

West Indian Manatee Survey Protocols

Project Development and
Environmental Analysis Branch



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Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to describe the protocol for protecting the West Indian Manatee during project construction.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Division Resident Engineer assigned to the project and the Division Environmental Officer (DEO) to inform all personnel associated with a project that manatees may be present in the project area and to educate them on this protocol.

Scheduling and Time Constraints

West Indian Manatees are rare in this part of the Atlantic and most sightings are from boats. Formal surveys for this species during the preliminary engineering phase of a project are not practical. Therefore, there are no definitive time constraints except those mentioned in the steps below.

Procedures

The Division Resident Engineer and DEO are responsible for following the steps below to ensure the safety of all manatees within a project area.

- Step 1.** Inform all personnel associated with the project that manatee may be present in the project area and that everyone is responsible for observing water-related activities for the presence of manatees.
- Step 2.** Ensure that all construction personnel know the general appearance of the species and their habit of moving about completely or partially submerged in shallow water.
- Step 3.** Advise all construction personnel that there are civil and criminal penalties for harming, harassing, or killing manatees, which are protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act.

- Step 4.** Inform the contractor that all vessels associated with the construction project will operate at “no wake/idle” speeds at all times while in water where the draft of the vessel provides less than a four foot clearance from the bottom. All vessels will follow routes of deep water whenever possible.
- Step 5.** Post a sign in all vessels associated with the project where it is clearly visible to the vessel operator. The sign should have the following statement:
“CAUTION: The endangered manatee may occur in these waters during the warmer months, primarily from June through October. Idle speed is required if operating this vessel in shallow water during these months. All equipment must be shut down if a manatee comes within 50 feet of the vessel or operating equipment. A collision with and/or injury to the manatee must be reported immediately to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (919-856-4520, ext. 16), the National Marine Fisheries Service (252-728-8762), and the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (252-448-1546).”
- Step 6.** Instruct the contractor on maintaining a log detailing sightings, collisions, and/or injuries to manatees during project activities.
- Step 7.** If a manatee is seen within 100 yards of the active construction and/or dredging operation or vessel movement, implement all appropriate precautions to ensure protection of the manatee. These precautions will include the following:
- Immediate shutdown of moving equipment if a manatee comes within 50 feet of the operational area of the equipment.
 - Do not resume activities until the manatee has departed the project area on its own volition (i.e., it may not be herded or harassed from the area).
- Step 8.** If siltation barriers must be placed in shallow water, these barriers will be:
- made of material in which manatees cannot become entangled
 - secured in a manner that they cannot break free and entangle manatees
 - monitored regularly to ensure that manatees have not become entangled
 - placed in a manner to allow manatees’ entry to or exit from essential habitat.
- Step 9.** Upon completion of the project activities, the project manager will prepare a report which summarizes all information on manatees encountered and submit the report to the Service’s Raleigh Field Office.

Background

The West Indian manatee, although uncommon, is considered to be a seasonal inhabitant of the coastal waters of North Carolina; mainly during the warmer months with most occurrences reported between June and October. Manatees are found in fresh, brackish, or marine water habitats, including shallow coastal bays, lagoons, estuaries, and inland rivers of varying salinity extremes. As directed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the NCDOT will include in the Biological Conclusion for all projects affecting coastal waters conservation measures that will ensure the safety of all manatees within the project area.

Policy, Regulatory, and Legal Requirements

- [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#)

- Endangered Species Act

Warnings and Precautions

There are civil and criminal penalties for harming, harassing, or killing manatees.

Resources and Tool

- [1996 USFWS Publication](#)

Contacts

- For suggestions to change this procedure contact: Karen Capps (919) 431-2003
- For questions about performing this procedure contact: Logan Williams, (919) 431-6617

User Access

- Restricted NCDOT, FHWA, MPO, RPO, Consultants, etc.

Flowchart

- None