

ACTION PLAN *Habitat Restoration Enhancement and Monitoring*

HE-3

Implement Palm Beach County Manatee Protection Plan

ACTION:

Continue to increase manatee protection in and around the Lake Worth Lagoon (LWL) and update the Palm Beach County Manatee Protection Plan (MPP) in 2014.

BACKGROUND:

All the steps highlighted in the 2008 HE-3 AP have been successfully implemented. Significant outreach efforts included working with the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) and FWC to develop a new colored manatee and boat safety zones brochure for PBC; redesigned manatee posters for the educational kiosks at 12 local boat ramps, and promote educational contacts via the Manatee Law Enforcement (LE) Program (Chapter 2) to increase awareness and compliance with manatee speed zones countywide. New educational material has been also created and displayed at numerous boating and environmental events. Several press releases were also prepared and distributed through the County Public Affairs Department on manatee issues and manatee season awareness. Several marine mammals' workshops were also organized from 2009 to 2012 in cooperation with the Marine Animal Rescue Society (MARS) and FWC.

In 2007 a dedicated funding source was established to set-up a grant program for LE per Step 3 of the 2008 AP. The PBCMPP commits the County to annually provide funding for additional on-water law enforcement in the County's waterways. The grant is funded by the County's Ad valorem taxes and due to the economic downturn, the annual budget for the LE program has been reduced from \$200,000 to \$150,000. The MPP was incorporated in the County's Comprehensive Plan. The County also encouraged local municipalities to adopt the MPP into their respective Comprehensive Plans. The City of West Palm Beach and Boynton Beach have adopted the MPP on December 15, 2008 and on December 1, 2009, respectively.

Continuous efforts to support existing and future programs to preserve, enhance, restore manatee habitat, and water quality within the County have been made. The BCC has allocated between \$525,000 and \$700,000 annually to habitat restoration projects. Five habitat restoration projects to improve water quality in PBC's waterways and enhance habitat for manatees have been completed and several are being designed and should be completed in the next 5 years.

STRATEGY:

- STEP 1 Continue and expand upon public education efforts through more aggressive outreach to LE agencies, boaters, fishermen, shoreline residents, restaurants, marinas, boat rentals, and the general public. Support construction and operation of the proposed manatee education center at the FPL Riviera Beach plant scheduled to be constructed in 2014.
Potential Partners: ERM, FWC, SFWMD, DEP, municipalities, environmental education centers, Lagoon Keepers, FPL.
- STEP 2 Work with local governments, FWC, and local marine law enforcement units to provide more effective enforcement of boating speed and entry restrictions within the manatee protection zones by adding more municipalities to the LE program, and encouraging LE agencies to increase multi-agency manatee details like “Operation Mermaid” in PBC and adjacent Counties.
Potential Partners: ERM, FWC, PBSO, local law enforcement agencies, local governments
- STEP 3 As the budget or grant opportunities allow, return funding to the LE grant program to 2007 levels for local and State law enforcement marine patrol units working in PBC for the enforcement of manatee zones and public education.
Potential Partners: ERM
- STEP 4 Continue SAV and WQ monitoring. Conduct additional studies identified by FWC and USFWS which may include assessment of potential secondary warmwater refugia and radio tagging or photo monitoring of summer manatees to determine if there is a resident LWL population.
Potential Partners: ERM, FWC, USFWS, FPL, research organizations
- STEP 5 Identify potential manatee habitat creation opportunities within the lagoon that may be permitted, and constructed within a 5 year period (See HE-2).
Potential Partners: ERM
- STEP 6 Update MPP in 2014 and distribute for public review and comment.
Potential Partners: ERM, FWC

SCHEDULE:

Step 1 needs to expand to other local environmental action groups and utilize marine mammals stranding networks to recruit volunteers. Local boat rentals, marinas, schools and businesses will be also asked to participate in the outreach efforts. Work with FPL on the proposed manatee education and viewing center to significantly improve awareness of the importance of LWL to manatees. Step 2 has been initiated by PBSO and by 2013 manatee details will increase by 50%. ERM will continue with local law enforcement agencies to plan a series of actions to encourage adjacent Counties to participate in these operations. Step 3 will be pursued by ERM for the 2014-2015

manatee season. Step 4 and 5 will be initiated in 2013. Step 6 will be initiated by late 2013 with the goal of adoption by the BCC by the end of 2014.

COST:

The LE grant program will cost approximately \$150,000 to \$200,000/year. An additional \$75,000-\$100,000 is allocated to studies and public outreach. Habitat creation and restoration projects that benefit manatee and manatee habitat are allocated \$525,000 per year, however it could be increased to \$700,000 and return to the 2007 funding level.

EXPECTED BENEFITS:

Continued implementation of a coordinated manatee protection plan and boat facility siting component will provide a more unified, countywide approach to manatee conservation. Enforcement of waterway speed zones will increase protection of manatees and vital seagrass habitats within the lagoon. Increased public awareness of the lagoon's natural resources and the usage of these habitats by the manatees will improve their protection, as well as the habitats they depend upon. Habitat restoration projects will provide additional manatee food sources and improve water quality in the lagoon.

MONITORING ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSES:

Annual statistics issued by FWC will be used to monitor manatee mortality in the LWL. These statistics will be combined with an inventory of existing boat slips and number of registered boats in an annual report that evaluates change over time. This report will also highlight outreach efforts from local communities on manatee protection and education, special projects and awards and summarize habitat restoration progress.

REGULATORY NEEDS:

None anticipated.

FUNDING:

The MPP implementation will be funded through annual allocations by the BCC.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND FUNDING SOURCES*:

PBC, FWC, USFWS, PBSO, Municipalities, FDEP, FIND, FPL

*Listed Agencies have not committed funds and are subject to Agencies' budget approvals