

The City of St. Augustine Police Department

The City of St. Augustine Police Department has the authority to enforce waterway regulations within City limits (which include manatee habitat areas), and they presently have ten officers who are part of their 'marine unit'. Although they mainly respond to waterway incidents, they collectively spend 10-15 hours per week on patrol in City waterways. The Police Department would be the first responders to calls regarding manatee injuries within City waters, but would call FWC personnel for assistance in manatee-related issues.

The U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is responsible for enforcing federal laws on the St. Johns River, the Intracoastal Waterway, and the Atlantic Ocean along the eastern seaboard of the United States. USCG maintains an office and boats at their facility at Mayport near Jacksonville, from which they are responsible for approximately 240 miles of coastline, 300 miles of Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway and 160 miles of the St. Johns River. Their staff is primarily dedicated to 'Search and Rescue' missions, but they may be first responders to incidents regarding manatees. They coordinate with FWC on manatee issues, and would transfer responsibility of manatee issues to FWC upon FWC's arrival.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The USFWS has designated a statewide 'Manatee Agent' who oversees all federal enforcement issues that involve manatees. This agent is based in Gainesville and the FWS presence on-the-water in St. Johns County is minimal.

Collectively, the six different local, state and federal agencies identified above provide law enforcement presence on St. Johns County waterways. Manpower resources vary considerably from agency to agency, and the majority of enforcement effort is focused on the waterways that are used most heavily by boaters, primarily the AICW, including the Matanzas River, the Tolomato River and their tributaries. The FWC takes the lead with regard to manatee protection issues, and although the other agencies may be 'first responders' to reports of injured, stranded and/or deceased manatees, FWC assumes responsibility upon their arrival.

C. Local Land Development

Development of land in St. Johns County is regulated through various federal, state, county and municipal laws, rules, codes and ordinances. This section identifies the elements of the St. Johns County Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) and Land Development Regulations (LDRs) that affect the protection of manatees and/or their habitat in St. Johns County.

1. Development Standards

Activities that affect the shoreline, submerged lands, and open-water manatee habitat have the potential to negatively impact manatees. Dredge/fill and shoreline stabilization activities may directly or indirectly affect the abundance, distribution, quantity and quality of food resources available for manatees and may lead to an overall degradation of habitat. Alteration of the shoreline and adjacent upland areas often destroys or reduces the natural function of wetlands and adjacent buffer areas. Replacement of mangroves and herbaceous shoreline vegetation

with vertical bulkheads, shoreline armoring and/or piers, docks and marina facilities may negatively affect a variety of natural coastal processes and may result in the loss of submerged or emergent aquatic vegetation that provide foraging habitat for manatees.

Several federal, state and/or local regulatory permitting programs currently provide protection for these sensitive natural resources. For example, property owners must obtain approvals from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) for projects within “Waters of the United States”, which include all areas of manatee habitat in St. Johns County. Additionally, the State of Florida requires that approvals be obtained from FDEP or SJRWMD for projects that affect “Waters of the State”, which includes all areas of manatee habitat in St. Johns County. Additionally, for areas that are within state-designated boundaries of Aquatic Preserves, there is an additional level of protection that often requires approval from the Governor and Cabinet prior to conducting dredge/fill projects.

2. Comprehensive Plan

As part of the development of this MPP, the existing St. Johns County Comprehensive Plan has been reviewed in order to determine the extent to which existing Goals, Objectives and Policies either are consistent with (or are potentially in conflict with) manatee protection.

This analysis revealed that, in general, although the goals, objectives and policies were not developed specifically with protection of manatees in mind, nearly every Element includes items that benefit manatees either directly or indirectly. Specific pages of the Comprehensive Plan in which items are described that would have some effect on manatee or manatee protection are included in Appendix E, with pertinent line items highlighted. As an example, statements regarding the County’s desire to acquire conservation lands and/or improve the quality of surface waters can be found in Section D (Sanitary Sewer Sub-element), Section E (Conservation/Coastal Management Element), Section F (Recreation and Open Space), and Section G (Intergovernmental Coordination Element). Improving water quality within manatee habitat areas will have a positive effect on manatees.

Upon acceptance of the Manatee Protection Plan, the County is expected to amend their *Land Development Regulations* to specifically adopt provisions that would increase protection of manatees.

D. Education and Awareness

Educational information on manatees is available from a variety of public and private sources. Existing sources of information, materials and public awareness programs are presented in this section.

1. Florida Department of Environmental Protection

The FDEP is one of two state agencies primarily responsible for dissemination of environmental information. Within FDEP, the state park system provides a variety of materials describing the state’s flora and fauna. Three state parks are located in St. Johns County: Anastasia State Park, Faver-Dykes State Park, and Fort Mose Historic State Park. Manatee sightings are not uncommon at/near Anastasia and Faver-Dykes State Parks, and park management plans include information about manatees. Information about these parks is available at <http://www.floridastateparks.org/FindaParkRegion.cfm?Dist=Central>.