



If You  
Love  
Us,

Please Don't  
Feed Us

TIPS FOR  
PROTECTING  
MANATEES  
IN THE WILD



Save the  
Manatee® Club












## Don't Take Lettuce Or Water From Strangers

If only we could teach manatees that rule. But we can't, so it's up to us to do what's right for manatees.

### Mind Your Manatee Manners:

-  Look, but don't touch when swimming or diving.
-  Practice "passive observation" and observe manatees from a distance.
-  Resist the urge to feed manatees or give them water.
-  Stash your trash. Discard monofilament line, hooks, and other trash properly.
-  Call **1-888-404-FWCC (3922)**, **#FWC** or **\*FWC**, or use **VHF Channel 16** on your marine radio if you see an injured, dead, tagged, or orphaned manatee, or if you see a manatee being harassed.

West Indian manatees are endangered animals. At present, there are approximately 3,000 manatees left in the United States. About 43% of all manatee mortalities since 1974 have been attributed to human-related factors, where cause of death could be determined. Because human-related manatee deaths are preventable, this area is the most logical place to begin in order to reduce mortalities.



## What's wrong with feeding manatees or giving them water?

Feeding manatees or giving them water can result in behavior modification. Because they have approached humans expecting food or water, some manatees have been harassed or fed dangerous or non-food items. Manatees' natural feeding patterns may be altered by encouraging them to "hang around," waiting for food or water. When hand-fed lettuce or water from a hose is no longer available, manatees may not know where to find or identify natural, reliable sources of food. In addition, feeding and watering can "tame" manatees, causing them to lose their fear of humans. For their own protection, wild animals need to stay wild to survive.



## But I wouldn't harm a manatee.

Of course you wouldn't. But not everyone loves manatees, and feeding manatees or giving them water could encourage them to swim up to people who might harm them. People have been known to sit on manatees, ride them, and shoot at them with guns and bows. Manatees can also be hooked by fishermen if they venture too close to their boat.

# MANATEE

## Q & A

### I see manatees when I'm out in the boat, and they are so cute. I want to pet them. Besides, they act like they like it.

If manatees swim up to boats, it is likely they have been fed before and are expecting the same from you. But think about it – watercraft collisions are the number one known cause of manatee mortalities. Encouraging manatees to approach boats makes them prone to encounters with propellers and entanglement in fishing gear. Also, manatees sometimes like to feed on the vegetation that gets wrapped around the boat's propeller. Before starting up, always check around your boat for manatees, especially around the motor area.

### I always put out a hose for manatees at the marina because they look thirsty. Since they are in salt water, I assume they need it.

Manatees can be found in fresh, brackish, or salt water. Often, people will leave hoses running from their docks because it is known that manatees are attracted to fresh water. But manatees in salt water can go for long periods without actively drinking fresh water. It is still not known what their fresh water requirements are, but there are many natural sources of fresh water to which they have access.



### I need to feed the manatees. They look hungry, and I've heard there may not be enough natural seagrass for them.

Although seagrass beds are in decline from pollution and scarring in many areas, there is more than enough vegetation to sustain a healthy manatee population in the wild in Florida. Manatees not only eat seagrass, they eat other submerged, floating, and emergent plants.



### What should I do when I'm swimming or diving and I see a manatee?

"Look, but don't touch" is the best policy. You actually have the most to gain by remaining at a distance. If you approach manatees, they will likely swim away. By quietly observing manatees, you will get a rare opportunity to see the natural behavior of this unique animal (any other actions might be considered harassment). When diving, switch to your snorkel gear and float on the surface of the water, as the sound of bubbles from scuba gear may cause manatees to leave the area. When swimming in the presence of manatees, slowly enter the water and avoid excessive noise and splashing. Please don't ride, chase, or harass manatees in any way.

### I don't understand how throwing a few things in the water can harm a great, big animal like a manatee.

Debris in waterways, such as discarded plastic bags, six-pack holders, fishing hooks, or monofilament line is dangerous to manatees and other forms of wildlife. Litter, especially plastic litter that does not degrade, can get tangled in plants that manatees eat, and manatees can become entangled or accidentally ingest these plastics. When manatees swallow a plastic bag or a wad of fishing line, it can choke them or block their intestines. Fish hooks can puncture their esophagus, stomach or intestinal lining and lead to infection which, in turn, can lead to illness or death.





## Hi, I'm Your Average Manatee

I weigh about 800–1,200 pounds and am about 10 feet long. I can live in fresh, brackish, or salt water. What I need is clean water, lots of naturally occurring plants to eat, space to travel, and safe, protected areas. Can you help me?

## Get Involved!

For more information on manatees, contact:

Save the Manatee® Club	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
500 N. Maitland Ave.	6620 Southpoint Dr., So., #310
Maitland, FL 32751	Jacksonville, FL 32216
<a href="tel:1-800-432-JOIN">1-800-432-JOIN (5646)</a>	<a href="tel:904-232-2580">(904) 232-2580</a>
<a href="http://www.savethemanatee.org">www.savethemanatee.org</a>	<a href="http://northflorida.fws.gov">northflorida.fws.gov</a>

## Give To The Emergency Rescue Fund

These funds will only be spent on manatee rescue and rehabilitation efforts. Contact Save the Manatee Club (see above) for more information.

## It's The Law

Manatees are protected under federal law by the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, which make it illegal to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal. Manatees are also protected by the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978. Feeding manatees, giving them water, or otherwise altering their behavior can be considered harassment.

**It is a second degree misdemeanor to intentionally discard any monofilament fishing line or monofilament netting into or onto the waters of the state of Florida.**