

## Mind Your Manatee Manners



**If you see manatees while swimming, diving, or boating, please follow these suggestions:**

-  Look, but don't touch. Avoid excess noise and splashing.
-  Practice "passive observation" and observe manatees from above water and at a distance.
-  Resist the urge to feed manatees or give them water.
-  Stash your trash. Discard monofilament line, hooks, and other trash properly.
-  Do not enter designated manatee sanctuaries for any reason.
-  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.

**By quietly observing manatees, you will get a rare opportunity to see the natural behavior of these unique animals.**

Manatees are a protected species. A significant proportion of manatee mortality is attributed to human-related activities, such as watercraft collisions, drowning in gates or locks, and entanglement or ingestion of fishing gear. Human-related manatee deaths are preventable, making this the most logical place to begin to reduce mortalities.



### Get Involved!

For more information on manatees, contact:

**Save the Manatee® Club**  
**500 N. Maitland Ave., Maitland, FL 32751**  
**1-800-432-JOIN (5646) • [www.savethemanatee.org](http://www.savethemanatee.org)**

Become a volunteer! Visit [www.savethemanatee.org/vol.htm](http://www.savethemanatee.org/vol.htm)

### Public Awareness Materials

SMC offers a variety of free public awareness materials to boaters and waterfront property owners. These items include metal dock signs, vinyl boating banners, boat decals, and waterproof manatee protection cards. If you are interested in receiving any of these items, please contact [education@savethemanatee.org](mailto:education@savethemanatee.org) or call 1-800-432-JOIN (5646).

### It's the Law

Manatees are protected under federal law by the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA). These laws make it illegal to harass, harm, 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 also against the law to intentionally discard monofilament fishing line or netting into Florida waters.

Watch manatee webcams at [www.manatv.org](http://www.manatv.org)

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## TIPS FOR PROTECTING MANATEES IN THE WILD



**I don't understand how interacting with manatees can be harmful to them. They're so big! I could never hurt them and besides, if they don't like it, they could just swim away.**

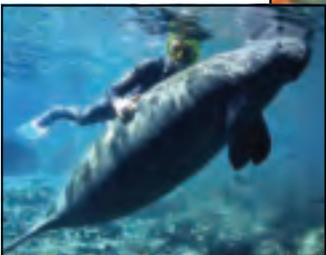
Human interaction with manatees can alter their behavior in the wild, causing them to leave warm water areas or putting them in harm's way from nearby vessel traffic. When manatees are in colder water, they expend valuable energy just to keep warm. They may not be able to afford the energy required to swim away.

**As a diver, I think the best way for people to appreciate manatees is to see them up close and personal. It's a way to get people interested in helping them.**

Save the Manatee Club believes the best way to appreciate manatees is from a respectful distance. We are concerned that natural manatee behavior can be disrupted by humans who approach manatees too closely. People should never approach, chase, surround, touch, disturb, ride, or poke manatees; give them food or water; or engage in any action that could separate a mother and calf.

**Why is it so bad if a mother and calf get separated?**

Manatee calves are dependent on their mothers for up to two years. Not only do mothers feed their calves, but they also teach them essential survival skills. Calves who are separated from their mothers may not be reunited. For example, if a mother swims away while a calf is being petted, the calf may not find its way back to her and could ultimately die without her.



Examples of manatee harassment (top to bottom): touching, surrounding, and riding. Photos © David Schrichte.

# MANATEE

## Q & A

**I've been diving before with manatees, and some of them come right up to me and roll over to have their bellies scratched. It seems to me like they enjoy it.**

Manatees who exhibit this behavior may have been "tamed" from previous interactions with other divers. As appealing as it may seem to interact with manatees, we have to always keep in mind what is best for the manatees. For their own protection, wild animals need to stay wild to survive.



© David Schrichte

**What is wrong with feeding manatees or giving them water?**

Feeding manatees or giving them water can result in behavior modification and changes to their natural feeding patterns. Manatees may expect food or water, be harassed, or fed items that are not a natural part of their diet. 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. They may also lose their fear of humans. "Tamed" manatees may approach a boat expecting food or water, only to be injured or killed by a propeller or become entangled in fishing gear. Manatees also 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 near the motor.

**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 as it is known that manatees are attracted to fresh water. But manatees in salt water can go for long periods without actively drinking freshwater. They are also very skilled at finding natural sources of fresh water on their own.

**I've heard there may not be enough natural seagrass for manatees. I need to feed them to help them survive.**

While seagrass beds may be declining in some regions of the state, there is enough vegetation to sustain a healthy manatee population. In addition to seagrass, manatees also eat other submerged, floating, and emergent plants. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to protect seagrass from pollution and propeller scarring and support other seagrass recovery efforts.



Courtesy FWC

**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 in or accidentally ingest these plastics or other foreign objects. When manatees swallow a plastic bag or fishing line, it can choke them or cause an intestinal blockage, both of which can be fatal. Fish hooks can puncture their esophagus, stomach, or intestinal lining and lead to infection that can result in illness or death.



Courtesy FWC