

EXAMPLES OF HARASSMENT



Giving water or food



Touching



Getting too close to a manatee sanctuary



Riding



Surrounding or blocking



Disturbing a mother & calf

MIND YOUR MANATEE MANNERS

Many manatee deaths are attributed to human-related activities, such as watercraft collisions or entanglement in or ingestion of fishing gear. Interaction with humans can also alter manatee behavior in a way that puts them in danger.

Please follow these guidelines anytime you encounter wild manatees:

- Look, but don't touch. Practice "passive observation" and observe manatees from above water and at a distance.
- Do not feed or give water to manatees.
- Avoid excess noise and splashing.
- Do not chase or block the path of traveling manatees. Never separate a mother and calf.
- Properly discard used fishing line, hooks, and other trash.
- Do not enter designated manatee sanctuaries.
- When boating in a known manatee area, know your local zones and keep an eye out for manatees.
- When paddling, stay two kayak lengths away from a manatee.
- When encountering a manatee while in the water, remain at least one human body length away.

Failure to follow these guidelines may be considered harassment, which is punishable by law.



Kayakers mind their manatee manners by observing wild manatees from a distance. This is an example of "passive observation."



Save the Manatee® Club
1-800-432-JOIN (5646)
savethemanatee.org

PLEASE DON'T TOUCH OR FEED ME

Tips for protecting manatees in the wild



photo © David Schrichte

HARASSMENT IS ILLEGAL

Manatees are protected under federal law by the Endangered Species act of 1973 and the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972. 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. It is also against the law to intentionally discard fishing line or netting into Florida waters. **Penalties for violations of these laws can include fines or imprisonment.**

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you see a manatee that is being harassed, or a dead, injured, tagged, or orphaned manatee, **report it to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission by calling 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).**



MANATEE Q&A

How can interacting with wild manatees be harmful?

Disturbance from human activity can cause manatees to leave a safe area, putting them in harm's way from cold exposure or nearby vessel traffic. Disturbance can also cause manatees to expend energy relocating to avoid contact with humans. This is particularly relevant when manatees have congregated in a warm-water habitat or a designated manatee sanctuary.

How can I best appreciate and view wild manatees?

The best way to appreciate manatees is from a respectful distance. Natural manatee behavior can be disrupted by humans who approach manatees too closely. Thus, observing manatees at a distance provides the best opportunity to observe their natural behaviors.

I've heard there may not be enough food for manatees in the wild. Shouldn't we be feeding them to help them survive?

In most areas of Florida where manatees are found, manatees are not struggling to find food. Manatees eat over 60 species of aquatic plants in Florida, from seagrass to mangrove leaves. *It is illegal for members of the public to feed or water manatees, and doing so changes their natural behavior.*

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant loss of seagrass in and around the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) on Florida's east coast, leading to an unusual number of manatee deaths

due to starvation. In response to this unusual manatee mortality event (UME), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service joined together to hold a supplemental feeding trial, targeting the manatees most affected by the loss of seagrass in the IRL. Learn more: savethemanatee.org/algae

Why is it harmful to provide food or water to manatees?

Feeding manatees or giving them water is against the law. Doing so can result in behavior modification and changes to their natural feeding patterns, or they may be fed items that are not part of their natural diet. Manatees are skilled at finding sources of fresh water and do not need supplemental water from humans.

Feeding or giving water to manatees may also lead them to lose their fear of humans. They 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 the engine, always check around your boat for manatees.

I've gone swimming with manatees, and some of them come right up to me and roll over to have their bellies scratched. They seem to enjoy it.

Manatees that exhibit this behavior may have been "tamed" from previous interactions with other humans. As appealing as it may seem to interact with manatees, it is not what is best for them. A manatee rolling on its side is actually exhibiting an avoidance behavior. For their own protection, wild manatees must stay wild to survive.

How can throwing trash or other items in the water harm a large animal like a manatee?

Litter, especially plastic litter which does not degrade, can mix with the plants that manatees eat and cause choking or an intestinal blockage, both of which can be fatal. Manatees can also become entangled in or

accidentally ingest these plastics or other foreign objects like fishing line. Fish hooks can puncture their esophagus, stomach, or intestinal lining and lead to infection that can result in illness or death.

I saw a large group of manatees rolling around and slapping their tails. What were they doing? Should I be concerned?

This behavior is typical of manatee mating herds. It can be dramatic with lots of movement and splashing, especially if it takes place in shallow water. This activity can attract people who are either curious about what's going on or concerned that the manatees are injured, stranded, or in distress. However, it is important to observe this natural behavior from a respectful distance. Any disturbances may disrupt the mating herd and jeopardize the reproductive cycle. Additionally, adult manatees are large, powerful creatures. It can be dangerous to approach or interfere with a mating herd.

Why is separating a mother and calf pair harmful? Won't they find each other again?

Disturbing wild manatees can cause a mother and calf to be separated, which is a very dangerous situation for the calf. Manatee calves are dependent on their mothers for up to two years. Mothers feed their calves and teach them essential survival skills. Calves that are separated from their mothers may not reunite. For example, if a mother swims away while a calf is being petted, the calf may not find its way back to her. Manatee calves cannot survive on their own.

