

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Florida's freshwater, brackish and marine habitats are home to large mammals known as Florida manatees (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*.) For thousands of years, manatees and humans have shared these waterways. However, as the human population increased in Florida, threats to manatees grew, leading to federal, state, and local protections. In 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act prohibited any harassment or harm of manatees. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 increased federal protection of manatees and made it a violation to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, capture, or collect an endangered species. The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978 declared the entire state as a refuge for manatees. In 1989, the State listed Volusia County as one of 13 counties key to manatee survival.

As a result of continuing threats to manatees, Volusia County established a manatee protection program to reduce manatee injury and mortality, while taking into consideration natural resources, recreational demands, and economic factors. The County's manatee program, staffed by a full time employee and supported by the County's natural resources program, is designed to meet the State's objectives for the creation of manatee protection plans. Therefore, the County's program intends to: reduce the number of boat-related manatee mortalities; achieve an optimal sustainable manatee population; protect manatee habitat; promote boating safety; and increase public awareness of the need to protect manatees and their environment. See *Schedule K, Manatee Protection Plan Guidelines of the Governor and Cabinet's October 1989 Policy Directive*.

These objectives have been incorporated into the area-specific manatee protection plan, which has been divided into phases. Phase I (approved by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in February 2001) deals with manatee/human interaction, habitat inventory, habitat protection, education, research, and governmental coordination. This phase was designed to address current impacts to manatees and promote manatee conservation in the future. Data and information in Phase I have been updated during the development of Phase II.

Under Phase I, Volusia County has implemented several programs designed to protect manatees including: a monofilament recycling program, a manatee conservation newsletter, a boater education program, a bilge sock program (designed to reduce petroleum pollution from entering waterways,) a sediments study, among others. Volusia County has also demonstrated its dedication to habitat protection through programs within its Environmental Management, Public Works, and Land Acquisition and Management divisions. Further, participation in programs such as the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, the Surface Water Improvement and Management Program, and the Northern Coastal Basin Program provides additional protection to manatees through habitat restoration and public education about aquatic environments.

Phase II, including the Boat Facility Siting Plan, strives to minimize watercraft related injuries to manatees. In setting policies to safeguard manatees and their habitats, Phase II will also have the effects of increasing boater safety, facilitating recreation planning, and protecting estuarine habitat critical to many species.

This plan provides critical protection for important manatee areas and other environmentally sensitive areas while creating a funding source for additional law enforcement and education initiatives. This approach will integrate protective strategies for manatees with effective boat facility siting. As a result, there will be greater predictability in the permitting process for the development community and the regulatory agencies, while appropriating increased law enforcement presence into areas of greatest manatee/human overlap. This approach is supported by the Florida Manatee Recovery Plan, which states, “priority actions in manatee conservation and protection include boater education, enforcement, maintenance of signs and buoys, compliance assessment, and periodic re-evaluation of the effectiveness of the rules.” *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2001. Florida Manatee Recovery Plan, (Trichechus manatus latirostris), Third Revision, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Atlanta, Georgia. p.34.*

Further, appropriate dock density should be achieved by incorporating a number of factors and approaches into boat facility siting plans. Therefore, Phase II of the Manatee Protection Plan for Volusia County bases boat facility siting on: funding for enforcement through the Manatee Conservation Fund, area-specific slip to shoreline ratios based on an evaluation of the manatee data, and specific siting criteria (including depth conditions, water quality specifications, dredging standards, seagrass/native submerged aquatic vegetation restrictions, best management practices, zoning/land use policies, among others).

Finally, Volusia County has demonstrated its commitment to the protection of manatees by allocating resources from its general fund towards the implementation of Phase I, as well as aggressively securing grants for manatee conservation and education. Once approved by the state, Phase II will establish a fund for increased on-the-water law enforcement and manatee conservation and education, while providing specific guidance for the siting and construction of new or expanded boat facilities.