



**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
CARIBBEAN ECOLOGICAL SERVICES FIELD OFFICE**

Conservation Measures for the Antillean manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*) for marine events.

Section 7 (a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) charges Federal agencies to aid in the conservation of listed species, and section 7 (a)(2) requires the agencies, through consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), to ensure their activities are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or adversely modify designated critical habitats. Section 7 applies to the management of Federal lands as well as Federal actions that may affect listed species, such as Federal approval of private activities through the issuance of Federal funding, permits, licenses, or other actions. Any person that injures, captures, or kills a manatee is subject to penalties under Federal law. If federal funds or permits are needed, the funding or permitting agency shall initiate Section 7 consultation with the Service. To initiate a consultation under the Section 7 of the ESA, you must submit a project package with the established minimum requirements. These conservation measures should be incorporated into the project plans to minimize possible impacts to the species. Download the [project evaluations fact sheet](#) to learn more about the requirements or visit our [project evaluations webpage](#).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) considers shallow coastal areas, bays, estuaries, river mouths and mangrove lagoon ecosystems as important for the conservation of the Antillean manatee because these areas contain the three key ecological attributes necessary for species' long-term survival: sea grass, freshwater for drinking, calm and shallow waters. Not all of these resources need to be present in order for manatees to use any particular area. The Antillean manatee in U.S. Caribbean, including Vieques, Culebra, and occasionally the U.S. Virgin Islands, are thought to spend the majority of their time in shallow waters less than 20 feet deep and regularly moving into deeper waters when moving between local sites and resources. Actions proposed for these areas should be carefully evaluated to ensure that manatees and their habitat are not affected, especially by the improper use of watercrafts within manatee habitat.

To evaluate the potential effects of any proposed marine event on manatees and its habitat, the Applicant needs to provide the following information:

- Describe the type and amount of watercraft associated to the marine event.
- Provide a map of the entire marine event course with the water depths in that area.
- Describe all types and amount of in-water markers (e.g., buoys) that will be used for the marine event.

For most high speed and high-risk events, we recommend aerial surveys (i.e., helicopter) to spot manatees in the water and track their movements. However, alternatives to aerial surveys may be considered when the Applicant justifies why they are not using aerial surveys and submit an

alternate dedicated manatee observer plan (watch team) designed specifically for each marine event.

The Service has developed the following conservation measures with the purpose of assisting others to avoid or minimize adverse effects to the Antillean manatee and its habitat. These recommendations may be incorporated into new project plans and under certain circumstances into existing projects. Depending on the project, additional recommendations can be provided.

1. Marine events must be coordinated with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER), and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (VIDPNR), if events are conducted in U.S. Virgin Islands
2. Do not plan marine events in areas shallower than 10 feet.
3. For marine events that take place at night, all watercraft should proceed at a safe speed (5 mph), in order to avoid striking any protected species.
4. All marine event personnel and participants should be informed of the possible presence of manatees in the marine event area, and the need to avoid any collision with them. A manatee awareness meeting should be held before the event. All marine event personnel and participants should be advised that there are civil and criminal penalties established by the Federal government for harming, harassing, or killing a manatee. Be aware, that the permit holder and/or contractor for the event may be held responsible for any manatee harmed, harassed, or killed as a result of the marine event if permit conditions are not followed.
5. The event area must be continuously monitored for manatees before (at least 30 to 60 minutes) and during the event to detect manatees that may approach or enter the event area by qualified manatee observers. The qualified manatee observers (watch team) should be provided with proper communication equipment (e.g., two-way radios) to allow them to stay in close communication with each other as well as with the event officials while conducting monitoring. Manatee observers should also employ the use of flags for warning or stopping an event. If communication is interrupted during an event, the race will stop until communication is restored.
 - **Note:** There is no agency observer or training program. Observers may be considered qualified based on their experience. Permit holder and/or contractor are responsible for keeping track of each observer's qualifications and experience.
6. Manatee observers should be designated exclusively for that purpose and no other. An appropriate amount of manatee observers (watch team) should be designated to cover the entire area of the marine event. The position of each observer within the marine event area or on land must also be recorded. A watch team should include a team coordinator, multiple observers at an elevated position on boats and/or land, and/or an observer in a plane or helicopter. All observers should use polarized sunglasses in order to reduce glare and enhance observations.

7. Manatee observers will be in close communication with race officials in order to stop the event if a manatee is observed within the boundaries of the event or upon the request of any observer. If a manatee is sighted within 500 feet of the perimeter of the event boundaries, the observer will immediately notify the event official to alert them that the event may need to be halted. The event official will notify the participants that extreme caution needs to be taken since there is an animal in the vicinity. The event must be stopped immediately upon request of the manatee observer. The event should not resume until the animal has moved away from the area on its own. Manatees must not be herded or harassed to leave the event area. If the observer loses sight of a manatee observed in or near the event area, the event will not resume for at least 30 minutes following the initial sighting, provided that the manatee is not observed again.
8. All participating vessels will travel to and from the event course under the direct supervision of event officials and at idle speed, or the slowest possible navigable speed, until arriving at the course.
9. All participants and official boats should adhere to speed zones adjacent to the event site.
10. A final manatee observer report should be submitted to the USFWS (refer to contact emails below) within 30 days of the event, including a copy of the final USCG permit. Any manatee injury or deaths should be reported immediately:
 - PRDNER: 787-724-5700, 787-230-5550, 787-771-1124
 - USFWS: 787-851-7297
 - Puerto Rico Manatee Conservation Center: 787-400-2782, 787-279-1912 ext. 2070
11. No marine event watercrafts, including spectators, should anchor on or above seagrass and coral reefs.
12. If any of the above recommendation is not met prior to or during the event, the event should be immediately terminated.
13. All marine events should also avoid potential effects on sea turtle nests or sea turtles in the water. Be aware these recommendations are for manatees only, sea turtles in the water or other marine mammals are under the purview of NOAA, thus consultation with them should be initiated as well.

If you have any questions regarding the above conservation measures, please contact the Service:

- Marelisa Rivera, Deputy Field Supervisor
 - Email: marelisa_rivera@fws.gov
 - Office phone 787-851-7297 ext. 206 or mobile 787-510-5219
- José Cruz-Burgos, Endangered Species Coordinator
 - Email: jose_cruz-burgos@fws.gov
 - Office phone 787-851-7297 ext. 218 or mobile 787-510-5206