

**NWX-FWS (US)**

**Moderator: Ken Warren**  
**January 7, 2016**  
**12:30 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all lines are in a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer portion of today's call. Today's call is being recorded and if you have any objections you may disconnect at this time. And I (would) now like to turn today's call over to Mr. Ken Warren. Sir, you may begin.

Ken Warren: Good afternoon, everybody. I'm going to turn it over to Larry Williams who will be the host and MC for today. Go ahead, Larry.

Larry Williams: Hello, everybody. If I could have your attention please. I want to start off by first saying thank you to everybody who has joined us today here in person. We also have some people joining us over the phone, and we're here at the Seaquarium which has been a wonderful partner in manatee conservation for years and it's a wonderful opportunity to be here to share some news with everybody.

So like I said thank you for coming and as we get started I want to first introduce Mr. Andrew Hertz, the President and General Manager of the

Miami Seaquarium, and on behalf of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and our leadership I want to thank Andrew and his team here at the Seaquarium.

Some members of his team in particular I want to thank Mr. Robert Rose, the Curator, Dr. Maya Rodriguez, the Staff Veterinarian, and Mr. Eric Eimstad, the Assistant General Manager.

I want to thank all of you for your long-term partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation partners, not only in manatee recovery but in all forms of conservation that you work in. Mr. Hertz, if you might come up and say a few words.

Andrew Hertz: Thank you very much. As you said my name is Andrew Hertz and I am celebrating 20 years of being at Miami Seaquarium this year and I will tell you working with these animals, rescuing manatees, releasing them back out into the wild is a part of the DNA of Miami Seaquarium.

We celebrated our 60th anniversary this past year and we rescued our first orphan manatee before the park even opened in 1955. We were helping take care of these animals before the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act even existed.

So this is what we do, we take care of animals, we help the animals out in the wildlife, and Robert and his team are outstanding, I have never see anyone so selflessly give of their time and their effort for these animals. These animals, (turtles), we rescue and rehabilitate turtles as well, and it is just a great honor.

I can tell you when I was first starting here I helped a couple of times bottle feed manatees over night because when they, they're orphans, they have to

feed every couple of hours just like babies and sometimes it puts a lot of strain on the staff.

And so they'll reach out and get volunteers from the rest of staff and as a marketing person I had the opportunity to stay overnight one night and do that and, you know, I tell that story quite a bit and the animal care staff like to tell me, yes, that was great for you, that's Tuesday for us.

So, you know, they do this every single day, they live it, they breath it, and I just want to give them all the credit, and I want to thank the Fish and Wildlife Service for coming out here to make this announcement.

I think the most important thing to think about now this is a great achievement but this is only a mile marker on the road, the road is not done. They still need a lot of care, a lot of help and I'm sure others are going to talk about that more than I should, but thank you very much.

Larry Williams: Thank you, Andrew. Again, I want to thank the Seaquarium not only for hosting the event today but for the work over decades (in) actually accomplishing the recovery that got us to this point with manatees, that's tremendous work.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Michael Oetker. Mike is the Deputy Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He's stationed at our regional office in Atlanta, Georgia.

Mike has been with the Fish and Wildlife Service for 16 years and he's been with our team there in our regional office for the past two years. (In) Mike's current positon he oversees all of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

operations in 10 southeastern states and the Caribbean. And we're very lucky to have Mike here with us today. Mike, would you come up?

Michael Oetker: Thank you, Larry. Good afternoon and thank you, all, for coming out (unintelligible) a great pleasure of mine to be here to announce some really good news, and also to celebrate and thank you all of our partners and citizens that have been active in manatee recovery and protection over the years.

The Fish and Wildlife Service recently completed our review of the manatee status and based on the best available, scientific information we believe the manatee is no longer in danger of extinction. So what that means today we are announcing a proposal to reclassify the manatee from an endangered status to a threatened status.

When aerial surveys first began in 1991, in Florida there were 1267 manatees and since that time through all the hard work of everyone those numbers have increased on both coasts, and in Florida today we have an estimated number of 6300 manatees in Florida.

Now (I'll say) that's a minimum estimated number that the agency, (the) Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Fish and Wildlife Service uses to track our progress. (Now) that's about a 500% increase from when we first started this.

In addition to that in Puerto Rico we have more than 500 manatees that swim in the waters around the commonwealth, and in total we estimate more than 13,000 manatees swim throughout the historic range of, throughout Mexico, Central America and the East Caribbean.

This action today (of) what we're announcing is really in our view demonstrates the successes of how the Endangered Species Act can and does work, (and while in) here making a waterways safer and cleaner in Florida.

Now while we're proposing this change in classification we also recognize that there is some areas that we have to do better. As an example in Three Sisters Spring at our Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge north of Tampa.

We're also working to limit the number of swimmers (in that) the number of people swimming with manatees, (and) in order to try to balance opportunities to observe wildlife with the health and safety of manatees. Now I'm going to read a few things that (have), that a lot of agencies and organizations have accomplished in the last few decades.

And that really that manatee recovery is really (to) truly a collaborative effort that involves state and federal agencies, local governments, voters and recreationists, conservation organization, the tourism industry, and others that help us implement conservation measures as well as strong protections for manatees.

More than 50 manatee protection areas have been created to provide boating speed limits in high-volume manatee areas or restrict water activity during winter. Water control structures have been retrofitted and have significantly reduced manatee deaths. Power companies continue to work with agencies and organizations to address warm water outflows.

Florida County (have) made significant progress in developing and implementing manatee protection plans and strategically siting (boat) facilities to reduce boater impact on manatee.

Efforts to limit (entanglement) of manatees in fishing equipment continues to improve (as) private zoos and aquariums like Seaquarium and an extensive network of manatee specialists and volunteers continue to rescue sick and injured manatee, rehabilitate them and return them to the wild.

Now this announcement today is a proposal based on the best scientific information available to us. We now opened a 50-day comment period to gather additional information that we may not have had and so we're reaching out to the public for that information.

Now while manatees may no longer face imminent extinction they still require continued protection and sustained conservation to fully recover.

Reclassifying the manatee as threatened will not affect existing protections. Speed restrictions in protected areas and prohibitions on harassment need to remain in place and will continue to enforce.

In addition to the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act provides an addition layer of protection. And finally we also retain authority to implement additional conservation measures if those actions are needed to address threats.

Now the thing that I recognize, our agency recognizes that we cannot do this alone and this is a great example of Seaquarium what they've been able to do here for almost 60 years is a great example of how partnerships really contribute to the success of the recovery.

And so there's a lot of people I'd like to recognize right now, quickly run through and I'd like to start with the Florida Congressional Delegation, Senators Nelson, Rubio, and many of the U.S. Representatives from Florida have had diverse interest in manatee recovery.

I'd like to recognize Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission who are represented here as well today. They have been key in this recovery effort under the - sorry, (I've lost) - under the leadership of Nick Wiley and Ernie Marks who's here, the Regional Director for this area.

I also want to mention the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico through the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources through Secretary Carmen Guerrero and Perez and Miguel Garcia, their staff have aided in recovery in not just Puerto Rico but throughout the Caribbean.

The U.S. Coast Guard plays a critical role in helping enforce manatee protection zones and minimize boating collisions with manatees. Conservation organizations including states, the manatees (club), Seaquarium, SeaWorld and Marineland have helped build community support for manatee conservation and rescued and rehabilitated many, many manatees.

Florida County have enacted many of manatee protection, and then the manatee forums and the collection of all the groups have had significant contribution.

And last I'd like to just mention my team from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the leadership of Larry Williams here in Florida and all of the all the individuals but specifically Jay Herrington and Jim Valade.

In Puerto Rico, (Edwin Muniz) and his team, (our) manatee patrols that enforce the law, and then many of our Florida National Wildlife refuges that provide critical habitat for manatees. Thank you very much and I hope you enjoy the day.

Larry Williams: Thank you, Mike. Now I want to introduce Mr. Ernie Marks. Ernie is the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission South Regional Director. Ernie's region includes 10 Florida counties starting with, in St. Lucie County to the north and going all the way to Monroe County in the south.

Ernie joined the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in late 2014 after serving 10 years with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. With the Florida DEP, Ernie worked as the ecosystem Director and as the Everglades Restoration Specialist.

He has a degree in natural resource management and economics from the University of Rhode Island, and I'll add that I've had the pleasure of working with Ernie on several different conservation fronts, Everglades restoration, Florida panther recovery and manatee recovery, and it's a pleasure to have you with us today, Ernie.

Ernie Marks: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Well, first of all I'd like to thank Miami Seaquarium for having us here today; it's a beautiful facility and thanks for the weather, that was great. Appreciate that. I'd also like to thank Deputy Regional Director Mike Oetker and State Supervisor Larry Williams for their individual efforts as well as their collective staff efforts in getting us here today so thank you both.

I also send regards from our Executive Director Nick Wiley, who, while's he's unable to make it here today, shares the excitement of this announcement and pledges FWC's continued support. Despite Director Wiley's absence we are extremely fortunate to have FWC Commissioner and Vice Chair Foreman Liesa Priddy.

You know, this is just one step in a very long journey and it took an enormous amount of effort and collaboration to get where we are today. Examples of this include FWC's development of a state-wide management plan for the manatee which has yielded tremendous success.

FWC, the state and other conservation groups have been instrumental in developing and implementing protections for warm water refuges including springs protections and restoration critical to the survival of the manatee especially in the winter months.

Significant efforts with our partners like the Miami Seaquarium, SeaWorld, Lowry Park Zoo regarding manatee rescue and rehabilitation has contributed to population numbers that we see today.

Collaborative efforts across agencies led by FWC developed methods for significant improvement over our traditional manatee population surveys resulting in a peer-reviewed, a statistically sound method for estimating manatee populations and probably of equal importance being able to monitor population trends going forward.

Now as all the speakers have said here today all of this is made possible by a collaborative effort across numerous partners but also through Florida legislative appropriations from the state to save the Manatee Trust Fund.

Out of all this here's the take home message, FWC and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, our partners and the citizens of the state of Florida and the U.S. have worked collaboratively for years to increase the abundance and health of Florida's manatee populations.

This collective effort has culminated in a great recovery and conservation success and FWC proposed - supports the proposed reclassification efforts as it continues through the process.

We're committed to working with our partners to maintain a thriving manatee population in the state of Florida. Thank you again for the opportunity to join you here today and we look forward to continued success.

Larry Williams: Thank you, Ernie. We're extremely grateful for the partnership that we have not only with you and Commissioner Priddy but with the entire Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Committee. They've been a huge partner not only in manatee recovery but in everything the Fish and Wildlife Service does in the state of Florida.

So now we're going to take questions. We're going to take questions from everybody here; we're also going to take questions from people on the phone. We're going to start with everyone that's here. So be thinking about questions that you want to ask.

Before we take the first question, I want to introduce Mr. Jim Valade. Jim is the Fish and Wildlife Service's Manatee Recovery Coordinator. He's done tremendous work in helping recover manatees to this point. He deserves huge kudos for all of his work in that effort and we're lucky to have Jim here with us today and - yes.

So let's go ahead and take the first question from the crowd. Our plan is to take questions from the crowd and then we will transition to taking questions over the phone. So first question, sir.

Man: (Unintelligible).

Larry Williams: Okay. So...

Jim Valade: And can you repeat the question please?

Man: (I will do).

Man: (Yes). We will repeat the question after you (Unintelligible).

Man: (Unintelligible)

Jim Valade: I believe the question was, you know, will the public see any change in the regulatory measures, manatee protection zones and things of that nature? Yes. My name is Jim Valade, I'm with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Yes, you know, the public will not see any change. A reclassification from endangered to threatened, if we're going to do that we'll need to make sure that all the protections continue to remain in play, and so we will need to continue to enforce the manatee protections areas throughout the state of Florida.

Man: (Unintelligible).

Jim Valade: Well...

Man: (Manatees).

Jim Valade: Yes, the question is, you know, why is the Service proposing to reclassify from endangered to threatened? Well, one, we were petitioned by the Pacific Legal Foundation to conduct a review of the status of the West Indian

Manatee, and we did and (in our) review, you know, we concluded that the West Indian Manatee better fit the definition of a threatened species as opposed to an endangered species.

It's really a success story. You know, we're fulfilling our, you know, mandate to review the petition that we received and, you know, this is our conclusion, and along with the conclusion we're also proposing to go ahead and move forward with the reclassification.

It's really good news. If you will, it's like taking, you know, manatees out of intensive care and, you know, putting them in, you know, a regular care facility. They still need our attention without a doubt but, you know, they're no longer in intensive care per say. Yes, ma'am.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Jim Valade: Yes. You know, the question is, you know, can we explain a little bit about the sound science that we considered in our review of the status of the West Indian Manatee?

Well, you know, one, you know, the, (like) the 12-month findings proposed rule will come out tomorrow in the federal register and I would certainly encourage you all to take a close look at that, it goes into much greater depth. (They're a) really, you know, in a couple of, you know, significant analyses that we considered.

You know, one in regards to manatees throughout their range including Central (and) South America and elsewhere with a paper, population by ability analyses by (Unintelligible) and (Martinez) that came out in 2012

where they projected, you know, a future for West Indian Manatee in those areas.

Certainly here in the southeastern United States, the United States Geological Survey and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (and the Wildlife Research Institute have worked on (a core) biological model that, you know, we considered very significantly in our review.

The, (there have also been) significant research that took place in Puerto Rico. The researchers in Puerto Rico have also come up with some good numbers in regards to population estimates and things of that nature. We also in our evaluation we conducted a threats analysis, actually the core biological model is (in part) part of that threats analysis.

But in regards to Service review of the status we have to do, it's known as a five-factor analysis where we're looking at threats associated with the habitat, with over utilization, with disease predation and adequacy of regulatory mechanisms and other human-related factors such as watercraft collisions.

To get to your specific point about the recent mortality event that took place 2010 and after that, you know, we did consider that in our review, the analysis of those events in regards to the status of the population is incomplete but we had to move forward with the information that is available at present.

With that said, you know, we understand from the researchers that we should have a final report here sometime within the few to several months and we will consider that as we move forward with the final recommendation on status of the West Indian Manatee. Next question. Oh, yes, (ma'am).

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Jim Valade: Okay, I believe the question is the public comment period, when does it start? Yes, the public comment period will start with the date of publication of the federal register notice, the 12-month finding and the proposed rule, and that will be published tomorrow which is, what's it, January 9th? Or January 8th I believe, and the public comment period will last for a period of 90 days.

In the federal register notice there will be instructions in there, you know, where the public can see this document and where they can send their comments and such. We will also have a public meeting, it's scheduled for February 20th in Orlando and we will be taking, you know, public comment at that meeting as well.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Jim Valade: (It is) actually 90 days, yes. Were there any more questions? Oh, yes.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Man: (Unintelligible).

Jim Valade: Yes, well, Larry will take a question here.

Larry Williams: Yes, this is - sure, again, this is Larry Williams and I think it was a follow-up question. Again, asking what will really change if this reclassification happens, and what will change obviously is the manatees' status would change from being in the category of endangered to being in the category of threatened and I want to explain what those categories mean.

Endangered means that the species is in imminent risk of extinction, that's the definition of endangered. Threatened means that they could become endangered in the foreseeable future.

So now that we have manatee numbers at more than 6000 animals, they no longer fit in that category of being in imminent risk of extinction. They better fit in our opinion in this category of threatened which means they could become endangered in the foreseeable future if, you know, if things sort of lined up the wrong way.

So again, that's the essence of the proposal is to move them to this other category of threatened. Now with that, within the Endangered Species Act, the protections change none at all.

Whether a species is listed under the Endangered Species Act as endangered or threatened, they essentially have the same protections. If they become totally delisted where they're no longer even threatened, then the protections really go away. So, you know, that's how the protections work with the categories of the Endangered Species Act.

The other thing that we have to keep in mind with manatees, they're protected under a separate law. The Marine Mammal Protection Act protects manatees and whales and sea lions, any kind of marine mammal gets really strong protections under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

This change in their status that we're proposing has no bearing on their protections under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. To change those protections takes a special regulation that would have to get published and basically published in the federal register and we are not proposing that.

So the changes being proposed is their status would change to this category of threatened but the protections that people might see in way of speed zones or regulations for manatees are not going to change.

And the regulations and speed zones and manatee protection plans have been put in place have gotten us to this point where we can consider reclassifying the animals as threatened and we would not want to roll those back because we still have to get the animals to the point of being totally recovered.

So again, further reasons we wouldn't want to roll any of those protections back. But if we did not do the work of reclassifying the animals to threatened we would show no progress, it would represent just how well they are doing now compared to 20 years ago when we only had 1500 animals.

So when we look at the definition of endangered and threatened and we look at where the animals stand, we believe they more closely align with the category of threatened so that's why we're proposing to classify them that way. So I hope that answers your question. Yes.

Man: (Unintelligible)

Larry Williams: Okay. So thank you for all the questions from the crowd here. We're going to see if there are any questions on the phone.

Coordinator: If you would like to ask a question on the audio please press star one. It will take just a few moments for any questions to queue up. One moment while the questions queue. Our first question comes from (Frank), your line is open.

(Frank): So (Unintelligible).

Larry Williams: Go ahead.

(Frank): (Unintelligible).

Larry Williams: Go ahead with your question. Okay, Operator, let's move on.

Coordinator: I'm showing no response. One moment.

Man: (Unintelligible).

(Jacklyn Lopez): (Jacklyn Lopez).

Coordinator: Your line is open.

(Jacklyn Lopez): Thank you. What are the service's plans for designating or revising (Unintelligible)?

Larry Williams: I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

(Jacklyn Lopez): Sure. What are the agency's plans for revising critical habitat in light of the new information and the proposal to down list to threatened?

Larry William: Okay, the question related to critical habitat establishment.

Jim Valade: Oh, yes. This is Jim Valade. As I understand the question, you know, what are the Service's plans with regard to revising critical habitat? We were petitioned to revise the critical habitat for manatees some years ago.

In our review of that petition we determined that a revision of critical habitat for the manatee was warranted but (precluded) and that the basis for that

recommendation was that at the present time the Service had other priorities and limited staffing and funds to revise critical habitat for the manatee.

As such it was put on hold and we continue in that pattern. We certainly do anticipate a revision of critical habitat but we're, you know, continuing to look at our priorities and resources on (the) estimation on when we will indeed revise critical habitat.

Larry Williams: Okay.

Coordinator: Thank you.

Larry Williams: Any other questions, Operator?

Coordinator: I do show more questions. (Emily Yahley), your line is now open.

(Emily Yahley): Hey, I was wondering how does this reclassification change how Fish and Wildlife Service prioritizes funding and resources towards, you know, manatee conservation programs, regulations? I mean you just mentioned the critical habitat portion, I mean, would we see since they're being down listed, you know, more well, we should put our money towards endangered species rather than threatened?

Larry Williams: (Okay). So the question was how would this proposed reclassification effect the Fish and Wildlife Service's prioritization of manatees relative to other species and our work to continue their recovery? And the answer is it won't change where manatees stand in our priority.

You know, manatees are a really high profile species that people can relate to. They're very important to the ecology of, you know, Florida's aquatic

ecosystems, and our goal is to get manatees to the point of being fully recovered and off the Endangered Species List.

So with that goal in mind we don't expect any kind of change in how hard we work to recover manatees, and I think speaking for all of our partners, you know, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Committee, the Save the Manatee Club, many other non-profit partners, I think that they would all keep manatee recovery as an extremely high priority so I don't expect any changes in that manner.

(Emily Yahley): (Okay). Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Hailey McKee), your line is open.

(Hailey McKee): Hi. I was calling to ask I understand that as part of the definition of the species being threatened that its protections are to be maintained and in some cases strengthened. As time goes on as a species is threatened will there be any change to protections for the manatee for human-caused threats or interferences like speed zones? Is there any chance or any concern that we may end up seeing a reduction in those protections?

Jay Herrington: My name's Jay Herrington and I'm with the North Florida Ecological Services Office, I'm the field Supervisor there and as far rolling back any speed zones (or) that, we made our decision based on what's in place right now so you wouldn't just want to automatically start removing those because that would change the determination possibly.

The other thing that I would say is somebody told me once that it was like if you were in critical care with some kind of illness and they got you on medication that stabilizes you, well as you become stabilized, you wouldn't

want to stop taking the medication. So we have to stay the course and continue to do the things that we're doing.

(Hailey McKee): Thank you.

Woman: (Unintelligible).

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Melissa Klinsing), your line is open.

(Melissa Klinsing): Thank you. Two questions really, first one is (at) what number if there is one would you consider the manatee population to be fully recovered and then the next question is what's the roll of the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission going forward? Do they have any kind of an approval process or do they just watch and see what happens?

Woman: (Karen) line two.

Man: (Thanks). Sure.

Man: (Unintelligible).

Man: First question.

Larry Williams: So again, the first question was about would this change anything about how the animals are protected and again, the answer there is no. We don't foresee any changes in the protections for the species. The other question was relative to the state's role with this proposal and Ernie will be able to answer that better than I can.

Ernie Marks: Thank you, Larry. So I think the question is in the state's role what if any changes would the state make going forward or what would the role of the state be?

And from our standpoint we have a state-wide manatee plan in place. That plan will be maintained in place. It is adaptive so as things get better or worse, we can change how we address those situations on a case by case basis.

But primarily when we're talking about numbers and looking at these going forward the work that we have done on, with the, in a collaboration with the other agencies to try to fine tune the methodology that we use to look at the number of animals.

And also look forward and monitor any trends associated with that is going to be critical I think to both us as well as the other agencies that we collaborate with in making any future decisions, but right now nobody at the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has any plans much like Larry said about removing any protections while the species remains either in an endangered or threatened state. Thank you.

(Melissa Klinsing): And my first question was actually at what level would you consider the manatee population to be fully recovered? Is there a number, an objective number?

Man: Oh, okay, go ahead.

Larry Williams: Yes, this is Larry Williams again and I want to apologize, I mis-characterized the first question that the last person on the phone had. So the question was at what number might the Service consider manatees to be fully recovered and no longer fit the category or threatened?

And I think that is being asked in the context of at this point we're saying that there is at least 6000 manatees and we feel like they should be classified as threatened because of that. So I apologize I got that question wrong but I want to answer it now.

So the simple answer is there is no number that is a population goal for manatee recovery and the reason for that is we've seen with a lot of different species that they can be no longer at risk of being endangered or threatened at various population levels as long as their population trends are heading upward and as long as other risks for the species are sufficiently addressed.

So with manatees, you know, we have risks like the need to protect warm water refuges. We have the risk of boating collisions and we have the risk of red tide events.

If we could see that all of those risks are addressed sufficiently that they won't cause the population to go the other direction and we could see that the current population is trending upward and has consistently done that for a long time then that's the kind of framework that we would propose, you know, a total recovered status.

So we try to not to focus on a specific number because in our experience with manatees and other species specific numbers are not always the best way to approach recovery.

(Hailey McKee): Okay. Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Dinah Pluver), your line is open.

(Dinah Pluver): Thank you. Could you guys (kindly) go over the timeline for what happens now? What happens with the public comment period and at what point do you foresee the animals, the status could change?

Man: (Unintelligible).

Jay Herrington: Jay Herrington again. The first thing we're going to do is tomorrow this will hit the federal register and that will open up a 90-day comment period. We want comments from the public and everybody who has an interest in manatees because we do want to get this right.

After that we will begin an analysis and review of those comments in the context of our initial review and as far as when that will be complete I (was) going to say that it, you know, sometime, you know, maybe early, you know, early next year. It, you know, 12 months, you know, plus. Does...

(Dinah Pluver): Thank you.

Jay Herrington: That answer your question?

(Dina Pluver): Yes. Thank you

Jay Herrington: (Unintelligible).

Man: We got it.

Coordinator: Thanks. Our next question comes from (Craig Tidman), your line is open.

(Craig Tidman): Hi, I was looking over the recovery plan. I was just hoping you could clarify for me the threat assessment you guys did in terms of what's happening with

the power plant refuges, and also if you believe the regulations for boating speeds is, are adequate given that we saw more manatees killed by boats last year than the previous year?

Jim Valade: Yes, hi, (Craig), Jim Valade. (I believe) had a little trouble hearing questions here but I think I got it right. (If I) understand your question it was how did the threats assessment address issues such as the power plant and other threats, is that correct?

(Craig Tidman): Well, also the boating speeds given that we saw more manatees killed by boats last year than the year before.

Jim Valade: Yes, thanks, (Craig) for the clarification. The, you know, in regards to our threats analysis, you know, we used the best available information that was there as we conducted our status review.

The, you know, the final results of, you know, the, or the final numbers in regards to manatee deaths for 2015 were not available to us at the time we concluded our 12-month finding but with that said, you know, in our, you know, five-factor analysis that we did consider the longevity and availability of warm water and certainly we considered the effect of watercraft collisions on manatees.

(And) certainly one of the strength in our analyses was a threats analysis (that) a company did, (core) biological model ones and, you know, the, that particular analysis based that, you know, in view of the current threats, the, you know, future of the manatee, you know, certainly, you know, looking pretty rosy out into the future.

(Craig Tidman): What was the date of that analysis, when did you do that?

Man: When was the analysis?

Jim Valade: The date of the analysis, the most recent (core) biological model runs, there was a report that was published by the U.S. Geological Survey last year, I believe it was last summer, 2015.

(Craig Tidman): All right, thanks.

Larry Williams: All right, thanks. Operator, we have time for...

Coordinator: I do show...

Larry Williams: Two more questions.

Coordinator: I do show one last question.

Larry Williams: One last question.

Coordinator: (Ashley Morris), your line is open.

Ashley Morris: Hey, this is Ashley with StarNews, I'm in Wilmington, North Carolina, I know that's a little north of where manatees normally are but we had multiple sighting this year, at least 10 here and we heard of lots more in Virginia.

I just wanted to know if the sightings here northward were a sign of the success of the manatees' recovery and if that led to maybe, you just got knowledge that they were more out here even up north led to the status change from threatened to - or from endangered to threatened?

Jim Valade: Yes, hi, Jim Valade. You know, it's a really interesting question. Pretty clearly we're getting many more sightings, (you know), in the Carolinas, in the Chesapeake, you know, in recent years.

To be frank with you we're not quite sure what to make of it. Certainly one of the interpretations is that hey, as you have a growing manatee population you start to see animals sort of moving and exploring the fringes and, you know, it's entirely possible that that is what's taking place in those areas.

Similarly, you know, manatee education and outreach efforts have been tremendous and, you know, if people are more aware and more familiar with manatees (and), you know, we do know that, you know, given people's familiarity with manatees they're more inclined to report sightings than perhaps they have been in the past.

So, but, you know, my personal belief is it's probably a little bit of each. I think an increasing number of sightings has something to do with a growing a population and certainly with greater awareness of manatees, you know, north of Florida and Georgia.

Ken Warren: Okay, thanks a lot Jim. With that we'll end the Q&A session and turn it back over to Larry.

Larry Williams: Okay. Excellent questions there and like Ken said that will end the question-and-answer session. It's also going to conclude the news conference so we're going to wrap things up. I want to give two individual contacts and a Website so people who want additional information.

So if you have additional questions, I'm going to give you the names of two of our public affairs officers. One is Mr. Ken Warren who's here with us today.

Ken's number is 772-643-4407. We have another public affairs officer, Mr. Chuck Underwood. His phone number is 904-731-3332.

And also I want to give everybody a Website that you can go to for more information. That Website is fws for Fish and Wildlife Service, [.gov/southeast/](http://www.fws.gov/southeast/), so that's the Website for our southeastern region in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

So again, I want to say thank you to everybody for coming today. Thank you for, to all of our partners in manatee recovery and a special thank you to Andrew Hertz and the team here at Miami Seaquarium for hosting the event and all of their work in manatee (unintelligible). So thank you everybody. Have a good afternoon.

Ken Warren: All right, Operator, that concludes the event for us here.

Coordinator: This does conclude today's conference call. We thank you for your participation and you may disconnect at this time.

END