

Save the Manatee® Club

The Voice for Manatees Since 1981

Save the Manatee® Club (SMC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization, established in 1981 by singer/songwriter Jimmy Buffett and former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham. SMC's mission is to protect imperiled manatees and their aquatic habitat for future generations. To accomplish its mission, SMC works closely with federal, state, and local governments, as well as with the public at the grass roots level, and supports policies that are based on the best scientific data available. SMC raises public awareness; educates; conducts research; sponsors rescue, rehabilitation, and release efforts; supports land acquisition; promotes aquatic habitat protection; advocates for improved protection measures; and assists education and conservation efforts in other countries.

2019 Highlights of Activities and Accomplishments

International and Interstate Conservation

We have helped to conserve manatee populations around the globe by supporting local education and conservation efforts to improve the lives of manatees and local residents. In 2019, SMC:

- Explored opportunities for partnerships with the African Marine Mammal Conservation Organization in Cameroon and provided funding to assist with education and outreach efforts there.
- Continued collaborative efforts with Wildtracks, Belize's only manatee rehabilitation facility. Sent funds, supplies, and essential equipment, much of it donated by our supporters, to assist their rescue and rehabilitation efforts.
- Maintained our relationship with Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) in Alabama, who provide us with sighting information about adoptee Bama.
- Continued providing assistance in other countries where manatees reside.



Cora Berchem feeding rescued manatee Sandy at Wildtracks rehabilitation center in Belize.

Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Release

SMC appreciates all its partners' efforts on the manatees' behalf. Our goal is to ensure that each manatee has the best chance of surviving an injury or illness and returning to the wild. In 2019, SMC:

- Continued efforts to protect the funding for Florida's Critical Care Program so that sick, injured, and orphaned manatees could be rescued, rehabilitated, and returned to the wild.
- Assisted with, and documented, several manatee rescues and releases and participated in post-release monitoring.
- Continued to actively participate in the work of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership, whose goal is to rescue and treat sick or injured manatees and then release them.
- Continued to co-lead the Blue Spring Manatee Observer Volunteer Program to prevent manatee harassment during the summer months – accumulated more than 2,675 volunteer hours.
- Helped to establish a new Manatee Observer Program in Ft. DeSoto to prevent harassment.



A volunteer Manatee Observer at Blue Spring State Park

Conservation and Advocacy

With the help of our supporters and diverse grassroots network, we work in virtually every area of manatee conservation. In 2019, SMC:

- Submitted legal brief in ongoing "Amendment 1" lawsuit challenging the misappropriation of conservation funds.
- Supported efforts to restore the Ocklawaha River and the 20-plus springs that are impounded by the Rodman Dam. Restoration of the Ocklawaha is the single most important factor in ensuring adequate warm water habitat for Florida's manatees in the future.
- Drafted comments opposing weakening of federal permitting requirements resulting from changing definitions of "waters of the U.S.," and opposed weakening of endangered species regulations for Department of Interior and NOAA.
- Advocated for Everglades restoration and land acquisition for conservation during Florida's legislative session.
- Served as a representative and board member for the Florida Springs Council (FSC), a statewide association of organizations focused on springs protection issues and advocacy.
- Was a party to litigation challenging 5 Basin Management Action Plans (BMAP) with other members of the FSC to improve the state's approach to managing septic and agricultural waste pollution in Outstanding Florida Springs.
- Rallied national, state, and local supporters to act on numerous issues supporting the Endangered Species Act (ESA), opposing cuts in funding for imperiled species, and opposing the development of a highway through Florida wetlands.
- Presented as invited speakers at several conferences, symposia, and educational meetings.
- Published op-eds and addressed questions about the importance of civic engagement in resolving the myriad threats manatees may suffer due to algae blooms and red tide.



Acting Director of Conservation and Advocacy Anne Harvey at "Fully Fund Florida Forever" press conference.



Executive Director Patrick Rose testifies during the BMAP hearing.

Education and Public Awareness

Our extensive education and outreach efforts have grown impressively over the years with help from our supporters and volunteers. In 2019, SMC:

- Premiered above and underwater webcams at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park (HSWSP) in partnership with Explore.org.
- Increased public awareness about manatees through our Blue Spring State Park (BSSP) manatee webcams.
- Produced several educational videos that were distributed on our website, YouTube, and social media, including “If You See A Manatee, Be Cool” and “Please Don’t Feed or Give Manatees Water,” as well as Manatee Q & A videos, and a feature on our work with Wildtracks and manatee tracking.
- Continued distributing free public awareness materials to shoreline property owners and boaters, all featuring instructions to report sick or injured manatees.
- Created and distributed public service announcements (PSA) for the national print media, magazines, newspapers, blogs, websites, radio stations, and TV stations.
- Coordinated multiple volunteer-lead events, statewide.
- Maintained our relationship with HSWSP, who provide us with updates about adoptees Betsy, Ariel, and Electra.
- Continued updating our website to help people learn about manatees and current issues and how they can get involved to help protect them.
- Participated in several Facebook live sessions featuring events like BSSP roll-call and manatee releases.
- Organized and led multiple water and shoreline cleanup events aimed at reducing the number of manatees becoming entangled in or ingesting trash. Over 700 pounds of trash was collected during these cleanups. Expanded by hosting cleanups outside Central Florida.



SMC webcams at BSSP being upgraded to prepare for manatee season.



Volunteer Doug Brown helps educate visitors at the Blue Spring Manatee Festival.

- Designed, published and distributed a wide variety of free educational materials to teachers, students, parks, environmental groups, libraries, government agencies, and others.

Research

Over the years, SMC has supported numerous cooperative research projects. Accurate and current data are essential tools that help when advocating for new or continued protections for manatees and their aquatic habitat. In 2019, SMC:

- Continued decades-long observations on the Blue Spring manatees and shared data such as scar sheets and genealogies with manatee researchers and other scientists.



Researchers Wayne Hartley and Cora Berchem performing a morning roll-call at BSSP

- Recorded a record number of manatees for a single day (558) at BSSP, a warm-water sanctuary.
- Participated in the statewide synoptic survey, held annually to obtain a minimum count of manatees in Florida.
- Utilized webcams and on-site observations for manatee research and health checks at BSSP.

Membership and Development

Our members and supporters are the heart of our organization, allowing us to continue being the voice for manatees worldwide. With the help of manatee advocates worldwide, in 2019, SMC:

- Introduced two new manatees, Illusion and Millie, into our Adopt-A-Manatee® program.
- Continued the integration and advancement of our online technologies, improving efficiencies and providing our members a more personal and interactive experience.
- Participated in the 16th Annual Save the Manatee 5K event in Michigan, organized by L'Anse Creuse High School biology teacher, Lesley Argiri, which raised \$37,000 for SMC. Over 1,000 people participated in-person and nearly 1,248 participated virtually.
- Added thousands of new donors, manatee adopters, volunteers, and online supporters and advocates to our growing manatee community.



Proud supporters from around the world showing off their medals from the 16th Annual Save the Manatee virtual 5K.



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