through our entire list of those who selected they wanted to offer a comment when they pre-registered for this evening's meeting, and to save some time for others who might want to offer a comment as well.

01:09:52.970 --> 01:10:01.589

Megan Stone - AECOM: If we do not get the opportunity to hear your comment this evening, you can submit your written comments via [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

01:10:01.850 --> 01:10:04.799

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll provide that information in the chat.

01:10:05.570 --> 01:10:09.460

Megan Stone - AECOM: Second, please be respectful of others and their viewpoints.

01:10:09.610 --> 01:10:37.669

Megan Stone - AECOM: Third, please refrain from using profanity. While passion is welcome in your comment, policy requires that we mute anyone who uses inappropriate language because we are recording this meeting, and others may be live streaming, so please avoid inappropriate language. If that does happen, we'll provide a reminder before unmuting that person and asking them to try again using words acceptable to all ages.

01:10:38.230 --> 01:10:49.689

Megan Stone - AECOM: As I mentioned, comments will be accepted in the order that people registered, and if you registered before the start time of tonight's meeting, you're on our pre-registered commenter list.

01:10:50.020 --> 01:11:03.539

Megan Stone - AECOM: If you are on that commenter list, when it is your turn to provide your comment, we'll read your name aloud and display your name on the screen. We'll also display the name of the commenter who is next in line.

01:11:03.710 --> 01:11:12.140

Megan Stone - AECOM: When you hear your name called out, please use the raise hand feature so that we know you are available and ready to offer your comment.

01:11:12.730 --> 01:11:31.100

Megan Stone - AECOM: You can access the raise hand feature by clicking on either the reactions icon or the participants list icon, which are both located at the bottom of your Zoom screen. If you wave your mouse back and forth across the bottom of your Zoom screen, these icons should appear.

01:11:31.370 --> 01:11:36.970

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, you might need to exit out of your full screen view in Zoom to see those icons.

01:11:37.230 --> 01:11:45.639

Megan Stone - AECOM: You can then select the raise hand feature located either in the reactions icon or at the bottom of your participants list.

01:11:45.810 --> 01:11:50.839

Megan Stone - AECOM: Or, if you're calling in through the phone, please press \*9 to raise your hand.

01:11:51.310 --> 01:11:57.319

Megan Stone - AECOM: Once you've raised your hand, you'll then be unmuted so that you can provide your verbal public comment.

01:11:57.660 --> 01:12:04.900

Megan Stone - AECOM: You may be double muted. If that is the case, we will prompt you to unmute yourself on your end so that we can hear you.

01:12:05.100 --> 01:12:16.920

Megan Stone - AECOM: We ask that you please spell out your first and last name for the record before providing your verbal comment. And if you are representing an organization or group, please say so during your comment.

01:12:17.330 --> 01:12:21.280

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll display a commenter timer on the screen as well.

01:12:21.640 --> 01:12:36.449

Megan Stone - AECOM: After you've provided your comment, we will mute you and move on to our next commenter. Again, once we've worked our way through our current list, if we have time, we'll move on to those who registered after the start time of tonight's meeting

01:12:36.720 --> 01:12:49.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: who selected they wanted to offer a comment, and if we still have time remaining after that, we'll open up the verbal public comment portion to anyone who would like to offer a comment who has not already done so.

01:12:50.100 --> 01:12:51.600

Megan Stone - AECOM: Next slide, please.

01:12:55.790 --> 01:13:00.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: And again, we just have these instructions listed here on the screens.

01:13:02.140 --> 01:13:11.090

Megan Stone - AECOM: And here we have the icons where you can see that reactions icon. That's one way to find the raise hand button

01:13:11.260 --> 01:13:16.280

Megan Stone - AECOM: or you can go to your participants list, and you'll find the raise hand feature there.

01:13:16.440 --> 01:13:22.580

Megan Stone - AECOM: And again, we do want to note, folks are welcome to provide comments in Spanish this evening as well.

01:13:23.510 --> 01:13:29.810

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that, we'll go to the next slide and begin with our first pre-registered commenter.

01:13:32.070 --> 01:13:38.950

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, our first pre-registered commenter is Collin Macgibeny.

01:13:39.650 --> 01:13:48.319

Megan Stone - AECOM: Collin, if you're on with us this evening and still would like to provide a comment, please raise your hand and we'll go ahead and get you unmuted.

01:13:51.630 --> 01:13:52.330

Megan Stone - AECOM: Okay.

01:13:52.750 --> 01:14:02.579

Megan Stone - AECOM: I don't see Collin in our list of pre-registered commenters, so we'll go ahead and circle back to them later on and see if they join us.

01:14:03.080 --> 01:14:09.399

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that, we'll go ahead and move on to our next pre-registered commenter, who is Aja Moore.

01:14:11.750 --> 01:14:17.240

Megan Stone - AECOM: I also don't see that we have Aja in our pre-registered commenter list.

01:14:18.340 --> 01:14:22.520

Megan Stone - AECOM: So again, we'll circle back to them if they join later on.

01:14:23.700 --> 01:14:27.880

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that, we'll move to Aarin-Conrad Allen.

01:14:29.770 --> 01:14:36.579

Megan Stone - AECOM: I don't see that we have Aarin in our commenter list-attendees list this evening.

01:14:37.000 --> 01:14:40.720

Megan Stone - AECOM: So again, we'll circle back and see if they join later on.

01:14:42.360 --> 01:14:46.209

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that we'll move on to Fred Sweets.

01:14:48.440 --> 01:14:54.450

Megan Stone - AECOM: Fred, if you would like to provide a comment, please do raise your hand and we'll go ahead and get you unmuted.

01:14:56.330 --> 01:14:58.340

Megan Stone - AECOM: Give me a moment here.

01:15:08.240 --> 01:15:16.910

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, just in case you're having trouble accessing that raise hand feature, we'll go ahead and unmute you.

01:15:17.040 --> 01:15:24.570

Megan Stone - AECOM: And if you'd like to provide a comment, feel free to come on. If not, we'll go to our next pre-registered commenter.

01:15:26.880 --> 01:15:28.130

Fred Sweets: Am I unmuted?

01:15:28.830 --> 01:15:30.480

Megan Stone - AECOM: Yes, you are, Fred.

01:15:30.930 --> 01:15:36.650

Fred Sweets: Yes, I live in Miami, and I'm concerned about

01:15:37.150 --> 01:15:52.819

Fred Sweets: the jet skis in the area around—in Biscayne Bay. I used to see mini manatees, and now I don't see as many. I don't know why. I've called the Coast Guard on speeding jet skis

01:15:54.310 --> 01:16:01.670

Fred Sweets: creating a lot of wake, and out of the lane that's normally traversed by motorboats

01:16:02.580 --> 01:16:06.319

Fred Sweets: and the jet skis as part of the intracoastal waterway.

01:16:06.500 --> 01:16:10.002

Fred Sweets: What can be done to police the—

01:16:10.710 --> 01:16:14.290

Fred Sweets: because I know they've hit some manatees in my area.

01:16:14.570 --> 01:16:23.040

Fred Sweets: What can be done to eliminate violating jet ski operators?

01:16:25.640 --> 01:16:33.630

Fred Sweets: That's a bit of a comment. But it's also a question for anyone who might have a solution.

01:16:36.450 --> 01:16:45.950

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment, Fred. We are in the official public hearing portion, but you are welcome to submit questions as part of your comments

01:16:46.230 --> 01:16:50.120

Megan Stone - AECOM: so we'll go ahead and ensure that's captured for the record.

01:16:50.240 --> 01:16:54.459

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll move on to our next pre-registered commenter

01:16:55.390 --> 01:16:57.680

Megan Stone - AECOM: who is Sarah Nemes.

01:17:00.320 --> 01:17:09.279

Megan Stone - AECOM: Sarah, I do see your hand raised. I'll go ahead and prompt you to unmute now. Can you spell your first and last name for the record, please?

01:17:09.930 --> 01:17:16.880

Sarah Nemes: I can. It is Sarah, S-A-R-A-H. Last name is Nemes, N as in Nancy, E-M as in Michael, E-S.

01:17:17.830 --> 01:17:19.940

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you. You can begin your comment.

01:17:20.350 --> 01:17:45.239

Sarah Nemes: Absolutely. Well, one, just want to thank you all for—in the Service for hosting this webinar tonight, and certainly grateful to have the opportunity to represent United Parks and Resorts, formerly known as SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment, on this call, and just wanted to put a comment in to thank you all for the work that we're doing in Florida, and specifically with the MRP Partnership. Terri has done a phenomenal job with the group, and I just wanted to put that into the record

01:17:45.240 --> 01:17:52.030

Sarah Nemes: that any sort of support that's needed from the Partnership, and specifically from United Parks and Resorts, we are here to support.

01:17:55.150 --> 01:17:56.210

Sarah Nemes: And that's all.

01:17:56.460 --> 01:18:04.610

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment, Sarah. We will go ahead and lower your hand and move on to our next pre-registered commenter

01:18:04.880 --> 01:18:06.960

Megan Stone - AECOM: who is Grant Gelhardt.

01:18:08.710 --> 01:18:12.129

Megan Stone - AECOM: I don't see Grant in our

01:18:12.250 --> 01:18:20.770

Megan Stone - AECOM: attendees list this evening, or any phone callers on, but again we'll circle back to see if they join us later on.

01:18:21.100 --> 01:18:25.779

Megan Stone - AECOM: With that we'll move to our next pre-registered commenter, Rhonda Roff.

01:18:31.170 --> 01:18:36.220

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right, perfect. I see your hand raised. I'll go ahead and prompt you to unmute, Rhonda.

01:18:36.400 --> 01:18:38.049

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hi, there! Can you hear us?

01:18:38.490 --> 01:18:39.810

Rhonda Roff: Yes. Can you hear me?

01:18:40.150 --> 01:18:42.119

Megan Stone - AECOM: We can. Can you spell your

01:18:42.240 --> 01:18:44.310

Megan Stone - AECOM: first and last name for the record, please?

01:18:44.310 --> 01:18:47.729

Rhonda Roff: Oh, sure, it's Rhonda, R-H-O-N-D-A.

01:18:47.930 --> 01:18:52.300

Rhonda Roff: Last name is Roff. R-O-F like in Frank, F like in Frank.

01:18:53.220 --> 01:18:54.670

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you. You can begin.

01:18:56.540 --> 01:19:23.550

Rhonda Roff: Yes, I live in South Florida. I have two homes, one in Broward County and one in Hendry County, so I'm inland and coastal. I spend a lot of time on the coast, and I spend a lot of time in the Florida Springs, and I am very concerned about the survival of the Florida subspecies of the manatees—as well as the Antillean manatees, but I have less familiarity with them.

01:19:24.380 --> 01:19:40.730

Rhonda Roff: I am concerned that the most recent population study that was done by the Fish and Wildlife Commission has too many

uncertainties in it. For example, there were occasions where the water quality—the surface water was choppy, and

01:19:40.730 --> 01:19:54.759

Rhonda Roff: they only considered the ability to see through the water from the airplanes to be fair. And I'd really like to know that these other population models would be completed before the actual population number is considered.

01:19:54.920 --> 01:20:15.439

Rhonda Roff: We had a very politically motivated downlisting in 2017, as you know. There are a lot of competing interests for manatee habitat, and I don't think that we can assume that other states where manatees travel are really any better. Their variables are huge: human population;

01:20:15.450 --> 01:20:27.260

Rhonda Roff: the drawdown of groundwater, including for the springs; water quality considerations; agricultural runoff; septic, sewer, sewage spills,

01:20:27.380 --> 01:20:34.220

Rhonda Roff: the quality of forage is compromised by that, as well as herbicide applications to our waters in Florida;

01:20:34.804 --> 01:20:39.470

Rhonda Roff: boating hazards are growing as the boating community gets bigger.

01:20:40.000 --> 01:20:40.830

Rhonda Roff: And

01:20:41.170 --> 01:21:04.600

Rhonda Roff: right now I'm concerned that the changing critical habitat criteria might be too limiting, especially that some of the critical habitat, to the tune of 260,000 acres, was removed because the criteria was changed. So that I feel a little hamstrung right now, commenting on that, given the uncertainties in the critical habitat.

01:21:04.740 --> 01:21:20.049

Rhonda Roff: Climate change is a very big deal. We're looking at increasing harmful algal blooms, including red tide, seagrass losses as a result of that, stronger storms perhaps, that are tearing up our seagrass up in the



01:21:20.280 --> 01:21:47.850

Rhonda Roff: Big Bend region. And then there's the shuttering of the fossil-generating stations which will eliminate the warm-water refugia for the manatees in Florida, and how we are going to work with that, as the power plants shut down. I really would like to see the Ocklawaha River opened up all the way through. I'd like to see the management for this endangered or threatened species include

01:21:48.440 --> 01:21:55.699

Rhonda Roff: free range for them to go all the way from the St. Johns up into Silver Springs. Thank you very much for your time.

01:21:57.260 --> 01:22:01.890

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment, Rhonda. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute

01:22:02.300 --> 01:22:07.510

Megan Stone - AECOM: and move on to our next pre-registered commenter, who is Julio Colon.

01:22:09.280 --> 01:22:15.170

Megan Stone - AECOM: I do see we have Julio in our participants list, so we'll go ahead and give them a moment

01:22:15.420 --> 01:22:18.159

Megan Stone - AECOM: to see if they would still like to comment.

01:22:18.760 --> 01:22:26.480

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, you can access that raise hand feature in your participants list or in the Zoom toolbar.

01:22:27.310 --> 01:22:33.420

Megan Stone - AECOM: Perfect. I've gone ahead and prompted you to unmute, Julio.

01:22:38.130 --> 01:22:39.529

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hello! Can you hear us?

01:22:39.850 --> 01:22:41.040

Julio Colon: I sure can.

01:22:41.390 --> 01:22:45.599

Megan Stone - AECOM: Perfect. Could you spell your first and last name for the record, please?

01:22:45.600 --> 01:22:52.779

Julio Colon: Yes, my first name is Julio, J-U-L-I-O. And my last name is Colon, C-O-L-O-N.

01:22:53.560 --> 01:22:55.550

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you. You can begin your comment.

01:22:57.090 --> 01:23:15.099

Julio Colon: Well, my name is Julio Colon, as I said, and I filed the October 18th, 2021, petition with the Secretary, requesting that the Antillean manatee in Puerto Rico be considered as an endangered species, or rather as an endangered distinct population segment

01:23:15.260 --> 01:23:21.769

Julio Colon: apart from the other subspecies, the Florida manatee.

01:23:22.390 --> 01:23:32.710

Julio Colon: So the reason why we filed that petition was because it just seemed like every week, sometimes every other week, or every week sometimes, there was a dead manatee

01:23:33.240 --> 01:23:37.410

Julio Colon: washing up on the beach, and it seemed like an unnecessary death sometimes.

01:23:37.610 --> 01:23:43.449

Julio Colon: Like obviously, we know what happens with watercraft motors.

01:23:43.550 --> 01:23:55.290

Julio Colon: And so we decided to look into that. And it seemed to me that the answer was to treat the Puerto Rico population as separate and distinct from the Florida subspecies just because

01:23:55.630 --> 01:24:05.079

Julio Colon: that a resurgence in one didn't necessarily mean that there was a resurgence in the other, and they didn't interact at all. So that's why we did that.

01:24:05.390 --> 01:24:10.280

Julio Colon: And while it may be discrete and significant in the legal sense

01:24:10.728 --> 01:24:14.109

Julio Colon: in order to qualify to be a distinct population segment,  
01:24:14.320 --> 01:24:32.959

Julio Colon: I wanted to comment to express that I agree with the Service's proposal that gives the same or likely better protection, really, because it looks at the subspecies as a whole throughout its entire range, so a resurgence within the Service's jurisdiction will not

01:24:33.330 --> 01:25:00.149

Julio Colon: in theory affect its status unless it reflects strongly enough throughout the Antillean manatee's range. So my comment, in a nutshell, is that I agree with the classification as an endangered species wherever found with regard to the Antillean manatee, rather than as distinct population segment, and I also acknowledge that this would address the concerns mentioned in my 2021 request-

01:25:00.400 --> 01:25:06.556

Julio Colon: my 2021 petition. And I would also like to incorporate

01:25:07.240 --> 01:25:10.100

Julio Colon: the substance of that petition into my comment.

01:25:11.350 --> 01:25:14.699

Julio Colon: And that's all. I'd also like to thank

01:25:14.910 --> 01:25:22.030

Julio Colon: all the employees at the Department of Interior. That's all.

01:25:22.940 --> 01:25:24.329

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Julio.

01:25:24.730 --> 01:25:32.490

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll go ahead and place you back on mute and move to our next pre-registered commenter, Ricardo Torres.

01:25:34.340 --> 01:25:39.730

Megan Stone - AECOM: I see your hand raised. I've gone ahead and prompted you to unmute, Ricardo.

01:25:41.900 --> 01:25:42.530

Ricardo Torres: Good evening!

01:25:42.530 --> 01:25:43.030

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hi there.

01:25:43.030 --> 01:25:43.640

Ricardo Torres: Can you hear me?

01:25:44.260 --> 01:25:45.589

Megan Stone - AECOM: Yep, we can hear you.

01:25:46.140 --> 01:25:47.226

Ricardo Torres: All right, perfect.

01:25:47.970 --> 01:25:55.279

Ricardo Torres: So my name is Ricardo Torres. That's R-I-C-A-R-D-O.  
Last name T-O-R-R-E-S.

01:25:55.480 --> 01:25:59.680

Ricardo Torres: I'm speaking on behalf of the Center for Biological  
Diversity.

01:26:00.190 --> 01:26:23.779

Ricardo Torres: First of all, I'd like to thank the Service for their  
proposed listing of the Antillean manatee as endangered. And I'd just  
like to use my time today to comment on three aspects that are  
relevant to Antillean manatee conservation here in Puerto Rico, and  
that would be coastal development, watercraft mortality, and seagrass  
loss, in the hopes of encouraging the Service to finalize this  
proposed rule as quickly as possible to protect the species.

01:26:24.090 --> 01:26:33.339

Ricardo Torres: So currently, there are at least three projects of  
coastal development that are affecting areas near confirmed manatee  
habitat: the Army Corps dredging of the San Juan Bay,

01:26:33.510 --> 01:26:41.809

Ricardo Torres: the construction of this touristic mega-complex  
Proyecto Esencia on 2,000 acres of locally protected soil in the  
municipality of Cabo Rojo,

01:26:41.940 --> 01:26:46.849

Ricardo Torres: and the legalization of private housing encroaching  
upon Bahia de Jobos Natural Reserve.

01:26:47.430 --> 01:26:57.859

Ricardo Torres: So lack of enforcement and adequate regulatory  
controls, both locally and federally, have been crucial in allowing

these questionable developments, and I'd just like to call the Service's attention to these.

01:26:58.460 --> 01:27:08.579

Ricardo Torres: Lack of enforcement along with, you know, an understaffed Department of Natural Resources also exacerbates boating accidents which some of the other commenters have spoken on.

01:27:08.760 --> 01:27:14.529

Ricardo Torres: Watercraft mortality accounts for more than 50% of human-related Antillean manatee deaths

01:27:14.980 --> 01:27:27.349

Ricardo Torres: and increasingly frequent watercraft incidents directly harm manatees, but also they lead to the separation of calves from their mothers, which affects not only their chances of survival, but also stunts their development.

01:27:28.140 --> 01:27:40.139

Ricardo Torres: Finally, seagrass. Seagrass in Puerto Rico faces a variety of threats, some of which the Service correctly identified, such as coastal development, and yet others remained unnamed, such as glyphosate runoff.

01:27:40.340 --> 01:27:48.270

Ricardo Torres: Glyphosate is currently used by all industrial agricultural conglomerates in Puerto Rico, which are mostly concentrated on the south of the island.

01:27:48.940 --> 01:28:05.480

Ricardo Torres: As storms increase in intensity due to climate change, stormwater runoff is definitely going to be more aggressive and is going to result in larger amounts of glyphosate being discharged into the southern coast which creates algae blooms that interfere with natural seagrass regeneration processes.

01:28:06.270 --> 01:28:13.059

Ricardo Torres: I'd just like to remind everyone here that swift action yields the most power in the race against extinction.

01:28:13.200 --> 01:28:22.980

Ricardo Torres: And for these reasons I urge the Service to swiftly finalize this proposed rule and ameliorate these and other threats to the species. Thank you, everyone.

01:28:24.900 --> 01:28:34.580

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment, Ricardo. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute and move to our next pre-registered commenter, Aidalis Santana.

01:28:36.020 --> 01:28:40.960

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right! I see your hand raised. I've prompted you to unmute.

01:28:41.140 --> 01:28:42.789

Megan Stone - AECOM: Are you able to hear us?

01:28:43.380 --> 01:29:11.529

Aidalis Santana: Yes. Hello. My name is Aidalis Santana, that's A-I-D-A-L-I-S S-A-N-T-A-N-A, representing the Center for Biological Diversity. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. My comments concern the imminent loss of warm-water habitat and seagrass degradation across the state. Over half of Florida manatees rely on warm water discharges from power plants to survive the winter.

01:29:11.650 --> 01:29:23.419

Aidalis Santana: Florida Power and Light aims to decarbonize its electricity generation by 2045 which could eliminate four major artificial warm-water sanctuaries within the next 20 years.

01:29:23.750 --> 01:29:33.379

Aidalis Santana: Despite this looming transition, power companies have yet to provide a clear schedule detailing when and where these outfalls will be removed.

01:29:33.560 --> 01:29:41.909

Aidalis Santana: The Service has acknowledged that this habitat loss poses a significant threat to manatees, increasing the risk of population collapse.

01:29:42.230 --> 01:29:51.050

Aidalis Santana: Furthermore, seagrass, a critical food source for manatees, continues to decline, threatening the species' survival.

01:29:51.170 --> 01:29:58.289

Aidalis Santana: An example of this: the Indian River Lagoon lost up to 95% of its seagrass in less than a decade.

01:29:58.390 --> 01:30:10.760

Aidalis Santana: Without access to sufficient forage, manatees face starvation and increased mortality, exacerbating the most recent Unusual Mortality Event, and posing the risk of more to come.

01:30:11.080 --> 01:30:24.860

Aidalis Santana: Hence, I urge to prioritize the protection of the Florida manatee by working with the energy providers to give a clear timeline and implementation plan for their decarbonization efforts.

01:30:25.040 --> 01:30:34.480

Aidalis Santana: Furthermore, more aggressive efforts are needed to curb nutrient pollution and restore seagrass beds statewide. And, above all,

01:30:34.630 --> 01:30:44.760

Aidalis Santana: immediate action is critical to prevent population declines and ensure the survival of this iconic species, our Florida gentle giants. Thank you.

01:30:47.680 --> 01:30:51.839

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute

01:30:52.160 --> 01:30:57.929

Megan Stone - AECOM: and move on to our next pre-registered commenter, who is Sandra Clinger.

01:30:59.280 --> 01:31:05.409

Megan Stone - AECOM: I don't see that Sandra is in our list of attendees this evening.

01:31:06.078 --> 01:31:12.949

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll go ahead and give it a moment here. I'm just going to take a look at our attendees list and see

01:31:13.090 --> 01:31:17.910

Megan Stone - AECOM: if anyone we missed the first time has now joined the meeting.

01:31:18.874 --> 01:31:21.550

Megan Stone - AECOM: So we'll take a moment here for that.

01:31:24.620 --> 01:31:40.059

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. It doesn't look like we have any new pre-registered commenters on. So at this time we are going to open up

the meeting to anyone who would like to comment, regardless of whether you signed up when you registered.

01:31:40.290 --> 01:31:49.539

Megan Stone - AECOM: So again, if you'd like to comment, please do raise your hand. You can find that in your participants list or in the Zoom toolbar.

01:31:50.810 --> 01:31:51.530

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right.

01:31:52.220 --> 01:31:55.079

Megan Stone - AECOM: Okay. We will go to Sarah Younger.

01:31:56.280 --> 01:31:58.890

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hi, Sarah, I've prompted you to unmute.

01:31:59.850 --> 01:32:02.060

Sarah Younger: Good day. Can you hear me?

01:32:02.530 --> 01:32:03.770

Megan Stone - AECOM: We can hear you.

01:32:03.770 --> 01:32:07.769

Sarah Younger: Hi, yeah. My name's Sarah Younger, that's S-A-R-A-H

01:32:07.970 --> 01:32:09.989

Sarah Younger: Y-O-U-N-G-E-R.

01:32:10.310 --> 01:32:32.399

Sarah Younger: And first off I want to thank my friend Rhonda for letting me know about this meeting, because I might have signed up for it, but totally forgot. So I want to first off thank her. I also want to echo her comments. As I do live in North Central Florida, I see the water systems—I rely on well water myself—

01:32:32.510 --> 01:32:36.149

Sarah Younger: and our springs are under severe threat.

01:32:36.270 --> 01:32:41.390

Sarah Younger: I live near the Santa Fe River Basin. We do get manatee here.

01:32:41.560 --> 01:32:50.989



Sarah Younger: And in fact, they're often found in parts of the springs, through the winter months especially.

01:32:51.150 --> 01:32:55.969

Sarah Younger: I am very concerned about the lack of forage.

01:32:55.990 --> 01:33:13.219

Sarah Younger: And, as I had mentioned, water lettuce often is seen as intrusive and is used as--removed in some areas. I'm thinking that it might serve as a forage for some of these distressed animals.

01:33:13.611 --> 01:33:28.859

Sarah Younger: And I also am concerned about our population growth. I shared that about Alachua County. We are going to be seeing a massive number of people moving into the center part of the state as they retreat from the seaside,

01:33:28.930 --> 01:33:39.670

Sarah Younger: and I think that the need for freshwater resources are going to continue to be hammered. We have right up the road from me

01:33:39.680 --> 01:34:01.000

Sarah Younger: a water bottling plant which offers very little benefit to our community, yet carries millions of gallons of water every day out of our springs. And, you know, the commercialization of our freshwater systems pose a threat not just to the manatees, but also to our local residents. So

01:34:01.000 --> 01:34:19.550

Sarah Younger: I would like to know if these critical habitats could be expanded in any way. I would like to also echo that the opening of the Ocklawaha and the removal of the Rodman dam would benefit

01:34:19.900 --> 01:34:35.709

Sarah Younger: this species greatly, and I would hope that the Department could make some efforts to assist in educating the public about the need for additional critical habitat for these endangered species.

01:34:36.410 --> 01:34:51.789

Sarah Younger: And I've spent a little bit of time on the water. I have seen those manatees. Of course I don't interact with them. I just am very grateful when they make their presence known. And I want to add that, you know, because they are such

01:34:53.380 --> 01:34:54.700

Sarah Younger: an iconic

01:34:54.930 --> 01:35:14.230

Sarah Younger: animal for our state that I would hope that we could cherish their presence in our waters and make sure that they continue for many generations. So thank you for taking my comments, and I hope that we continue to see the growth of manatees in our region. Thank you.

01:35:15.050 --> 01:35:16.460

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Sarah.

01:35:16.910 --> 01:35:19.389

Megan Stone - AECOM: We will place you back on mute.

01:35:19.770 --> 01:35:29.460

Megan Stone - AECOM: And again we are now accepting comments from anyone who would like to provide a comment, regardless of whether you signed up when registering.

01:35:29.910 --> 01:35:34.220

Megan Stone - AECOM: So please do raise your hand if you would like to provide input.

01:35:34.650 --> 01:35:40.829

Megan Stone - AECOM: Any input is welcome. We'll have another 25 minutes or so in our comment session.

01:35:40.990 --> 01:35:45.370

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll be on ready to listen to your comments.

01:39:35.190 --> 01:39:49.210

Megan Stone - AECOM: Just a reminder that we will be in our comment session for another 20 minutes or so here. So if anyone does have any comments, please do use that raise hand feature and we'll go ahead and get you unmuted.

01:39:49.400 --> 01:39:50.530

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you.

01:40:22.620 --> 01:40:29.069

Megan Stone - AECOM: I also do want to remind everyone that you're welcome to submit comments in Spanish this evening.

01:40:29.350 --> 01:40:35.410

Megan Stone - AECOM: So if anyone would like to provide any comments in Spanish, please feel free to raise your hand.

01:40:36.027 --> 01:40:41.839

Megan Stone - AECOM: The instructions for providing comments in Spanish are the same for providing those in English.

01:41:46.890 --> 01:41:51.809

Megan Stone - AECOM: I see I have a hand raised. I'll go ahead and unmute you now.

01:41:53.230 --> 01:41:54.950

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hey, there! Can you hear us?

01:41:56.530 --> 01:41:57.270

M Fairchild: Yes.

01:41:58.050 --> 01:42:01.320

Megan Stone - AECOM: Perfect. Could you spell your name for the record?

01:42:02.570 --> 01:42:05.000

M Fairchild: Yes, M-D, the letters.

01:42:05.800 --> 01:42:10.750

M Fairchild: Fairchild, F-A-I-R-C-H-I-L-D.

01:42:13.470 --> 01:42:15.779

M Fairchild: My comment is-

01:42:15.960 --> 01:42:35.569

M Fairchild: I don't want it to sound like a tirade. We all understand that the biological diversity is really important, and as for the manatees, the richness of the natural environment, and the natural world is what provides for their immunity, if you will. Can you hear me?

01:42:38.090 --> 01:42:39.489

Megan Stone - AECOM: Yes, we can hear you.

01:42:40.270 --> 01:42:42.220

M Fairchild: Trees like-

01:42:42.370 --> 01:42:48.199

M Fairchild: you know, I feel like I'm preaching to the choir. But just, you know, trees like the

01:42:49.280 --> 01:43:15.990

M Fairchild: *Avicennia germinans*, the mangrove and the other one, they have anti-tumor compounds, and you know, if these trees are planted in the same concentration that they would be in the natural environment, you'd see a healthier population. Of course you can't remediate propeller scars, and I'm not, you know, advancing a panacea, but it's known that the

01:43:16.100 --> 01:43:32.519

M Fairchild: manatees are suffering from escalating HPV infections which is probably coming from sewer systems or boat bilges, or whatever, and from human populations, I don't know if they've traced it, but these

01:43:32.580 --> 01:43:46.209

M Fairchild: plant metabolites that get in the water from a biologically rich environment are some of the things that can extend the life of the animals and give them some immunity to these diseases. Anyway, that's my comment.

01:43:49.710 --> 01:43:53.729

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute.

01:43:53.900 --> 01:43:58.959

Megan Stone - AECOM: and we'll move on to our next hand raised, which is Grant Gelhardt.

01:43:59.470 --> 01:44:03.610

Megan Stone - AECOM: I've prompted you to unmute, Grant. Are you able to hear us?

01:44:11.750 --> 01:44:20.190

Megan Stone - AECOM: You may be double muted on your end. Let me just go ahead and try that again.

01:44:21.620 --> 01:44:24.549

Megan Stone - AECOM: You should see a prompt on your screen saying—

01:44:24.550 --> 01:44:25.240

GRANT GELHARDT: Can you hear me now?

01:44:26.010 --> 01:44:26.880

Megan Stone - AECOM: We can hear you now.

01:44:26.880 --> 01:44:27.450

GRANT GELHARDT: Can you hear me now?

01:44:28.190 --> 01:44:28.920

Megan Stone - AECOM: Yes.

01:44:29.240 --> 01:44:30.174

GRANT GELHARDT: Yes.

01:44:31.220 --> 01:44:37.109

GRANT GELHARDT: Hello, my name is Grant Gelhardt. I'm the chair of the Florida Sierra Club.

01:44:37.270 --> 01:45:03.850

GRANT GELHARDT: And as a statewide environmental group-conservation group we are very concerned about the manatee habitat and, basically, the Florida manatee in this case here. The loss of seagrass beds over the last decade has been disastrous for the Florida manatee. Also

01:45:03.870 --> 01:45:09.846

GRANT GELHARDT: the need for warm-water habitat is critical. We encourage that

01:45:10.470 --> 01:45:19.929

GRANT GELHARDT: the state and the federal government look into the breaching of the Rodman dam to open up the Ocklawaha River

01:45:20.542 --> 01:45:27.579

GRANT GELHARDT: to manatees traveling up to the spring systems, especially Silver Springs

01:45:27.940 --> 01:45:49.129

GRANT GELHARDT: and the 20 submerged springs along the Ocklawaha River. So we are hoping that both the federal government and the state government take additional steps to protect these manatees. They need to have the ultimate protection in this changing times with

01:45:50.096 --> 01:46:00.799

GRANT GELHARDT: global warming. Whether we want to admit it or not, it is a fact. And the global warming is impacting both seagrass beds and habitat.

01:46:01.070 --> 01:46:23.330

GRANT GELHARDT: And we urge that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Service take action to protect the manatee and incur and take all necessary steps to protect them, whether they are listed as threatened or endangered.

01:46:23.400 --> 01:46:49.900

GRANT GELHARDT: Both listings are important. Of course, any possibility of getting them listed as endangered would be great, but if they're continuing to be listed as threatened, additional time, resource, and staffing. And to protect the grass beds. Water quality protection is critical. The dumping of water out of

01:46:50.850 --> 01:47:06.199

GRANT GELHARDT: the lakes, stormwater systems, and Lake Okeechobee has been disastrous on seagrass beds, both in the Indian River Lagoon and down into Fort Myers and Estero Bay

01:47:06.540 --> 01:47:08.460

GRANT GELHARDT: and Charlotte Harbor.

01:47:08.630 --> 01:47:24.359

GRANT GELHARDT: Thank you very much for your time and effort. Keep up the good work. We are relying on you. You are the front lines. Please protect the manatees and protect this iconic species. Thank you very much. Again, Grant Gelhardt, Florida Sierra Club.

01:47:25.600 --> 01:47:30.719

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you, Grant. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute, and lower your hand.

01:47:31.630 --> 01:47:35.980

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we'll continue to keep an eye out for any hands raised.

01:47:36.220 --> 01:47:50.129

Megan Stone - AECOM: We have moved through all of our pre-registered commenters, and the hands raised that I saw. So if anyone would like to comment again, you're welcome to do so. We have 13 minutes or so left in our

01:47:50.420 --> 01:47:55.080

Megan Stone - AECOM: comment session before we turn it back to the Service for some closing remarks.

01:47:55.240 --> 01:48:09.189

Megan Stone - AECOM: So again, we do encourage you to submit comments verbally here this evening, or if you'd prefer to submit those in writing, you can visit regulations.gov, and we have that information in the chat.

01:48:09.690 --> 01:48:14.950

Megan Stone - AECOM: I see Lyman has their hand raised. I've prompted you to unmute.

01:48:15.630 --> 01:48:17.339

Megan Stone - AECOM: Are you able to hear us?

01:48:18.060 --> 01:48:18.610

Lyman Welch: Hello?

01:48:19.180 --> 01:48:20.100

Megan Stone - AECOM: Hi.

01:48:20.780 --> 01:48:25.239

Lyman Welch: Hi! This is Lyman Welch. I live in Sanibel, Florida.

01:48:25.945 --> 01:48:38.389

Lyman Welch: And I just want to comment that I'd like you to adopt the strongest protections for manatee. The manatee is a very

01:48:38.580 --> 01:49:08.139

Lyman Welch: special creature here in Florida, and it's—you know, everyone looks at them and really enjoys them. They're troubled now. They're being threatened by boaters. They're being especially threatened by the lack of seagrass, so that they're not able to eat, and some of them have been starving, especially during the winter months,

01:49:08.360 --> 01:49:11.699

Lyman Welch: and dying, and that's

01:49:11.830 --> 01:49:35.910

Lyman Welch: not a good thing. I would like to see more manatees around in the streams and in the waters, and able to survive. And to

do that, I think you need to adopt some stronger protections of different habitat to protect the seagrass and provide for places for the manatees to eat.

01:49:35.970 --> 01:49:58.589

Lyman Welch: I think there may be some additional areas in Florida that should be protected beyond what you've proposed in the initial proposal. So I think you need to look carefully at additional areas for protection, to promote seagrass growth to protect the manatee.

01:49:59.000 --> 01:50:22.819

Lyman Welch: And I'm speaking of Florida. I know you're looking at Puerto Rico as well, but I'm only really knowledgeable about the manatees in Florida, but we really enjoy them here. They're a great part of wildlife on Sanibel, where I live. It's amazing when we see them come up in the waters, whether, you know, we're in

01:50:22.820 --> 01:50:46.740

Lyman Welch: "Ding" Darling Refuge and and kayaking about and seeing the manatees, or whether they come up on the beaches and the shorelines, or in the different streams and waterways that we have here in Sanibel. I really enjoy them, and I'd like more protection to be there, so just wanted to encourage

01:50:46.740 --> 01:50:54.400

Lyman Welch: some stronger protection. I think it's important to protect the manatees. They need the seagrass

01:50:54.400 --> 01:51:11.679

Lyman Welch: to be there to allow them to eat and to survive. So I think the strongest protection--and look at additional areas that you can protect beyond what you've proposed, because I think there are some additional areas.

01:51:11.680 --> 01:51:32.840

Lyman Welch: And other people have provided more comments. The Sierra Club, for example, the Sierra Club of Florida, has provided some additional areas, and I would support those to be protected in addition to what you've proposed so far. So thank you very much for offering the opportunity to comment and have a great day.

01:51:34.190 --> 01:51:39.180

Megan Stone - AECOM: Thank you for your comment, Lyman. We'll go ahead and place you back on mute.



01:51:39.650 --> 01:51:43.639

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we will look for additional hands raised.

01:51:44.050 --> 01:51:52.169

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, we welcome any input that you might have this evening. If you'd like to do that verbally, you can raise your hand

01:51:52.290 --> 01:51:56.199

Megan Stone - AECOM: or we have that comment information in the chat.

01:51:56.370 --> 01:52:05.300

Megan Stone - AECOM: You can submit comments through regulations.gov by searching the docket number, or we have the direct link in the chat.

01:52:05.420 --> 01:52:09.299

Megan Stone - AECOM: And those comments can be submitted by March 17th.

01:52:10.030 --> 01:52:12.943

Megan Stone - AECOM: And we've also included a link to

01:52:13.490 --> 01:52:16.650

Megan Stone - AECOM: the press release and some FAQs.

01:52:16.950 --> 01:52:20.660

Megan Stone - AECOM: So do open that chat and copy those down.

01:52:21.050 --> 01:52:25.699

Megan Stone - AECOM: Again, we'll continue to keep our eye out for any hands raised.

01:55:21.120 --> 01:55:32.229

Megan Stone - AECOM: Right, looks like we have around 5 more minutes in our meeting this evening, so we have time for one more comment. If anyone would like to provide a comment, please do raise your hand.

01:55:32.610 --> 01:55:38.319

Megan Stone - AECOM: We'll keep an eye out for hands raised, and then we will go to closing remarks from the Service.

01:58:18.480 --> 01:58:28.380

Megan Stone - AECOM: All right. Thank you, everyone, for your comments and questions. I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Lourdes with the Service to close this out.

01:58:33.120 --> 01:58:41.510

Lourdes Mena - USFWS: The Service would like to thank everyone for attending this meeting, and for those that asked questions or provided comments

01:58:41.710 --> 01:59:00.229

Lourdes Mena - USFWS: or testimony. We will consider all of this information, as well as any comments on the proposed rule received or postmarked before March 17th. We would like to remind you that all the comments will be received rather than in process. If you have any questions, please send it to the

01:59:01.960 --> 01:59:07.609

Lourdes Mena - USFWS: contacts on our website. Please have a good evening, and thank you.