

**REPORT FROM THE LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE
FOR TAMPA BAY**

September 2003

**Prepared for the
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

**Prepared by the
Tampa Bay Estuary Program**



September 10, 2003

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANATEE PROTECTION SPEED ZONES FOR TAMPA
BAY**

**From the
LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**Final Report
September 2003**

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Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The report was submitted on behalf of the Local Rule Review Committee constituted by state law under the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act to review and provide recommendations on proposed manatee protection zones in Tampa Bay.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Rule Review Committee (LRRC) was convened in July 2003 to evaluate and provide local perspectives on new manatee protection zones in Tampa Bay proposed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The Tampa Bay LRRC was the first constituted under a new state law requiring review of state manatee zones by a local advisory panel of diverse stakeholders. That law, the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act, specified that the membership of the LRRC must contain a 50-50 balance of manatee advocates and waterway user advocates, and set a 60-day time clock, commencing upon receipt of the formal state proposal, for reviewing and providing a report to the FWC summarizing the Committee's recommendations regarding the proposed zones.

State law allows for counties bordering a single waterway to designate a joint committee to represent their communities. The County Commissions of Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas designated an existing manatee advisory committee, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's Manatee Awareness Coalition, to serve as the LRRC. *Appendix A contains copies of the county resolutions designating the MAC as the LRRC for Tampa Bay.*

Members of the LRRC were drawn from the existing MAC membership. Additional important stakeholder groups were identified and invited to serve on the LRRC to ensure the required balance of interests. *Appendix B contains a complete list of the LRRC members, alternates where those were utilized, and associated stakeholder affiliations.* The committee was composed of 14 voting members and a non-voting Chair, Nanette Holland of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Ms. Holland and the TBEP staff also provided administrative support for the committee throughout its duration.

The LRRC met six times between July 15 and August 27. *Appendix C contains a list of the meeting dates and times.* One open public forum was held, on August 26 at the Manatee Civic Center from 6-9 p.m. Nearly 600 people, predominantly Manatee County residents opposed to the regulatory speed zones proposed by the state, attended that forum. The forum offered an opportunity for the committee to present its findings to the public, and to obtain feedback from citizens on those recommendations. *A videotape of the forum is provided as a supplement to this report.*

Regular committee meetings were scheduled for three hours, but frequently ran long to allow ample time for discussion. *All meetings were recorded on audiotape; the tapes are available at the Tampa Bay Estuary Program office in St. Petersburg.* In total, the committee met for more than 20 hours over a six-week period.

The first meeting, on July 15, was devoted to a presentation of the state proposal from FWC's Bureau of Protected Species Management staff, and allowed LRRC members to ask questions about the proposal and about the data upon which the proposal was based. Data presented by FWC staff included aerial surveys, satellite telemetry and mortality reports.

Subsequent meetings were devoted to a county-by-county discussion of the manatee protection zones proposed by the FWC. The public forum was held on August 26, after the committee had completed its review of the proposal, and developed recommendations regarding zones in each of the three counties. Public comments and input also were encouraged at the regular committee meetings, which often were attended by 40 or more people. Additionally, minutes of each meeting were sent via e-mail, within 48 hours of each committee meeting, to a substantial list of people who asked to be provided with those minutes.

A final, wrap-up meeting was held August 27 to review the recommendations, and to offer an opportunity to reconsider or clarify the initial recommendations. At this time, committee members also made specific recommendations for new or expanded boater education programs. *Appendix D summarizes those recommendations.*

In general, the LRRC recommended few new state regulatory speed zones for Tampa Bay, opting instead to defer to existing local or federal zones where they existed, or were planned, and to support existing organized boater education or seagrass protection programs in areas with no regulation. Speed zones were recommended in the Little Manatee River and Apollo Beach areas of Hillsborough County, and in the Braden and Manatee rivers of Manatee County. In Manatee County, a majority of the committee supported deferring state rulemaking until the county has completed a revision of its existing slow speed ordinance, and adoption of that ordinance as the formal state rule for manatee protection in the county. No new speed zones were recommended for Pinellas County.

Although committee members reached unanimous or near-unanimous agreement on several areas proposed for regulation by the state, in other areas they were sharply divided, with manatee advocates on the committee supporting at least some speed restrictions in most areas, and boating and angling representatives on the committee preferring no regulation or favoring boater education initiatives instead of regulation. In two areas proposed for regulation by the FWC – the western side of Old Tampa Bay from the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Gandy Bridge, and the eastern side of Tampa Bay from the Courtney Campbell Causeway to the Gandy Bridge – the committee failed to achieve a consensus after extensive discussion and exploration of alternatives, and ultimately was unable to make a recommendation to the state.

Key philosophical differences characterized much of the discussions regarding the proposed zones. Boating and angling interests view Tampa Bay as a success story, with relatively few manatee deaths due to watercraft collisions for a waterway of its size (81 deaths from 1974-January 2003), extensive existing local speed zones and substantial recovery of both manatee populations and the seagrass habitats that support them. This combination of factors led them to conclude that significant additional regulation of boating speeds was not warranted.

Manatee advocates cited the relatively high proportion of manatee deaths from watercraft in Tampa Bay compared with deaths from all causes. They also noted that the trend appears to be on the upswing, with approximately 70% of the deaths occurring since 1993. The high number of boats registered in the three Tampa Bay counties (more than 110,000) prompted concern from

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these advocates about the potential for increased boater-manatee interactions as the region continues to grow.

Despite these disparate viewpoints, there was a clear majority of nine or more votes on the final motions for most of the bay segments identified for possible regulation.

This report provides a summary of the recommendations issued by the LRRC for Tampa Bay, as well as detailed highlights of the discussions regarding each proposed zone. Majority and minority viewpoints are presented within these discussion highlights.

SUMMARY OF LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Cockroach Bay Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal to implement a regulatory slow speed zone in this area. Instead, the committee expressed support for a boater education and compliance monitoring program for this area to be conducted by the Cockroach Bay Users Group. This boater education program has been approved by the Hillsborough County Commission for a 3-year trial period.

Little Manatee River

Recommendation to endorse the state proposal for a blanket 25 mph speed zone in the Little Manatee River west of I-75, and to modify the proposal to require slow speed east of I-75.

MacDill Air Force Base Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal for a regulatory slow speed zone along the shoreline from approximately Misener Marine south to and encompassing MacDill Air Force Base because a local City of Tampa speed zone associated with a pending development is being implemented for the northern portion of this zone (from Misener Marine south to and encompassing the flats adjacent to the American Legion building out to the 6-foot contour). Additionally, the southern portion, surrounding MacDill AFB, is already a strictly enforced, no-entry area to boaters as a weapons firing range impact zone and under homeland security provisions.

Apollo Beach Area

Recommendation to endorse the state proposal for a slow speed zone in the small “polygon” at the northwestern tip of Apollo Beach (the “Hammerhead”) that is currently sandwiched between existing Hillsborough County and federal speed zones.

Hillsborough Bay Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal for a regulatory slow speed zone in the entire eastern side of McKay Bay and the entire Palm River because this area is mostly under local regulation. There is an existing county Slow Speed Minimum Wake zone in the entire Palm River from the 50th Street Bridge (US 41) east to the first hydro-lock at State Road 60 (Adamo Drive).

Old Tampa Bay (East) from the Courtney Campbell Causeway North to the Pinellas County Line

Recommendation to cap speeds at 25 mph in all existing marked channels from the Hillsborough County border with Pinellas County to the Courtney Campbell Bridge; and to reject the state proposal for slow speed in the flats outside the channels from shore to approximately the 6-foot contour. The committee also recommended that Channel A be marked as 25 mph along its entire length to the existing no wake zone at the residential canal developments near the Bayport Yacht Club. Additionally, the committee recommended that the flats in this area from shore out to the 6-foot contour be designated as non-regulatory "Seagrass Caution Zones" for purposes of boater education and identified as such on local boating guides and on signs at area boat ramps.

Old Tampa Bay (east) from the Courtney Campbell Causeway South to the Gandy Bridge

The committee failed to reach a consensus recommendation for this area after a lengthy discussion and examination of several less restrictive alternatives.

Upper Manatee River/Braden River Area

The committee recommended that the Braden River south of approximately the city of Bradenton line, or the Braden River Lakes subdivision, be a slow speed zone, with no provision for faster access, as currently specified in Manatee County Ordinance 99-03.

North of that point, the committee recommended that a 25 mph channel be provided to allow faster access for boaters to the Manatee River.

Additionally, the committee endorsed the county's existing ordinance (99-03), creating a 300-foot slow speed shoreline buffer in the Manatee River east of I-75, calling on the state to defer rulemaking in this area until the county has completed an expected revision of its existing ordinance, and then for the state to adopt the county ordinance as the official state rule for this area.

Finally, the committee endorsed the county's intention to identify and exempt several traditional water sports recreation areas from the slow speed zone restrictions.

Terra Ceia Bay/Manatee River Area, Upper Manatee River and Anna Maria Sound areas

Recommendation to defer to the county ordinance for the remainder of Manatee County's waterways within the purview of the committee, with the exception of several 25 mph channels or traditional-use corridors recommended by the committee but not presently included in the county ordinance. Specifically, the committee supports 25 mph limits in the following identified channels or deeper-water travel paths:

- A deep-water corridor into and through Miguel Bay
- A deeper-water travel corridor to the south of Joe Island, running east and west.
- A deeper-water corridor to the west of Joe Island, running north and south.
- The entrance channel into Bishop's Harbor.

Weedon Island Area

The committee rejected the proposal for state regulation of the Weedon Island Preserve area south of the Gandy Bridge, because Pinellas County has implemented, posted and enforced regulatory idle, slow and combustion-engine exclusion zones here. The committee did recommend that the FWC assist the county in enforcing the speed restrictions in this area.

In the area north of the Gandy Bridge, encompassing the shallow waters from the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Gandy Bridge, as well as the Big Island area north of the Howard Frankland, the committee failed to reach a consensus after a lengthy discussion and examination of several modifications to the state proposal.

Boca Ciega Bay Area

The committee rejected the state proposal for slow-speed zones in the waters surrounding Tierra Verde and the eastern portion of Fort DeSoto Park because Pinellas County has an active and apparently successful resource management program in place that encompasses some regulatory combustion-engine exclusion zones as well as numerous signs warning boaters to operate with caution in shallow waters with seagrass beds. The committee also recommended that the flats between the Intracoastal Waterway and the Sunshine Skyway Bridge be placed under county management, and that the FWC and the Florida Department of Transportation work with the county to accomplish that.

St. Petersburg Area

The committee rejected the state proposal for slow-speed zones in this area because the city of St. Petersburg has several local speed zones in place that the committee deemed adequate for manatee protection.

Old Tampa Bay (West)

The committee rejected the state proposal for this area, recommending instead that the flats from shore out to the 6-foot contour be identified as non-regulatory "Seagrass Caution Areas" for purposes of boater education, and that the designation be noted on boat ramp kiosks and Boater's Guides.

DETAILED DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Cockroach Bay Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal to implement a regulatory slow speed zone in this area.

Motion made by Jessica Koelsch, second by Laurie Macdonald. Passed unanimously.

Majority Viewpoint:

The Cockroach Bay Users Group is currently beginning implementation of a boater education program here to explain the importance of slowing down in the shallow areas. This program has been approved by the Hillsborough County Commission for a trial 3-year period. The county will post the area within a month as a “Manatee Caution Area.” Committee members were told a qualified researcher working with C-BUG would quantitatively measure the success of the program, and the education component would be provided using C-BUG members and other community volunteers.

The committee felt that this voluntary program should have a chance to show whether it can be successful. The fact that no manatee carcasses have been recovered in this area also played a factor in the decision of some committee members. Additionally, some committee members cited the limited manpower resources of FWC’s law enforcement staff as further justification for supporting the voluntary boater education program in lieu of regulation.

However, some committee members were skeptical that a solely voluntary program would be successful, citing the 3-year Tampa Bay Manatee Watch boater education and monitoring research study which indicated that regulatory zones are more effective than voluntary caution zones in persuading boaters to go slow in shallow waters. Their support for the motion was contingent upon the Florida Marine Research Institute developing a monitoring and compliance component to scientifically assess the success of the educational efforts.

Minority Viewpoint:

None, recommendation was unanimous.

Little Manatee River

Recommendation to endorse the state proposal for a blanket 25 mph speed zone in the Little Manatee River west of I-75, and to modify the proposal to require slow speed east of I-75.

Motion by Laurie Macdonald and Erica Moulton, simultaneously. Seconded by Jessica Koelsch. Passed by a vote of 7-6. (One member was absent.)

Majority Viewpoint:

Committee members agreed with the state proposal to cap speeds in the Manatee River west of I-75 at 25 mph because the river is wide and has a fairly deep mid-section in this area. Furthermore, committee members felt that a channel could not easily be marked in this section of the river. However, they were divided on the portion of the river east of I-75.

A narrow majority of the committee felt it important to designate the river east of I-75 as a regulatory slow speed zone because of the winding, meandering nature of the river in this area, which makes it unsafe to travel at high speeds, and because data suggests that this portion of the Little Manatee is an important calving and nursery area for manatees. This majority felt that the slow speed designation was an appropriate measure to ensure the protection of manatees utilizing the upper reaches of the river.

Minority Viewpoint:

Committee members voting against the slow speed zone east of I-75 also cited the meandering nature of the river in their arguments, saying this characteristic serves to effectively limit boat speeds without regulation. They also pointed out that no watercraft-related manatee deaths have been reported in the portion of the river east of I-75.

MacDill Air Force Base Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal for a regulatory slow speed zone along shoreline from approximately Misener Marine south to and encompassing MacDill AFB.

Motion made by Peter Clark, seconded by Doug Speeler. Passed unanimously.

Majority Viewpoint:

The shallow waters surrounding MacDill AFB area are presently a strictly enforced no-entry area to boaters as a weapons firing range impact zone and under homeland security provisions. The Coast Guard reported to the committee that this restriction is not likely to be relaxed in the near future. The committee felt that it would be unnecessary and redundant to have a state regulatory zone there as well.

In the area from Misener Marine south to the American Legion Hall and out to the Southwest tip of Port Tampa, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representative reported to the committee that the city of Tampa is currently preparing an ordinance requiring slow speed in this area as part of the permit requirements mandated by the FWS for a planned new waterfront development (WCI Communities). Committee members felt that the city ordinance would be adequate to protect manatees in this area, and that a state zone would be unnecessary and redundant.

Minority Viewpoint:

None, recommendation was unanimous.

Apollo Beach Area

Recommendation to endorse the state proposal for a slow speed zone in the small “polygon” at the northwestern tip of Apollo Beach (the “Hammerhead”) that is currently sandwiched between existing local and federal speed zones.

Motion by Ted Forsgren, seconded by Cheryl Johnson. Motion was amended by Ted Forsgren to clarify the recommendation is for a slow speed zone, not idle speed. Amended motion seconded by Suzanne Tarr. Passed unanimously.

Majority Viewpoint:

Committee members agreed that it made sense to implement a slow speed zone in this small area because it is the only “gap” in the extensive manatee slow speed zone enacted by Hillsborough County in late 2001. They agreed that designating this area as slow speed would be consistent with what has already been imposed on the surrounding waters.

Additionally, the committee supported the state proposal to remove the state zone at the Big Bend power plant because a federal zone adopted in late 2002 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supercedes it.

Minority Viewpoint:

None, recommendation was unanimous.

Hillsborough Bay Area

Recommendation to reject the state proposal for a regulatory slow speed zone in the entire eastern side of McKay Bay and the entire Palm River.

Motion by Erica Moulton, second by Doug Speeler. Passed unanimously.

Majority Viewpoint:

The Palm River is essentially a manmade river that was constructed for flood control. It is deep (20 feet in most areas) and lacks good water quality or habitat. Data indicate manatees travel up

the Palm River for fresh water as far as the dam. There is an existing county slow speed zone that covers approximately the eastern half of the river, from the 50th Street Bridge to the dam. The committee agreed that this regulatory zone offers sufficient manatee protection.

McKay Bay also lacks seagrass habitat and is very shallow (1-2 feet deep in many places). Very little boating occurs in this area and most committee members felt the likelihood of boaters speeding in this area to be small, and the risk to manatees also small.

Minority Viewpoint:

None, recommendation was unanimous.

Old Tampa Bay (East)

Recommendation to cap speeds at 25 mph in all existing marked channels from the Hillsborough County border with Pinellas County to the Courtney Campbell Bridge; and to reject the state proposal for slow speed in the flats outside the channels from shore to approximately the 6-foot contour. The committee also recommended that Channel A be marked as 25 mph along its entire length to the existing no wake zone at the residential canal developments near the Bayport Yacht Club.

Additionally, the committee recommended that the flats in this area from shore out to the 6-foot contour be designated as non-regulatory “Seagrass Caution Zones” for purposes of boater education and identified as such on local boating guides and on signs at area boat ramps.

Motion by Dave Markett, second by Laurie Macdonald. Passed unanimously.

Majority Viewpoint:

Committee members were initially divided over this zone. Several committee members viewed this area as an important nursery area for manatees, as demonstrated by the number of perinatal carcasses recovered in the vicinity, warranting slow speed in the shallow seagrass flats. A majority of the committee said more damage would be done to the flats by boats not on plane, as the area is so shallow. There was a lengthy discussion over the number of existing marked or unmarked channels and access corridors in this area.

Additionally, committee members were told by city officials of a pending slow speed zone encompassing a semicircular area at the mouth of Rocky Creek. This slow speed zone is being negotiated by the city and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of a marina development permit.

The recommendation as stated was eventually passed unanimously. The committee also recommended that the flats out to the 6-foot contour be designated as voluntary “Seagrass Caution Areas” for purposes of boater education.

Minority Viewpoint:

Although the eventual recommendation was unanimous, several committee members argued vigorously for some limited speed zones in the shallow flats, especially the waters near the mouth of Rocky Creek, which have high manatee utilization according to FWC data, and also are a heavily traveled boating corridor.

NOTE: The Old Tampa Bay East area in the state proposal also encompasses the bay shoreline from the Courtney Campbell south the Gandy Bridge. Committee members were sharply divided over proposed speed zones in this area and were unable to reach a consensus. After extensive debate and discussion, members realized they were not likely to reach agreement on appropriate manatee protection regulations for this portion of Tampa Bay. Committee members tried and failed again at their final meeting to achieve a consensus recommendation in this area, resulting in a 7-7 deadlock vote. A summary of the discussion regarding this area follows.

Discussion Points:

Among the modifications explored and subsequently rejected by a majority of the committee for this area:

- Making the area a voluntary slow speed zone
- Limiting the slow speed boundary to the 6-foot depth contour
- Limiting the slow speed zone to the westernmost extent of the seagrass
- Making the entire area a blanket 25 mph zone from the boundary proposed by the state to the shore
- Limiting the existing marked channels in the area to 25 mph and leaving the shallow areas unregulated

Discussion Points:

This was a very difficult area for the committee, thus resulting in no recommendation to the state. Committee members discussed data collected by the state for this area at length. Testimony was provided by audience members Brad Weigle and Monica Ross, former state manatee researchers, on the importance of this shoreline to manatees. According to the scientists, manatees use the area primarily for feeding and resting, but also occasionally for mating. Additional data sets, showing visual sightings and observations of tagged animals using this area, were provided to the committee. A substantial period of time was devoted to discussing the various data sets collected for this area and their management relevance.

Some committee members felt that the mere presence of many manatees in the area did not in itself justify boating regulations, since only four manatee deaths attributed to watercraft have been documented there since 1974. They also felt it was unfair to place very shallow waters off-limits to boaters – as proposed by the state’s shoreline buffer zones -- as those members do not believe that manatees typically inhabit waters of less than 3 feet deep.

Other committee members pointed out data indicating that manatees rest and feed on the flats, sometimes in very shallow waters. They felt that the area is so heavily used by manatees that boating speed limits to protect both manatees and their seagrass habitat were justified and reasonable, especially if access channels permitting speeds up to 25 mph were identified and marked. This area of the bay was a top priority for manatee advocates on the committee, who noted that the area also was recommended for regulation by the Florida Marine Research Institute in 1991 and by the Manatee Protection Strategies Task Force in 1998.

Much discussion was devoted to the westernmost boundary of the proposed speed zone. Committee members noted that it appeared that the state proposal extended beyond the 6-foot contour in many places, and discussed the possibility of shrinking that boundary to the 6-foot line, or even to the extent of the grass beds. These compromise recommendations all failed. In discussion, some committee members cited concerns about the 6-foot line as a boundary, since manatees often travel along these deeper corridors. Other committee members felt that confining the slow speed zones to just the limit of seagrass beds would not be sufficient to protect manatees. Committee members also voiced concerns about visual pollution resulting from the multiple signs that would be needed to mark such a large slow speed zone. A suggestion to consider a set distance from shore, rather than a specific depth, was not pursued in detail, though some committee members felt that a set distance would be easier for boaters to understand and for law enforcement to enforce. However, other committee members pointed out that the 6-foot contour has been used throughout Hillsborough County to define the boundaries of manatee speed zones, and that endorsing the 6-foot boundary in this instance would be consistent with previous county actions.

The members ultimately agreed that they could not reach a consensus on this area.

MANATEE COUNTY

Upper Manatee River/Braden River Area

The committee recommended that the Braden River south of approximately the city of Bradenton line, or the Braden River Lakes subdivision, be a slow speed zone, with no provision for faster access. North of that point, the committee recommended that a 25 mph channel be provided. Motion by Karen Ciemniecki, seconded by Peter Clark. Motion passed by a 13-1 margin.

Additionally, the committee endorsed the county's existing ordinance (99-03) creating a 300-foot slow speed shoreline buffer in the Manatee River east of I-75, and recommended the state defer rulemaking in this area until the county has completed an expected revision of its existing ordinance, and then for the state to adopt the county ordinance as the official state rule for this area. The committee also endorsed the county's intention to identify several traditional high-speed water sports recreation areas. Motion by Peter Clark, seconded by Gus Muench. This motion passed by an 11-2 vote.

Majority Viewpoint:

This area prompted a lengthy discussion by the committee members, and much interactive feedback from the audience – many of whom were residents of the Braden or Manatee rivers.

The state proposal for this area called for a blanket 25 mph speed limit in the Manatee River east of I-75, a 1000-foot shoreline slow speed zone in the Manatee River, and a slow speed zone for the entire Braden River with a 25 mph access channel throughout its length.

The recommendations made by the committee were based upon information provided by Manatee County regarding an existing local ordinance mandating slow speed throughout county waterways in waters within 300 feet of shore, or 3 feet deep, whichever is greater. In most cases, the state zones would be more restrictive than the county, except for the Manatee River east of I-75.

Although the local ordinance is not currently posted or enforced, county representatives told the committee they intended to do both in the coming months because the lack of manatee protection zones in the county is delaying approval of single-family dock permits by the federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Since the original ordinance is a boating safety and shoreline protection ordinance and does not address either manatee protection or traditional water sports activity areas, the county is revising the ordinance to address both issues. County representatives said those ordinance revisions could be completed in late September or early October of 2003, but the members of the LRRC were faced with the challenging task of evaluating and comparing a proposal from the state with a local ordinance that was still in flux and for which a final version was not yet available.

The meeting at which the state and local speed zones proposed for Manatee County were discussed was attended by nearly 40 Manatee County residents. Many advocated for a high-speed boating access in the Upper Braden to the Manatee River as included in the state proposal; an equal number supported the slow-speed designation in the Lower Braden as called for in the county ordinance.

After extensive discussion and input from both county staff and county residents in the audience, a majority of the committee supported a compromise recommendation to designate a 25 mph marked channel in the Upper Braden River, from approximately the Bradenton city boundary north to the Manatee River, while endorsing the county ordinance calling for slow speed in the Lower Braden, from the Bradenton city boundary south to the Evers Dam. A majority of the committee also endorsed the county's stated intention to identify and exempt traditional water sports areas in these rivers from the speed restrictions. Additionally, the committee endorsed the county's proposal for the Upper Manatee River as specified in the original version of the local ordinance, mandating a 300-foot shoreline slow speed buffer.

Finally, the committee recommended that the state defer to the county ordinance in regards to manatee protection in these areas, and that the state adopt the eventual local ordinance as the formal manatee protection rule for Manatee County once the revisions are completed. Committee members felt that state recognition of the local ordinance would be of benefit to the

county, since FWC Division of Law Enforcement personnel could more readily be devoted to enforcing local speed zones if they also were adopted by the state.

Minority Viewpoint:

Those committee members voting against this recommendation expressed support for the revising, posting and enforcement of the Manatee County ordinance, but stated that they could not concur with the committee recommendations without seeing the final version of the county ordinance. They expressed concern that the pending revisions to the ordinance might substantially weaken protections for manatees.

Terra Ceia Bay/Manatee River Area, Upper Manatee River and Anna Maria Sound areas

Recommendation to defer to the county ordinance for the remainder of Manatee County's waterways within the purview of the committee, with the exception of several 25 mph channels or traditional-use corridors recommended by the committee but not presently included in the county ordinance. Specifically, the committee supported 25 mph limits in the following identified channels or deeper-water travel paths:

- A deep-water corridor into Miguel Bay, beginning at the "low bridge" on the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, running through Flounder Pass on the western side and encompassing the entire bay, exiting at the southeast tip of Miguel Bay.
- A deeper-water travel corridor to the south of Joe Island, running east and west.
- A deeper-water corridor to the west of Joe Island, running north and south.
- The entrance channel into Bishop's Harbor.

The committee also reaffirmed its recommendation that the state defer its official rulemaking here pending revision of the existing county ordinance (99-03), and then adopt the county ordinance as the formal state rule for Manatee County.

Motion passed by a 10-2 vote.

One committee member was not present, and another abstained.

Majority Viewpoint:

The majority of committee members concluded that it was appropriate to defer to the county to enact manatee protection speed zones in this area, through its existing ordinance. Committee members also identified several traditional-use access corridors that could be incorporated in the revised ordinance if the county so desires.

Minority Viewpoint:

As previously stated, those dissenting said they were uncomfortable with endorsing an ordinance that has not yet been finalized and could change substantially.

PINELLAS COUNTY

Weedon Island Area

The committee rejected the proposal for state regulation of the area south of the Gandy Bridge and encompassing the Weedon Island Preserve, because Pinellas County has implemented, posted and enforced a comprehensive regulatory plan for this area that includes slow and idle speed zones, as well as combustion engine exclusion zones. The committee did recommend that the FWC assist the county in enforcing the speed restrictions in this area. The motion passed by a vote of 10-4.

In the area north of the Gandy Bridge, encompassing the shallow waters from the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Gandy Bridge, as well as the Big Island area north of the Howard Frankland, the committee failed to reach a consensus recommendation after a lengthy discussion and examination of several modifications to the state proposal.

Majority Viewpoint:

The state proposal called for a slow speed zone around Big Island; along the entire shoreline from the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Gandy Bridge from 1 to 1.5 miles offshore; and south of the Gandy Bridge, from the southern boundary of the Progress Energy complex to the tip of Weedon Island.

Pinellas County staff made a brief presentation on the county's management program for Weedon Island. The county's regulations include both year-round and seasonal combustion motor exclusion zones close to shore; slow speed zones in the deeper waters near the 6-foot contour and in the east-west channel just south of Gandy Boulevard; and an idle speed zone in Bayou Grande leading into Riviera Bay. Additionally, there is a small, federally designated no-entry zone just outside the power plant outfall canal. This area does attract many manatees in the winter because of the warm water discharged by the power plant, and the close proximity of seagrass beds in which the animals feed.

County representatives also provided statistics on the number of warnings and tickets given to boaters who violated the speed zones. The zones are enforced by both the county's preserve officers and the Sheriff's Office Marine Unit.

Most committee members said that it appeared the state proposal was an unnecessary duplication of the existing county zones, and recommended no state regulation of this area.

Minority Viewpoint:

Those who voted against this recommendation expressed support for the Pinellas County management efforts in this area, but felt that it would be beneficial to have the state adopt the Pinellas regulations as the formal state rule for purposes of additional enforcement.

NOTE: Committee members could not reach agreement on a recommendation for the area around Big Island, and from the Howard Frankland Bridge to the Gandy Bridge. A summary of the discussion regarding this area follows.

Discussion Points:

In this area, the state proposed a slow speed shoreline buffer zone, extending from shore more than 1.5 miles in some places, with no marked channels for faster access.

Committee members identified a few traditional access corridors where there is deeper water and boaters familiar with the area can go at higher speeds. These travel paths are north of the Gandy Bridge, traveling from west to east, just south of the Howard Frankland Bridge, traveling from west to east, and through the Big Island cut to the backside of the island.

However, most committee members were uncomfortable with the breadth of the slow speed zones proposed by the state for the area between the Howard Frankland and the Gandy Bridges, noting that in some cases the zones extended well beyond the 6-foot contour. FWC staff acknowledged that the zone was wide and that they were seeking input from the committee on the appropriate extent, if any, of this zone.

Additionally, there was disagreement over the importance of this area to manatees, the utilization of this area by boaters, and the risk posed to manatees by watercraft in these waters. Manatee advocates on the committee argued that some regulation of this area was justified by the telemetry, aerial survey and photo-identification data. Boating and angling representatives cited the lack of watercraft-related manatee deaths in the area, as well as the relative lack of boating pressure.

A motion to reject the state proposal for this area in its entirety failed, as did subsequent motions to limit the slow speed zones to the 6-foot contour of the extent of the seagrass beds and, finally, to the 3-foot contour. Committee members ultimately agreed they could not reach a consensus recommendation for this area.

Boca Ciega Bay Area

The committee recommended no additional regulation in this area (Tierra Verde and Fort DeSoto Park) because Pinellas County has an active and apparently successful resource management program in place that encompasses some regulatory motor-exclusion zones as well as signs warning boaters to operate with caution in shallow waters with seagrass beds.

The committee also recommended that the flats between the Intracoastal Waterway and the Sunshine Skyway Bridge be placed under county management, and that the FWC and the Florida Dept. of Transportation work with the county to accomplish that. Motion by Erica Moulton, seconded by Peter Clark. Motion passed by a 12-2 vote.

Majority Viewpoint:

The state proposal for this area was for a regulatory slow speed zone from the Pinellas Bayway south to and including Indian Key, and then resuming again at the Main Channel (Tierra Verde) and encompassing the entire eastern side of Fort DeSoto Park, with two 25 mph marked channels (Bunces Pass and the ICW, or Mullet Key, channel).

Pinellas County representatives provided the committee an overview of county actions in this area, including a monitoring project to assess the effectiveness of its seagrass signage program. They reported that caution signs installed in this area had proven to be almost as effective as regulated slow speed zones in getting boaters to slow down in shallow areas. County staff also cited the strong enforcement presence in this very popular park as a deterrent to reckless boating.

County staff noted that the one area that is not included in the county's management program is the narrow strip of shallow flats between the ICW and the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which are owned by the Florida DOT.

The majority of the committee members felt that the county management plan for this area is working well, and no state regulation is needed. They also supported adding the shallow waters owned by DOT to the county's management and monitoring program.

Minority Viewpoint:

Dissenting committee members expressed support for Pinellas County's management program, but felt that it would be beneficial to have the state adopt the Pinellas regulations as the formal state rule for purposes of additional enforcement. Additionally, they cited the 3-year Tampa Bay Manatee Watch boater education and monitoring research study which indicated that regulatory zones are more effective than voluntary caution zones in persuading boaters to slow down in shallow waters.

St. Petersburg Area

The committee rejected the state proposal for this area because the city of St. Petersburg has several local speed zones in this area. Motion made by Dave Markett, seconded by Doug Speeler. Motion passed by a 9-4 vote (One member was absent).

Majority Viewpoint:

Most of the committee felt that the slow speed shoreline buffer zones proposed by the state were not necessary based on a lack of watercraft-related manatee deaths, and the presence of several existing City of St. Petersburg idle and slow speed zones in waterfront residential areas of the city. These opinions were reinforced by city law enforcement personnel who told the committee they believe the city zones are adequately enforced to protect manatees as well as public safety. Additionally, the many St. Petersburg waterfront residents who attended this meeting supported the local ordinances, and opposed additional state-imposed regulation that could potentially eliminate their ability to water ski or enjoy water sports in areas they have used for decades, or force those activities out to busy channels where they or their children would be at risk.

Minority Viewpoint:

Dissenting committee members cited the highly developed nature of these areas and the associated substantial boating pressure. They argued that additional speed restrictions were justified given the high numbers of manatees that utilize these areas for feeding, fresh water, or simply as travel corridors.

Old Tampa Bay (West)

The committee rejected the state proposal for this area, recommending instead that the 6-foot contour be identified as a “Seagrass Caution Area” for purposes of boater education, and that the designation be noted on boat ramp kiosks and Boater’s Guides. Motion by Peter Clark, seconded by Dave Markett. Motion passed by a 7-6 vote (one member was absent).

Majority Viewpoint:

The state proposal for this area called for a seasonal slow speed zone (April 1-November 15) extending from the Hillsborough County line to the west, through Oldsmar and Safety Harbor, and south to the Courtney Campbell Causeway.

A majority of the committee believed that the speed zones proposed by the state were too broad and encompassed areas not heavily used by manatees. They also cited a general absence of heavy boating pressure in this area (generally local traffic), a scarcity of boat ramps, and a lack of existing marked channels to provide faster access to boaters transiting these waters. Posting such a broad zone as slow speed would require a large number of signs, which some committee members felt were both unsightly and a safety hazard.

Although there was some movement toward a compromise in this area to support some limited regulatory zones, that effort reached an impasse, and the majority ultimately voted against any regulatory zones here.

Most of the committee did, however, support a motion to designate the shallow waters of this area, from shore to the 6-foot contour, as “Seagrass Caution Areas,” for purposes of boater education programs aimed at promoting voluntary slow speed boating.

Minority Viewpoint:

Dissenting members cited state data indicating that the broad slow speed zones were justified based on tracking data that indicated manatees frequently travel beyond the 6-foot contour here. They also pointed out that this area generates a large volume of calls from residents reporting manatee sightings to the Pinellas County Manatee Watch Line and Save The Manatee Club.

The dissenting members also felt strongly that designating the shallow flats as voluntary “caution zones” was not sufficient protection, and cited the results of a 3-year boater compliance study coordinated by the TBEP’s Manatee Awareness Coalition that compared the effectiveness of voluntary versus regulatory speed zones. That study, jointly conducted by the Florida Marine Research Institute and Tampa Baywatch, concluded that regulatory zones are more effective. They also noted that educational kiosks and boaters guides promoting seagrass protection already exist.

RESOLUTION NO. R03-084

A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THAT THE TAMPA BAY MANATEE AWARENESS COALITION SERVE AS THE LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY.

Upon motion by Commissioner Frank, seconded by Commissioner Norman, the following Resolution was adopted by a vote of 7 to 0, Commissioner(s) _____ voting "no," Commissioner(s) _____ being absent.

WHEREAS, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff, under terms of settlement of a federal lawsuit, is required to evaluate all of Tampa Bay for manatee protection and propose a manatee protection rule to the FWC Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Legislature has adopted changes to the Manatee Sanctuary Act requiring FWC to notify affected counties for which a rule to regulate the speed and operation of motorboats for the protection of manatees is proposed, and requiring the county commission of a county so notified to establish a local rule review committee to provide comment, or several affected counties may form a combined local rule review committee to provide comment; and

WHEREAS, the Board requested and received from the Agency on Bay Management (ABM) and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP), through the Manatee Protection Strategies Task Force, recommendations on the establishment of manatee protection areas in Tampa Bay; and

WHEREAS, the Manatee Awareness Coalition (MAC), acting under the authority of the TBEP, is an active group of citizens representing advocates of manatee protection and environmental protection, and waterway users as well as representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies, formed to address issues related to the protection of manatees in Tampa Bay; and

WHEREAS, Hillsborough County recognizes the delicate balance between manatees and human-related activities as they relate to the various ecosystems in Tampa Bay.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA, AT THE MEETING ASSEMBLED THIS 7TH DAY OF MAY, 2003:

1. That the Manatee Awareness Coalition is hereby requested to form a task force from its membership to serve Hillsborough County as its local rule review committee for purposes of reviewing and commenting on rules proposed by FWC

RESOLUTION NO. 03-98**A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THAT A TASK FORCE
OF THE TAMPA BAY MANATEE AWARENESS COALITION
SERVE AS THE LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR
PINELLAS COUNTY.**

WHEREAS, The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff, under terms of settlement of a federal lawsuit, is required to evaluate all of Tampa Bay for manatee protection and propose a manatee protection rule to the FWC Commission.

WHEREAS, the Florida Legislature has adopted changes to the Manatee Sanctuary Act requiring FWC to notify affected counties for which a rule to regulate the speed and operation of motorboats for the protection of manatees is proposed, and requiring the county commission of a county so notified to establish a local rule review committee to provide comment, or several affected counties may form a combined local rule review committee to provide comment; and

WHEREAS, the Board requested and received from the Agency on Bay Management (ABM) and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP), through the Manatee Protection Strategies Task Force, recommendations on the establishment of manatee protection areas in Tampa Bay; and

WHEREAS, the Manatee Awareness Coalition (MAC), acting under the authority of the TBEP, is an active group of citizens representing advocates of manatee protection and environmental protection, and waterway users as well as representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies, formed to address issues related to the protection of manatees in Tampa Bay; and

WHEREAS, Pinellas County recognizes the delicate balance between manatees and human-related activities as they relate to the various ecosystems in Tampa Bay.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA, AT THE MEETING ASSEMBLED THIS 20th DAY OF May, 2003.

1. That the Manatee Awareness Coalition is hereby requested to form a task force from its membership or additional appointees to serve Pinellas County as its local rule review committee for purposes of reviewing and commenting on rules proposed by FWC for the protection of manatees in Tampa Bay. The task force membership should consist of equal numbers of waterway users and manatee/environmental advocates.
2. That the Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners is directed to forward a-certified copy of this resolution to the Manatee Awareness Coalition and to the chairs of the Hillsborough County and Manatee County Boards of County Commissioners for the purpose of considering similar action in those Counties, such that the Manatee Awareness Coalition may serve as combined local rule review committee for the tri-county area surrounding Tampa Bay.
3. That this resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

Commissioner Morrone offered the foregoing resolution moved its adoption, which was seconded by Commissioner Latvala upon the roll call the vote was:

Ayes: Seel, Latvala, Stewart, Harris, Morrone and Welch.

Nays: None.

Absent and not voting: Todd.

RESOLUTION R-03-134

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF MANATEE COUNTY, FLORIDA, DESIGNATING A TASK FORCE OF THE TAMPA BAY MANATEE AWARENESS COALITION (MAC) TO SERVE AS THE LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR MANATEE COUNTY AS REQUIRED BY REVISIONS TO THE FLORIDA MANATEE SANCTUARY ACT.

WHEREAS, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is responsible for manatee protection zones in State waters; and

WHEREAS, the FWC settled a federal lawsuit in 2001 by agreeing to a number of manatee protection initiatives around the State; and

WHEREAS, after the settlement agreement was entered into, the Florida Legislature adopted changes to the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act requiring FWC to notify counties for which a rule to regulate the speed and operation of motorboats for the protection of manatees is proposed, and requiring the county commission of a county so notified to establish a local rule review committee to provide comment, or allowing several affected counties to form a combined local rule review committee to provide comment; and

WHEREAS, the voting membership of a rule review committee established under the regulatory requirements shall be comprised in an equal proportion of waterway users such as fishers, boaters, and water skiers, to manatee and environmental advocates; and

WHEREAS, the Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act provides that county commissions in affected counties may designate an existing advisory group to fulfill the role of rule review committee; and

WHEREAS, the Manatee County Commission is represented on the Policy Board of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP), a regional body established to protect and preserve the natural resources of the Tampa Bay System; and

WHEREAS, under the authority of the TBEP, a regional Manatee Awareness Coalition (MAC) was formed several years ago to address issues related to the protection of manatees in the Tampa Bay System; and

WHEREAS, the MAC is an active group of citizens representing manatee advocates and other environmental groups, waterway users, and representatives from federal, state and local government agencies, and was formed to address issues related to the protection of manatees in the Tampa Bay System; and

WHEREAS, the interest groups that, according to the Florida Marine Sanctuary Act, must be represented on a local rule review committee are already represented on the MAC; and

WHEREAS, the Board has discussed and agreed to designate the MAC to fulfill the role of rule review committee;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of Manatee County, Florida, on this the 3rd day of June, 2003, as follows:

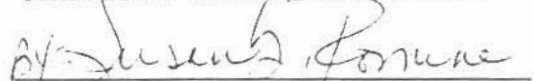
1. That the Manatee Awareness Coalition is hereby requested to form a task force from its membership to serve Manatee County as its local rule review committee for purposes of reviewing and commenting on rules proposed by FWC for the protection of manatees in the Tampa Bay System. The task force membership shall consist of equal numbers of waterway users and manatee/environmental advocates.
2. That this Resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

3rd PASSED AND DULY ADOPTED, by a quorum present and voting this, the June day of June, 2003.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF MANATEE COUNTY, FLORIDA


Chairman

ATTEST: R.B. SHORE
CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT


R.B. Shore



Appendix B. List of LRRC Members

LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR MANATEE PROTECTION IN TAMPA BAY

Chair (Non-voting)

Ms. Nanette Holland
Public Outreach Coordinator
Tampa Bay Estuary Program
100 8th Ave. S.E.
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
(727) 893-2765
nanette@tbep.org

Ms. Karen Ciemniecki
Friends of the Braden River
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Bradenton, FL 34212
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Mr. Peter Clark, Executive Director
Tampa BayWatch
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Tierra Verde, FL 33715
(727) 867-8166
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Mr. Ted Forsgren, Executive Director
Coastal Conservation Association of Florida
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Tallahassee, FL 32301
(850) 224-3474
info@ccaflorida.org

Ms. Cheryl Johnson
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Manatee Viewing Center
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Apollo Beach, FL 33572
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Ms. Alice Jewett

Friends of the Braden River (alternate)
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Mr. Richard Johnson
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Mr. Gus Muench
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Mr. Doug Speeler
Florida Dockbuilders Association
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Ms. Suzanne Tarr
Save The Manatee Club
500 N. Maitland Ave.
Maitland FL 32751
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Mr. Bob Upcavage
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upcavage@scheda.com

Appendix C. Schedule of LRRC Meetings

LOCAL RULE REVIEW COMMITTEE For State Manatee Protection Zones in Tampa Bay

Meeting Schedule

**Tuesday, July 15, 4-7 p.m.
Presentation of FW Proposal for Manatee Zones in Tampa Bay**

**Tuesday, July 22, 4-7 p.m.
Review of Proposed Hillsborough County zones**

**Tuesday, August 12, 4-7 p.m.
Review of Proposed Pinellas County zones**

**Tuesday, August 19, 4-7 p.m.
Review of Proposed Manatee County zones**

**Tuesday, August 26, 6-8 p.m.
Public Forum****

**Wednesday, August 27, 4-7 p.m.
Final committee meeting**

**All committee meetings were held at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council,
9455 Koger Blvd., Suite 219, St. Petersburg.**

****The Public Forum was held at the Manatee Civic Center in Palmetto.**

Appendix D. Education Recommendations of the LRRC

Boater Education Recommendations

The members of the LRRC were in unanimous agreement that increased boater education is an important tool for protection of manatees and their habitats. They believe this education needs to occur on both a statewide and local level, and that education programs and materials need to be coordinated to avoid duplication of effort and boater confusion.

Their recommendations also will be forwarded to the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's Manatee Awareness Coalition, which has developed and sponsored extensive boater education programs in the region, including the Tampa Bay Manatee Watch program to distribute information and safe boating tools (such as polarized glasses and nautical charts) to area boaters; the "Minute for Manatees" pilot program incorporating brief messages about environmentally responsible boating in existing Coast Guard Auxiliary Safe Boating Courses; and the Manatee-Friendly Neighborhood program which encourages stewardship of Tampa Bay manatees and their habitats by waterfront neighborhoods.

Additional educational initiatives suggested by the LRRC:

- Expanding distribution of polarized glasses to more boaters
- Including a flyer on safe boating in manatee/seagrass habitats with boat registration renewal notices
- Launching a VHF radio network to report manatee sightings locally or provide information about areas frequented by manatees. The committee also supports the use of Low Frequency radio transmitters installed on area bridges to provide information to boaters and area motorists about manatee and habitat protection.
- Developing Public Service Announcements about responsible boating in shallow waters
- Designating all waters of Tampa Bay within the 6-foot contour as "seagrass Caution Areas" for purposes of boater education, and identifying seagrasses as such on kiosks at boat ramps and in area Boater's Guides
- Expanding distribution of the "Mind Your Waterway" identification cards statewide, and including them in all boater education packets
- Promoting consistent language on signs used to identify manatee protection or caution zones. The committee suggested the use of a common symbol that could be easily recognized by boaters anywhere in the state. Additionally, the committee strongly supports posting signs on bridges or fenders wherever possible to minimize visual pollution and safety hazards, and using reflective markers and tape on all signs located on pilings for safety.

Bradenton.com

Posted on Sun, Jul. 13, 2003

Bradenton
HERALD | **East Manatee**
HERALD

Sea cow protections get closer look

KEVIN O'HORAN
Herald Staff Writer

Manatee protections in the Tampa Bay area will get a closer look through a series of local meetings planned by Florida wildlife regulators.

Starting with a Tuesday afternoon session in St. Petersburg, the meetings will bring together a local panel of boaters, environmentalists, officials and others to critique the state's latest round of safeguard proposals, kept under wrap to date.

"We haven't seen their proposal yet - no one has," said Nanette Holland, outreach coordinator with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. "It will be unveiled to us Tuesday, like it will to everyone else.

"They are deliberately not saying anything. They want to work through the committee process, through the meetings."

Florida officials, boaters, fishers, environmentalists and others have found themselves sparring frequently in recent years over the idea of adding safeguards for the gentle giants of the waterways.

Some argue manatees need no new protections, with populations skyrocketing since federal and state regulations of the 1970s. Others point to record numbers killed by watercraft in recent years and call for more codes.

The issue boiled over two years ago, when a coalition of environmental groups sued federal and state wildlife agencies for not providing enough safeguards under the current laws. The lawsuits were eventually settled.

That prompted a new wave of protections, including an effort that culminated last September with a new *set of slow-speed zones for boats and watercraft traveling through Terra Ceia Bay in Manatee County.*

"That was considered phase one of the settlement agreement," said Scott Calleson, an environmental specialist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"Phase two includes all of Tampa Bay. We're developing that now, and we'll discuss it next Tuesday with the local committee."

The committee comes courtesy of lawmakers, who last year mandated a new approach to writing manatee regulations, one that directs Fish and Wildlife staff to work closely with local rule review committees in shaping codes.

The committees - comprising an array of interested parties from the affected area - get an early peek at any proposal, then two months to help shape it.

Locally, that means a 15-member panel of leaders from Manatee, Hillsborough and Pinellas counties meeting five times in the next six weeks to learn about and weigh in on the latest state plan to protect manatees.

With emphasis on "learn," at least initially.

"The first meeting will be an informational meeting, mainly," said Holland, who is organizing the sessions. "The state will make its presentation, which will take at least an hour. The committee members will ask questions."

Not until the third meeting, slated for Aug. 12, will members of the public take control of the floor for comment.

By then, they should know whether they're talking about speed zones or sanctuaries, public or private areas, or even the bay proper or tributaries - including the Manatee River.

Two more meetings follow, then the local committee offers its input as to whether to accept the proposals as is, rewrite them or scrap them altogether.

Fish and Wildlife staff members then take those recommendations - one each from the majority and minority views on the committee - rewrite the rule as needed and forward it as a formal proposal to the wildlife commission's top brass.

At that point, the commission opens the proposal to public hearings, then moves to final action.

"I expect there will be confusion," Calleson said, "because this is the first time this part of the process will be used. In the past, the commission came up with a rule and then it went to public comment.

"Now, this is all that preliminary stuff no one saw."

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** Local rule review committee meetings on manatee protections.
- **WHERE:** Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, 9455 Koger Blvd., St. Petersburg
- **WHEN:** Tuesday, July 22, Aug. 12, Aug. 19 and Aug. 26, with each meeting at 4-6 p.m. Note: Times, dates and places may change.
- **INFORMATION:** Local committee - (727) 893-2765; Rulemaking - (850) 922-4330.

Bradenton.com

Posted on Wed, Jul. 16, 2003

Proposal would slow boats

Manatee, Braden rivers tagged for sea cow protection zonesKEVIN O'HORAN
Herald Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG - Boating speeds would be slowed for much of the Manatee and Braden rivers under a manatee protection plan for Tampa Bay unveiled by Florida regulators Tuesday.

Looking to protect river stretches pegged as vital to manatee reproduction, the plan would cap speeds at 25 mph in the Manatee River east of Interstate 75 and mark the entire Braden River as a slow-speed zone.

"Both of these areas, we have reason to believe they're calving areas," said Scott Calleson, an environmental specialist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The comments came before a panel of local boaters, environmentalists and others, a group required by new state codes to review the manatee protection plan and weigh in on whether to accept the plan as is, revise it or reject it outright.

The plan itself stems from a 2001 settlement agreement Florida leaders reached with a coalition of environmental groups that had filed twin lawsuits alleging state and federal agencies weren't protecting the endangered marine mammals.

The state's side of that settlement requires officials to review, though not necessarily change, manatee protection across Tampa Bay. They did that by reviewing years of data on manatee numbers and deaths, boat traffic and more.

In Manatee County, they looked at possible speed limits for three specific zones connected to the bay: Anna Maria Sound, where Tampa and Sarasota bays converge; the Terra Ceia Bay/Manatee River area; and the Upper Manatee and Braden rivers.

Much of Anna Maria Sound would get a slow-speed designation - essentially, a speed at which a boat remains level in the water and produces minimal wake - with a 25 mph channel for the Intracoastal Waterway course.

The 25 mph limit, Calleson said, is a nod to the maximum speed at which most boaters travel and the clip at which most boats get "on plane" - or, the bow rises out of the water allowing the boat to move more freely.

Terra Ceia Bay already has that 25 mph limit in places, but regulators would add it to all of nearby Miguel Bay and the channel linking Bishop Harbor and Tampa Bay.

And, they'd add a 1,000-foot slow-speed buffer to the shores of the Manatee west of the interstate.

Those changes followed a general pattern for all of Tampa Bay, with the proposal calling for slow-speed zones along much of the shoreline and in areas with healthy sea grass beds, habitat favored by the

endangered marine mammals.

But, Calleson said, mapping years of data and studies of the Upper Manatee and Braden rivers showed the waterways repeatedly littered with perinatal carcasses - stillborn manatees or calves that died shortly after birth.

That indicated manatees zeroed in on the meandering stretches of river to give birth to and raise calves, Calleson said, and that led to the tighter proposals there.

Proposals that, rolled together with those across the bay, delighted some panelists while shocking others.

"I'm real concerned about how the data are being used to put together a recommendation," said Ted Forsgren, a panelist and executive director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida, a boating rights group.

"When I came here today, I was expecting to see some tweaks. But this is huge. It's like every single square foot of sea grass that had a (manatee locator) dot near it has a zone."

At least, a zone proposal.

"We have a lot of flexibility here in what we can do," Nanette Holland, the committee coordinator, advised her fellow panelists.

That process resumes next Tuesday, when the group plans to meet to debate the proposals for Hillsborough County waters. Pinellas County is next in the chute, slated for an Aug. 12 meeting.

Manatee's waterways would get a full group review Aug. 19, with the following week devoted to a public comment session.

The panel's recommendations - including reports from the majority and minority voting sides - must be submitted to the wildlife commission by Sept. 15.

The commission's board, then, would decide whether to pursue any protection changes, including whether to heed any, all or none of the local suggestions.

"If this committee moves to recommend changes," Calleson told the panel, "that doesn't guarantee they'll be changed. But it does guarantee they'll be addressed, at least."

- WHAT: Local rule review committee meetings on manatee protections.
- WHERE: Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, 9455 Koger Blvd., St. Petersburg.
- WHEN: Tuesday July 22, Aug. 12, 19, 26 and 27. All meetings 4-7 p.m, except for 6-8 p.m. Aug. 19 public comment session. Note: Times, dates and places may change.
- INFORMATION: Local committee - (727) 893-2765; Rulemaking - (850) 922-4330.



Student Loan Consolidation - If you have \$10,000 or more in student loan debt and have started student loan repayment or are in your grace period, you may qualify for the Federal Student Consolidation Loan. Consolidation can save you up to 52% a month and could possibly lower your interest rate to 2.25%. [For more information please click here](#)

Jul 16, 2003

State Plans More Manatee Zones

By YVETTE C. HAMMETT
yhammett@tampatrib.com

ST. PETERSBURG - Nearly every chunk of the Tampa Bay coastline not already blanketed with a slow speed zone for manatee protection would be, under a state proposal unveiled Tuesday.

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission staff presented its plan to a local stakeholders' committee charged with reviewing the proposal and then making a recommendation to the governor-appointed fish and wildlife commission.

The committee has 60 days to make its recommendation. New manatee protection measures could be in place within a year.

Although the Save the Manatee Club, which sued the state for not doing enough to protect the endangered marine mammals, was "pleasantly surprised," the proposal, at first glance, left some boating enthusiasts horrified at its breadth.

"The manatee population is rising 14 1/2 times as fast as the mortality rate," said Ted Forsgren, a stakeholder committee member who is also executive director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida, representing local sport fishermen throughout the state. "I expected to see some tweaks on the existing zones, but these are huge.

"I don't understand why a huge amount of new additional zones are being proposed in Tampa Bay where there really isn't a problem," Forsgren said.

Patti Thompson, Save the Manatee's director of science and conservation, on the other hand, said some of the proposal didn't go far enough to protect the sea cows. Thompson represents the Save the Manatee group on the stakeholder committee.

"I'm concerned about the Manatee River, particularly, where they are proposing 25 miles per hour. That's a very shallow, narrow river where a lot of houses are being proposed. If your boat drafts 2 1/2 feet in 3 feet of water, that leaves 6 inches for a manatee."

She said she was happy to see the state proposing a mandatory slow speed zone along Cockroach Bay, an area used heavily by both boaters and manatees, south of the Alafia River.

There is currently a voluntary slow speed zone in that area, said state biologist Scott Calleson. But voluntary isn't good enough, he said.

The Cockroach Bay proposal could end up being one of the most contentious zones proposed for Hillsborough County, Thompson said.

Another proposal raising a few eyebrows was the area between the Howard Frankland and Gandy bridges, where a mile-wide slow speed zone is proposed on each side of the bay.

<http://info.mgnetwork.com/printthispage.cgi?url=http%3A//tampatrib.com/News/MGAFFA...> 7/16/03

The committee, made up of dock builders, environmentalists, boaters, fishermen and other interested citizens, from Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee counties, will address the zones in Hillsborough County at a meeting from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday. It will take up manatee protection for Pinellas County on Aug. 12 and consider changes in Manatee County on Aug. 19.

A public hearing is tentatively set for Aug. 26. All the meetings will take place at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, 9455 Koger Blvd., Suite 219, in St. Petersburg.

This will be the first time a new state law mandating the local stakeholders' review has been put to use, said David Arnold, chief of the state Bureau of Protected Species Management.

``From now on, any time there is a [manatee] rule debated, it will have to go through a local committee," Arnold said.

Once the committee makes its recommendation, the fish and wildlife commission staff will write a response either favoring the recommendation or explaining why it does not, Calleson said. The recommendation and the response are expected to go before the commission in November.

When the Save the Manatee Club sued the state and federal governments over a lack of manatee protection in 2001, the state settled the suit and promised to take a closer look at manatee rules in Tampa Bay. Tuesday's proposal is a result of that agreement.

Arnold said it is imperative citizens realize that what was presented Tuesday is just a first step in the process. ``The proposal could change a lot before it's over."

``We've put everything out there that we think is necessary for manatee protection, rather than having to add more areas later," Arnold said.

Even after the committee turns in its recommendation, the public will have at least three more opportunities to speak on the issue before any final decision is made, he said.

Reporter Yvette C. Hammett can be reached at (813) 657-4532.

This story can be found at: <http://tampatrib.com/News/MGAFFANU6ID.html>

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Manatee debate's next stops

Environmentalists and boaters are divided over the proposed expansion of slow speed zones.

By ADRIENNE LU, Times Staff Writer
© St. Petersburg Times
published July 21, 2003

Ray Markham, a Manatee County fishing guide who grew up in St. Petersburg, says he likes manatees as much as the next guy.

But recommendations by the staff of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to impose broad new manatee safety zones throughout the Tampa Bay region have the skipper steaming.

"I think they're unnecessary," said Markham, who runs a 16-foot flats skiff out on four- and six-hour fishing trips. "If you have to idle for a mile or two to some place, and then a mile or two out at 1 to 3 miles per hour, you're looking at spending an hour and a half to two hours of idling to get to where you want to fish."

But advocates of the proposed safety zones say the sea cows need as much help as they can get.

Patti Thompson, director of science and conservation with the Save the Manatee Club, thinks the proposed rules don't go far enough. She said five manatees have been killed by watercraft in the Tampa Bay area since February. "That's an indication that something alarming is going on," Thompson said.

Both sides will have about two months to debate the issue before a review committee, intended to allow for local input, responds to the staff recommendations. After that, the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission can adopt, reject or amend as many of the recommendations as it wishes.

The proposed zones are the result of a legal settlement with environmental groups in 2001, in which the state agreed, among other things, to consider new protections for manatees in the Tampa Bay area. On Tuesday, the local committee, which represents a broad range of interests, including boaters, environmentalists and fishermen, will discuss the zones proposed for Hillsborough County. On Aug. 12, the committee will discuss Pinellas County, and on Aug. 19, Manatee County. A public forum is set for Aug. 26; the committee plans a final meeting on Aug. 27. All the meetings will be from 4 to 7 p.m. except the public forum, which will be from 6 to 8 p.m. All the meetings will be at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council at 9455 Koger Blvd., Suite 219, in St. Petersburg.

David Arnold, chief of protected species management for the state commission, said the protections proposed for the Tampa Bay area are similar to those in place in other parts of the state. But the new

zones would greatly expand the areas where boaters would have to travel at slow speeds.

Just how well manatees are doing is a touchy subject. Though the mammals are still an endangered species, the two sides of the protection zone debate argue fiercely about how to interpret the numbers.

Ted Forsgren, executive director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida, a saltwater recreational fishermen's group, said state surveys show the manatee population in the Tampa Bay region has increased significantly over the past 10 years. He feels the manatee population is in fine shape, and that many of the proposed changes would unduly hamper fishermen and boaters.

"The population is rising by leaps and bounds, and maybe we would need a few adjustments here and there, but instead they have sweeping proposals to put thousands of acres of speed zones all around the bay," Forsgren said. "I was just shocked by the magnitude of what they were proposing."

But Thompson, of the Save the Manatee Club, said the state surveys are not a good indicator of overall population trends because they show only the number of manatees that were spotted by surveyors each year, and are largely dependent on weather conditions. Thompson said the survey figures have been widely discounted by scientists. She said a more accurate method of determining the manatee population, which involves identifying individual manatees, indicates the manatee population in southwest Florida has decreased by more than 1 percent over the past eight years.

She also said the number of boat-related manatee deaths has increased.

Scott Calleson, a biologist with the wildlife commission, said that from 1988 to 1992, nine of 41 manatee deaths recorded by the state were attributed to boats, or about 22 percent. From 1993 to 1997, 14 of 68 manatee deaths were related to boats, or 21 percent. From 1998 to January, 27 of 90 manatee deaths were attributed to boats, or 30 percent.

Markham fears the zones would have a drastic impact on the fishing and boating industries in Tampa Bay. Although Markham has other jobs, he said many others would likely go out of business.

"I love the manatees and I don't want to see them hurt," Markham said, "But what they're trying to do is just ludicrous."

If you go

A local review committee, which represents a broad range of interests including boaters, environmentalists and fishermen, will discuss the proposed manatee zones at a series of meetings:

Hillsborough County: Tuesday

Pinellas County: Aug. 12

Manatee County: Aug. 19

Public forum: Aug. 26

Final meeting: Aug. 27

- All the meetings will be from 4 to 7 p.m. except the public forum, which will be from 6 to 8 p.m., at

http://www.sptimes.com/2003/07/21/news_pf/Tampabay/Manatee_debate_s_next.shtml

8/28/03



Jul 29, 2003

A Fair Plan To Protect Manatees

While it faced a nearly impossible charge, the local panel established to recommend manatee zones for Tampa Bay has developed a reasonable plan.

Its recommendations, which would require slow boat speeds in areas frequented by the seagoing manatee, will undoubtedly anger some boaters. But the committee - which included boaters, conservationists, commercial fishermen and others who make their living off the bay - tried to be fair to boaters while also safeguarding the animal, which is frequently rammed by boats.

The recommendations will go to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, which will have the final say on the regulations.

As the Tribune's Yvette Hammett reports, the citizens' panel compromised on a number of issues, such as keeping Cockroach Bay as a voluntary slow-speed zone. The committee decided to give Cockroach Bay Users Group three years to show its education campaign will prevent irresponsible boating on the fertile flats along the southeast shore of Tampa Bay.

The committee proposed slow-speed zones near the TECO Big Bend Power Plant, a key manatee sanctuary, and along much of the bay's shoreline. It backed 25 mph speed limits in other areas.

The boating industry opposes the restrictions, saying the manatee is not truly endangered. But the Florida Marine Research Institute study found that though the manatee is not in danger of extinction anytime soon, its population is likely to decline by 50 percent or more during the next 45 years.

Last year 95 manatees were killed by boats. An added benefit of the slow-speed zones is that they generally protect habitat and improve fishing in the shallows, where high-speed boats can be disruptive and destructive.

The slow-speed zones, to be sure, can be an aggravation. But there is no way to come up with rules that will please everyone. And as the diverse members of the review panel wisely concluded, it is not necessary to go full throttle all the time.

This story can be found at: <http://www.tampatrib.com/News/MGAA54LYOID.html>

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Article published Aug 13, 2003

Sea cow panel will defer to Manatee

A state panel will let the county, which is working on its laws protecting the manatee, take the lead.

By **TOM BAYLES** tom.bayles@heraldtribune.com

ST. PETERSBURG – A committee of environmentalists and boaters examining proposed manatee zones in the Tampa Bay region decided Tuesday that Manatee County's 1999 slow-speed plans are good enough for them.

"We're deferring to the local people and local politicians to solve their own problems," Dave Markett of the Florida Guides Association and a member of the 16-member panel, said. "We're deferring to common sense."

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission is considering additional manatee zones as a result of a settlement to a lawsuit. Environmental groups had charged that state and federal wildlife managers aren't enforcing protection laws for the sea cows.

The panel will issue its recommendations to the commission in September.

The main provision of Manatee County's ordinance says boaters must go slow within 300 yards of shore or in water less than 3 feet deep. Boaters disliked the plan, and it was never enforced.

But the Manatee County Commission resurrected the ordinance when the federal government, complaining of county inaction, placed a moratorium on single-family dock permits.

The committee showed some give-and-take in examining Manatee's plan Tuesday night:

- he committee asked that a 25 mph channel take boaters to the Braden River Lakes subdivision. The rest of the river would be a slow-speed zone. The county would have made the entire river a slow-speed zone.
- In the Manatee River west of Interstate 75, the county's 300-foot shoreline buffer would remain with an unregulated channel down the middle. The state and environmentalists had wanted a 1,000-foot buffer.
- In the lower Manatee River, the same 300-foot buffer would remain, but the committee asked the county to consider a 25 mph channel in Miguel Bay, which connects Tampa Bay to Terra Ceia Bay, and in a few other places such as the access channel into Bishop Harbor.

The fish and wildlife commission doesn't have to enact any new zones, but the agency did put new ones in Sarasota and Charlotte counties after a similar process last year.

Manatee County Commissioner Joe McClash attended the meeting at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council headquarters.

He said he expected the county to take the committee's suggestions into account no date for this meeting yet.

The county also plans to add several "watersports areas" along the Manatee River, where waterskiing and tubing would be allowed.

When the county is through fine-tuning its manatee plan, the state will consider it.

The committee will take public comment on its plan for manatee zones throughout Tampa Bay at 6 p.m. on Aug. 26 at the Manatee Civic Center.

Bradenton.com

Posted on Wed, Aug. 13, 2003

PANEL SKIPS STATE PROPOSAL

County to alter sea cow rules

KEVIN O'HORAN
Herald Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG - A Manatee County plan to slow boats in the shallow waters near shorelines is the best choice - after a couple tweaks - to protect manatees in the area, a panel of local stakeholders said Tuesday night.

Meeting to discuss a Florida-written plan to protect the endangered sea cows, the 14-member group instead decided to table much of the state's proposal while the county moves forward with implementing its 4-year-old ordinance.

"We're deferring to the local people and the local politicians to fix their own problems," said panelist Dave Markett, a member of the Florida Guides Association.

Mostly, that is, they deferred. Members agreed to recommend the state adopt the county's manatee protection ordinance, once the county revises it to exclude known water-recreation areas from the codes.

The panel - comprising fishers, environmentalists, scientists and others - also recommended the state include 25-mph channels in several waterways, including a stretch of the Braden River and through Miguel Bay.

Both ideas likely will find their way into the county's manatee protection ordinance, which limits boats to "slow speed" - or, slow enough to stay flat in the water - in water less than 3 feet or within 300 feet of shore.

"We understood two years ago it needed to be tweaked," Joe McClash, a Manatee County commissioner, told panelists at Tuesday's meeting. "We'd like to work as closely with you as possible."

Regulators have been wrestling with how - or even whether - to add protections for manatees. Surveys in recent years have found more and more of the slow swimmers, but deaths caused by watercraft collisions also are on the rise.

Spurred by a lawsuit filed in 2001 by environmentalists, federal regulators attempted to boost protections by clamping down on the number of dock, seawall or other marine-related construction projects in Florida.

Florida officials, targeted in a similar lawsuit, last year added manatee sanctuaries and boat speed limits around the state, including Terra Ceia Bay, and now have shifted focus to Tampa Bay.

The plan officials with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission drew up for the bay would add slow-speed zones - at which boats stay flat in the water - to most waters less than 6 feet deep in the bay.

The plan locally would have added slow-speed zones along Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve, northern Anna Maria Sound and the Manatee and Braden rivers, with Miguel Bay and the Upper Manatee River allowing 25

mph speeds.

Channels linking select areas would have allowed boats to clip at 25 mph.

But the local panel - mandated by a change in state law to review any proposed manatee rule - decided Manatee's ordinance offered protection enough in most places.

"I like their local ordinance the way it is," said Suzanne Tarr, a biologist with the Save The Manatee Club who serves on the panel.

The only significant changes were to add to the Braden River a 25-mph channel running from the Manatee River to the Bradenton city line, set the Upper Manatee as slow speed and recast Miguel Bay as slow speed with a 25-mph channel.

The recommendations now head off on parallel tracks.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will review the advice as they decide what, if any, changes to make in Manatee. And county commissioners will take up the issues as they look to rewrite 99-03, a code that limits boat speeds in shallow waters frequented by the endangered marine mammals.

Any state action should wait until the county plan is finished, per the panel's thoughts.

"That's the recommendation as I heard it," said Kipp Frohlich, a biologist with the Fish and Wildlife commission. "That's what the panel wants us to do: wait and see what the county does."

In other action Tuesday, the panel changed the meeting place for its 6-8 p.m. Aug. 26 public forum. Given a flood of comments and questions from Manatee residents, the group decided to hold the event at the Manatee Convention and Civic Center, 1 Haben Blvd. in Palmetto.



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Manatee protection laws under scrutiny

By: TERRY TOMALIN
Published August 17, 2003
© St. Petersburg Times

ST. PETERSBURG - Rumors are spreading fast through the area as state and local government officials prepare to rewrite Florida's manatee protection rules.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has proposed some new restrictions that could affect boaters and fishermen.

The Florida Guides Association fears that access to the bay's fertile seagrass beds (the favorite haunt of redfish and trout) could be limited.

"It would seem that FWC staff is assuring one destructive activity to seagrass beds at the expense of standard, traditional, customary and historic public boating use of these same public waterways," said Dave Markett, senior vice president of the guides association in a letter to members.

"It should be hard to argue that manatees are good for seagrass beds," Markett said. "Fact is, manatees are seacows - seacows eat seagrass."

On Tuesday, a rules review committee will address proposed manatee protection zone designations for Pinellas County waters. Among many items under discussion will be whether vast areas less than 6 feet deep will be set aside as "slow speed" zones.

The meeting will be held 4-7 p.m. at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council, 9455 Koger Blvd., Suite 219, St. Petersburg.

"There is a lot of misinformation floating around out there," said Nanette Holland of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. "I think the best thing people can do is learn all the facts before they make a decision."

A public forum is scheduled for 6-8 p.m. Aug. 26 at the same

address. For more information contact Holland at (727) 893-2765.

MANATEE LICENSE PLATE: State officials want to redesign the manatee license plate, first introduced in March 1990.

The plate was created to help fund manatee research, rescue and rehabilitation, as well as habitat protection.

Last month, a redesign committee began accepting artwork for consideration. All art must comply with standards set by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles and 3M, the company that makes the plates for Florida.

Finalist designs will be posted on the Florida Marine Research Institute's Web site: floridamarine.org. The public will be asked to vote, via the Internet, on whether the state should keep the original design, or select one of the entries for a new plate.

Interested artists can send their submissions to: FMRI, c/o Manatee License Plate Redesign Committee, 100 Eighth Ave. SE, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

LINE RECYCLING: Discarded monofilament fishing line kills fish, turtles, birds and mammals. Monofilament can last 600 years in the environment so the only way to get rid of it is throw it out or recycle it.

The Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program is a statewide initiative to educate the public regarding the dangers of used monofilament and to encourage recycling through a network of line recycling bins and dropoff locations throughout the state.

You can order a free indoor recycling bin with prepaid shipping that can be mailed back when full by calling toll-free 1-877-777-3850. Partners, sponsors and volunteers are needed for beach and river cleanups.

To learn more, call Leesa Souto at (321) 723-4547 or go to fishinglinerecycling.com.

Resource hotlines:

Fish tags: 1-800-367-4461.

Marine fish kills: 1-800-636-0511.

Division of Law Enforcement: 1-888-404-3922.

Enviro-Line: 1-800-828-9338 (Great American Clean-Up of

Florida).

Florida Marine Research Institute: (727) 896-8626.

Bradenton.com

Posted on Sun, Aug. 24, 2003

Opinions sought on manatee protection

KEVIN O'HORAN
Herald Staff Writer

BRADENTON - A plan to protect endangered manatees by capping boat speeds in portions of Tampa Bay - and its tributaries - rolls into the area for a public comment period Tuesday.

The proposal, initially offered up by Florida regulators and later massaged by a panel of local stakeholders, calls for slowing watercraft in shallow waters by mixing state and federal laws, local codes and volunteer zones.

In Manatee County, the plan calls for relying on an existing ordinance that requires boats to glide slowly in near-shore waters.

"The committee has deferred to the county on the 300-foot zone," Nanette Holland, chairwoman of the committee, said of Manatee's ordinance. "The committee deferred to the county believing it is a local issue."

That likely won't temper what figures to be a testy public session at the Manatee Convention and Civic Center. Boaters, ecologists, regulators and residents remain at odds over how - or whether - to protect manatees.

The meeting is one in a series aimed at establishing a recommendation for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as that agency reviews its sea cow safeguards.

State studies show the number of manatees has increased steadily in recent years, while at the same time showing a steady climb in the number of the lumbering leviathans killed each year by watercraft collisions.

Federal regulators, spurred by a lawsuit filed by a coalition of wildlife groups, responded by slowing dock projects in areas deemed key to manatee survival. The move, they said, would slow watercraft deaths by limiting boat traffic.

State officials, also targeted by lawsuit, jumped into action last year by creating a handful of manatee sanctuaries and adding speed limits for watercraft in unregulated areas, including Terra Ceia Bay in Manatee.

That action - part of an out-of-court settlement - also called for state leaders to zero in on Tampa Bay.

In late June, they unveiled a plan to regulate boat speeds in areas of the bay known to harbor the slow-moving manatees and in stretches rich with sea grass, vital for the species survival.

In Manatee, that plan called for adding slow-speed zones along Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve in Anna Maria Sound north of State Road 64, within 1,000 feet of the Manatee River shoreline west of Interstate 75, and in the Braden River.

Miguel Bay and the upper stretch of the Manatee River would get a 25-mph speed limit, as would a channel through the Braden River and a handful of other channels linking docks and waterways.

But a change in state law earlier this year requires that local boaters, ecologists, residents and other stakeholders review any such proposal.

That 14-member panel, authorized by commissioners in Manatee, Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, dipped into that duty July 22.

And, despite an early dose of compromise, soon dipped into discord.

Boating-rights groups, frustrated at what they saw as a potential burden on boaters, questioned the basis for the plan itself.

"When you take away human rights, when you take away the right to freedom, there should be a demonstrated need. And we don't have a demonstrated need here," said Dave Markett with the Florida Guides Association.

Manatee protection advocates, frustrated at what they saw as a lack of progress, fired back.

"Is there any speed zone anywhere at any time that you would allow?" asked Jessica Koelsch, with The Ocean Conservancy.

When panelists turned to Manatee, they found speed zones already in place. Sort of.

County commissioners had cleared Ordinance 99-03 in 1999, revamping a code put in place two decades earlier to protect swimmers. But they never enacted the manatee safeguards by posting or enforcing the speed limits.

Which drew little attention until the feds started stacking up dock projects - some 1,000 statewide, including 150 in Manatee.

"In essence, the feds took the position that we had no speed regulations in the county," said Doug Means, Manatee's natural resources administrator.

Still, the local review panel liked the idea of letting the county tackle the issue in its own waters, in its own way. Mostly.

The group suggested the county tweak its protection plan by adding 25-mph channels through Miguel Bay and a stretch of the Braden River, and by excluding established recreation areas.

But that's all it is: a recommendation, for the county and the state.

"This committee does not have the desire or the authority to repeal a local ordinance," Holland explained. "If people want to comment on that, they need to take their comments and concerns to the county."

Not Tuesday's meeting, though.

"What we really want is people to comment on specific recommendations this committee will make to the state," Holland said. "We need people from both sides of the issue to show up and speak."

- **WHAT:** Public comment session for Florida manatee protection proposal
- **WHEN:** 6-8 p.m. Tuesday
- **WHERE:** Manatee Convention and Civic Center, One Haben Blvd., Palmetto
- **INFORMATION:** Local committee - (727) 893-2765; Rulemaking - (850) 922-4330

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Posted on Tue, Aug. 26, 2003

Boating accord

County has chance to control manatee zones

Tonight's public meeting at the Manatee Convention and Civic Center offers a chance for this community to come together on boating speed zones that would serve all interests.

Rarely has local government had as good an opportunity to tailor federal or state regulations to fit local conditions as it has with the proposed manatee-protection speed zones on local waters being considered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The plan up for discussion tonight (6-8 p.m.) basically would allow Manatee County to set its manatee protection zones rather than having them arbitrarily imposed by the state as they are being in the rest of the Tampa Bay area. Because Manatee County has a water safety ordinance in place - though as yet unenforced - the Fish and Wildlife Commission's stakeholders' advisory committee that has been meeting since July is prepared to accept that ordinance as this county's manatee-protection compliance, with a few amendments.

The ordinance, known as 99-03, was passed four years ago in response to complaints from residents of shoreline communities about noise pollution and damaging wakes caused by loud airboats and net fishers. The ordinance required boats to operate at slow speed within 300 feet of shores used by swimmers or those designated mangrove fringe or special protection zones. It also called for a maximum 25 mph speed in boat channels of major water bodies here.

With only a few changes, this ordinance serves to add manatee protection to its benefits, thus satisfying concerns of federal and state regulators for this unique, lumbering sea creature that too often becomes a casualty while seeking food and fresh water in the shallows of local rivers and bays. In the process it also may lift a moratorium that has held up construction of close to 150 docks in Manatee County, an ill-advised reaction to manatee fatalities from collisions with boats.

It is encouraging to see compromise emerge from a committee made up of such diverse interests: boaters, manatee advocates, environmentalists and scientists. It indicates an open-mindedness to the interests of all parties in an often-contentious debate. Boaters are not manatee-haters, nor are environmentalists boat-haters. Boaters want reasonable access to enjoy the water, and environmentalists want reasonable controls to protect the manatee and its feeding grounds. This plan appears to serve both.

It removes the previously proposed 1,000-foot slow-speed zone along shorelines, substituting a more reasonable 300-foot limit. It allows boats to go fast in designated channels until within 300 feet of shore. It exempts a number of sheltered areas where water sports long have been enjoyed: Palma Sola Causeway, Warner's Bayou, Fort Hamer, Terra Ceia Bay, among others.

Perhaps the biggest area of contention remaining is the extent of 25-mph speed zones in the Upper Manatee and Braden rivers. People who live far up-river object to being forced to run long distances at slow speed to reach the open channels of the two rivers. But this is exactly where the zones are needed most, both for boating safety and to protect the manatees that head upstream for the fresh-water interludes they seem to need. The rivers are narrow and shallow here, with many blind bends that are hazardous at high speeds. And the wakes of speeding boats erode the shorelines.

We hope the community is past the my-way-or-the-highway stance and realizes that this compromise offers the best solution likely to come from this debate. No one is going to get everything desired. There will be restrictions, but they can be reasonable if 99-03 is accepted. And, because it will be state-sanctioned, it will include state resources for enforcement, a key factor in protecting the manatee and the rights of law-abiding boaters.

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Bradenton.com

Posted on Wed, Aug. 27, 2003

PROTECTION FOR MANATEES

Boaters: County should set rulesJESSE WESTBROOK
Herald Staff Writer

PALMETTO - Boaters, anglers and public officials turned out in droves Tuesday night to send a clear message regarding the protection of manatees: Let Manatee County decide what's good for Manatee County.

"I'm offended that people think because you are a boater you don't like manatees," said Byron Shinn, who lives along the Braden River and has led a coalition of local residents who oppose regulation of waterways. "We understand our local waters, and we know where the manatees are."

In tears, Shinn made his impassioned plea before a committee of outdoors enthusiasts, ecologists and residents saddled with the responsibility of helping Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission decide boating rules for Tampa Bay and its tributaries.

Thus far, a fact-finding committee has appeased local residents by, for the most part, deferring to rules set forth by the Manatee County Commission.

The county has a law in place that requires boaters to slow their speeds within 300 feet of shores.

But the committee did not give the county blanket support.

Instead, the group suggested Manatee County tweak its protection plan by adding 25-mph channels through Miguel Bay and a stretch of the Braden River, and by excluding established recreation areas.

That incited a wave of backlash among the standing-room-only crowd at Palmetto's Manatee Convention and Civic Center.

Boater after boater testified that getting boats up to speed and activities like water-skiing require a 35-mph speed limit in the Braden River.

State Sen. Mike Bennett testified that his concern is not so much protecting manatees from boating accidents, but preventing overpopulation.

As their numbers swell in warm waters, like areas close to power plants, Bennett said manatees become more susceptible to problems that could deplete sea cow clans.

"They run out of food and disease comes in and cleans them out," he said.

Bennett cited studies showing manatee populations have actually increased in recent years, despite depletion concerns raised by conservation groups.

Supporters of tougher enforcement on waterways were all but drowned out by opposition, but a few of them did stand up to speak their minds.

"It's not the professional guides and boaters that concern me, it's the amateurs," said Joan Hodges, a resident of Parrish. "I'd also like to ask why power boaters oppose speed zones. That's a small inconvenience to protect these unique creatures."

County Commissioner Joe McClash used Tuesday's meeting to unveil a draft plan to beef-up manatee protection while ensuring traditional hot-spots for recreation are unchanged.

The new rules would establish havens for skiing and other water sports in a large portion of Terra Ceia Bay, part of the Key Royale Recreation Area, an area in Palma Sola north and south of Manatee Avenue, a segment of Warner Bayou and a section east of U.S. 301 south of Riviera Dunes.

McClash hopes to hold a public meeting on the proposed changes by Sept. 9 with plans for a hearing before the county commission by Sept. 25.

That would give Florida lawmakers plenty of time to take Manatee County's updated ordinances into account when formulating final speed rules for the Gulf Coast.

McClash suggested the state would be wise to follow Manatee County's lead.

"If they take away people's boating rights, they are going to have a big fight in Manatee County," he said.

Even if Manatee County does get to decide its own fate, Shinn does not have much faith the ordinance will hold up against private opposition.

"There will be one lawsuit from an outside group who does not know anything about our waterways," he said.

WWW.SAVETHEMANATEE.ORG A Web site devoted the saving the remaining Florida manatees.

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Manatee protection hearing grows heated

Many of the more than 300 attending decry proposed boating speed zones for Tampa Bay.

By CRAIG PITTMAN, Times Staff Writer

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published August 27, 2003

PALMETTO - More than 300 people crammed into the Manatee County Civic Center on a rainy Tuesday for a sometimes raucous public hearing on proposed new boat speed zones in Tampa Bay.

Some speakers complained about government interference in recreation and warned that the new zones would interfere with businesses and property rights.

"These proposed changes are ridiculous and don't take into account the economic impact," said David Walker, a fishing guide from Tampa, who drew thunderous applause from much of the crowd.

The zones proposed by biologists from the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission are supposed to protect the 350 or so manatees living in Tampa Bay, and the 100 or so more that join them during cold weather.

Since 1974, more than 250 manatees have turned up dead in Tampa Bay, with more than 60 of those deaths from boats. Under a legal settlement with environmental groups two years ago, the wildlife agency has promised to consider new regulations to slow down Tampa Bay's boaters - but has not promised to approve anything.

Generally, the wildlife agency staff has proposed extensive slow-speed zones covering much of Tampa Bay's shoreline that is not already regulated. The state also proposed making some voluntary slow zones - around Fort De Soto and Cockroach Bay - into mandatory slow-speed zones. Where marked channels exist, the state biologists have recommended 25 mph zones for boater access.

Until last year, the staff's recommendation would have gone straight to public hearings and then been voted on by the wildlife commission. But a new law requires all new regulations concerning manatees to be reviewed first by a local committee made up of boaters, environmentalists and other interests.

Pinellas, Hillsborough and Manatee counties agreed to set up a single panel for all three counties that would be chaired by Nanette Holland of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. It included representatives from the Save the Manatee Club, which has pushed for greater regulation, as well as the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida, which has petitioned the state to take the manatee off the endangered list.

The committee spent two months wrangling over the proposed zones and so far has voted to recommend that the wildlife commission reject nearly every one of them. In votes that were sometimes sharply split, they repeatedly recommended the state do more to educate boaters, encourage voluntary compliance and defer to county and city regulations.

In one area along the Pinellas shoreline, stretching from the Gandy Bridge to the Courtney Campbell Parkway, the committee was so divided the members were unable to reach any agreement.

The committee wanted to hold a public hearing before its final vote, which is scheduled for today between 4 and 7 p.m. at the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council office in St. Petersburg.

The crowd that showed up Tuesday night was far larger than the committee had expected, Holland said, and so rowdy that at one point she threatened to throw out all the hecklers.

"I may be small, but I am fierce," she told the crowd. She was immediately heckled anyway.

Some speakers complimented the committee for opposing the state's regulation proposals. But some said they were disappointed at the reliance on voluntary compliance and education.

One speaker, Tabitha Whalen, was in charge of Tampa Bay Watch's manatee education program for boaters and said that "in the end we didn't see the boaters behaving any differently."

Most speakers, though, complained that they saw no need to restrict boating at all. Many said they see more manatees today than they did years ago and blasted the Save the Manatee Club for leading the charge for more regulations.

"They're alienating and turning people against the manatee," warned Joe Kennedy, a Manatee County resident.

The state wildlife agency could begin considering the new Tampa Bay rules in November. If approved, they could go into effect in 2004.

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Manatee panel urges few changes

After months of review, a local committee recommends that the state impose few new rules on Tampa Bay.

By CRAIG PITTMAN, Times Staff Writer
© St. Petersburg Times
published August 28, 2003

ST. PETERSBURG - The first-ever local committee to review proposed boat speed rules for manatee protection is recommending that the state impose few new regulations on Tampa Bay.

The 15-member committee has spent two months reviewing proposals from state wildlife biologists for new boating regulations around the bay, where more than 350 manatees live year-round. A public hearing Tuesday night drew more than 300 people, but the committee's final meeting Wednesday attracted only a dozen spectators.

So far this year, nine manatees have been killed by boats in Pinellas, Hillsborough and Manatee counties, according to state biologists. Since 1974, more than 60 have been killed by boats in Tampa Bay, most of them in the past decade.

State biologists had recommended a host of new speed zones around the bay's shoreline. But the committee, in votes taken during its previous meetings, had repeatedly recommended against those rules.

Instead, on a series of split votes, the committee over and over recommended that the state defer to county or city regulations already in place - even if those regulations were designed to protect sea grass beds and not manatees - or concentrate on educating boaters about the need to slow down.

"I am strongly in favor of allowing local governments to police themselves," said Doug Metko, representing the areas' fishing guides.

During Wednesday's meeting, environmental activists on the committee tried to reopen the discussions about several areas, particularly around Safety Harbor and between the Courtney Campbell Parkway and the Howard Frankland Bridge.

Each attempt was shot down by a coalition that included representatives of dock-building, fishing guides and the boating industry. Two votes were split 7-7 (the chairwoman did not vote).

"I was really disappointed we couldn't do anything there," said Jessica Koelsch of the Ocean Conservancy, who failed to persuade enough of her fellow committee members to change their vote on

the Courtney Campbell-to-Howard Frankland area.

One member of the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, David Meehan of St. Petersburg, said he thinks he and his colleagues will give great weight to the committee's recommendations in considering any new Tampa Bay regulations.

In the past, the recommendations of state wildlife biologists would have gone straight to the commissioners for a vote. But a state law now requires that all new boating rules for protecting manatees be reviewed first by a local committee. The Tampa Bay rules are the first to be vetted by such a committee.

"The process went okay, but unfortunately the outcome was not so good," said Suzanne Tarr of the Save the Manatee Club, who served on the committee.

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Aug 29, 2003

Panel OKs 4 Zones For Manatees

By YVETTE C. HAMMETT
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ST. PETERSBURG - A local committee set up to review a state proposal for more manatee protection in Tampa Bay has agreed on only four areas in which to add slow- or idle-speed zones.

But it did agree to endorse more boater education on manatee protection and to designate shallow seagrass beds throughout the Bay as voluntary manatee "caution" areas.

Most of a proposal from the state's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff, however, was rejected by a majority of the group, which met over six weeks. The proposal originally called for adding some type of manatee zone along the entire shoreline on the Bay that is not already protected by a local ordinance.

The committee of boaters, fishermen, environmentalists and educators from Hillsborough, Pinellas and Manatee counties will forward its recommendation to the commission for consideration during its meeting in November.

"I'm a little disappointed," said Suzanne Tarr, a biologist for the Save the Manatee Club and a committee member. "We had an excellent opportunity to make a really strong recommendation to protect manatees from physical harm and protect their habitat. Tampa Bay is one of the best-studied areas in Florida. If we can't put in strong protection measures here, it makes me very uneasy about their future elsewhere in the state."

Tarr contends that boat-related manatee deaths have increased every year for many years and have increased considerably in the past decade.

But Ted Forsgren, director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida and a stakeholder on the committee, took a different view.

His group, which represents recreational fishermen and boaters, calls Tampa Bay a success story about manatee protection.

"This kind of local review did exactly what we envisioned," Forsgren said. "We made some tweaks, and that is all we needed to do."

Among the committee's recommendations for new manatee safety zones, are:

* A blanket 25 mph speed zone in Little Manatee River, west of Interstate 75 and slow speed east of I- 75.

* A new slow-speed zone at the northwest tip of Apollo Beach, known as The Hammerhead, currently sandwiched between existing local and federal speed zones.

* A 25 mph speed zone in all existing marked channels from the Hillsborough County border with Pinellas County to the Courtney Campbell Parkway and a 25 mph maximum speed the length of Channel A in the same area.

* A slow-speed zone in the Braden River, south of the Bradenton city limit, and a 25 mph channel north of that point for faster access to the Manatee River.

The proposed zones are the result of a lawsuit filed against the state and federal government by the Save the Manatee Club. As part of the settlement, the state promised to take a closer look at manatee rules in Tampa Bay but did not promise to implement them.

A new state law requires local stakeholders to review proposed manatee rules before they become law. This was the first time that law review has been put to use.

Reporter Yvette C. Hammett can be reached at (813) 657-4532.

This story can be found at: <http://tampatrib.com/floridametronews/MGAOHRSAWJD.html>

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Bradenton.com

Posted on Sun, Jul. 20, 2003

Don't go overboard

Vast new manatee zones not justified

What if you could use only low gear everywhere you drove in Manatee County? On narrow residential streets, on four-lane connector roads, on six-lane thoroughfares like University Parkway and S.R. 70 East, your top speed would be only a few miles an hour. The frustration level would be high, to say the least.

Boaters contend that something akin to staying in low gear is what they'll face if new manatee-protection rules are adopted this fall by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. New speed zones proposed to protect the manatee from collisions with boats would put most local waters under a speed limit of 25 mph or less. Only in the center channel of the Manatee River would boaters be allowed to get "on plane," that is, fast enough to raise the bow out of the water for efficient cruising speed.

Virtually the entire Intracoastal Waterway here would be affected: Anna Maria Sound, Terra Ceia Bay, Miguel Bay, the Manatee River as far east as I-75 and all of the Braden River. On the Manatee, the rules call for slow speed, that is, no wake, within 1,000 feet of the shore on both sides west of I-75.

We are all for protecting the wild manatee population, but such severe restrictions give us pause. Boating is one of Florida's most popular outdoor activities. It is especially so in Manatee County with its many islands and canals creating a perfect setting for fishing, shelling, skiing and simply enjoying being on the water. Limiting the speed so severely would take much of the pleasure out of boating, say boating advocates.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission justifies the enlarged speed zones on the basis of data showing perinatal carcasses, that is, stillborn or post-birth deaths, turning up in these waters, especially the upper Manatee and the Braden River. But the data doesn't indicate what caused these baby manatee deaths - whether it was injury from being hit by a boat, from disease or from some other cause.

In fact, mortality figures provided in connection with the new speed zone rules don't paint an alarming picture of manatee mayhem. Between 1976 and 2003, there were 251 dead manatees in the entire tri-county Tampa Bay region - Manatee, Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, say Fish and Wildlife officials. While it's disturbing to think of that many dead Snooties in the area, over 27 years it averages out to only 9.3 deaths a year in 400 square miles of water. And of those 251 dead manatees, only 59 were traced to collisions with watercraft - just 2.1 boat-related deaths per year. If this ratio is justified out of concern for manatees on water highways, why not impose similar speed cutbacks, i.e., first gear, on land highways that are far deadlier to *humans*?

Another key unknown is whether the manatee population is increasing or decreasing. The Save the Manatee Club says that, "unless drastic steps are taken to reduce human-induced mortality and injury, the long-term fate of the manatee is bleak." However, the Coastal Conservation Association of Florida, a boating rights group, says that the manatee population is rising 14 ½ times as fast as the mortality rate.

Parts of the plan make sense. Speed limits on most of the Braden River are justified for several reasons, including manatee protection. In many stretches it is a narrow, winding, shallow stream where speeding

boats cause danger to canoeists and kayakers and their wakes cause shoreline erosion. The area below Evers Reservoir dam is a favorite spot for manatees. There's a genuine need for a speed zone here.

On the grass flats of the Manatee, boats ought to proceed with caution - both to avoid damaging the grass as well as hitting manatees. But grass flats are patchy through much of the length of the river; it's unfair to restrict boats to slow speed all the way to I-75.

Review committee meetings will be held in Tampa this month and next to discuss the proposed new speed zones. The one affecting Manatee streams is from 6-8 p.m. Aug. 19. This is a challenge for boaters: Get involved; your recreational future is at stake. Inform yourself and lobby for common-sense manatee protection rules, not wholesale restrictions on your use of the Intracoastal Waterway.

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Aug 31, 2003

Manatee Committee Rejects Most Changes

FRANK SARGEANT

Some 600 angry flats anglers, boaters, dock builders and waterfront homeowners showed up at Manatee Civic Center in Palmetto last Tuesday, primed to boo the manatee rules review committee out of town.

The boos quickly changed to cheers, however, when they learned from committee chair Nanette Holland that most of the remarkably restrictive rules proposed by the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC) staff to protect manatees in Tampa Bay had been rejected.

While the FFWCC originally proposed to make almost the entire shoreline of the bay an idle-speed zone out to depths of six feet, the committee, proposed of anglers and boaters as well as avid manatee fans, agreed to very few of the proposals.

The review came as a result of a recently passed state law requiring local review of any manatee proposals. Per the revised recommendations, only four major areas would be affected by new regulations.

The Little Manatee River would be made a 25 mph zone west of Interstate 75, and a slow zone east of the river. An area northwest of Apollo Beach also would become a slow zone, attaching to existing zones already in place. A 25 mph zone also would be put in place in marked channels from the Hillsborough/Pinellas border to Courtney Campbell Parkway, and in Channel A, also in Old Tampa Bay. And a slow zone would be put in place on the Braden River south of the Bradenton city limit, with a 25-mph zone from there to the Manatee River.

The rest of Tampa Bay and its tributaries would continue to be regulated by current rules if the FFWCC agrees to the committee recommendations. The agency will take up the regulations in November, with rules going into effect some time next year. Increased efforts to educate boaters about manatee habits and habitat will be promoted by the Cockroach Bay Users Group and other volunteers, with voluntary compliance for slow-speed zones along the southeast shore of the bay continued.

The minimal proposals did not make everyone happy. Susannah Lindbergh, spokeswoman for the Wildlife Advocacy Group in Winter Park, said she was disappointed with what she called a "weak" recommendation.

"They basically ignored all the science and made a political decision," said Lindbergh, who also pointed out that more manatees are being hit by boats with every passing year.

However, many at the meeting contended that the slight increase in manatee strikes is the direct result of a booming manatee population.

"I've lived in this area since 1932 and I never saw a manatee until 1978," Cortez resident Charley

Jones said. ``Now, they're everywhere, and they want us to believe they're endangered."

Caleb Grimes of Bradenton said that the original proposals would destroy the waterfront lifestyle that so many have moved here to enjoy, despite the fact that manatees are thriving and have been for years.

``Manatee County already has an adequate set of rules in place," said Grimes. ``We don't need any additional regulations because the manatees here are doing fine." SEMINARS: Captain Mel Berman hosts redbfish tourney champs Brian and Greg Watts Wednesday at 7 p.m. at Ferman Chevrolet, 43520 U.S. 19 N. in Tarpon Springs, (727) 934-5789.

``Dastardly Dan" McKinney presents a free fly-fishing seminar Wednesday at 7 p.m. at Minnows & Monsters, 3811 S. Manhattan Ave. in Tampa.

Hunters born after July 1, 1975, are required to pass a hunter education course before they can purchase a state hunting license in Florida. For youngsters who need to take the course, the Central Florida chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation presents a unique opportunity Friday to spend a weekend in the outdoors while gaining the required credit.

The class takes place at the Ocala Youth Conservation Camp in Ocala National Forest. Fee is \$50, which includes the class plus dorm accommodations and food. A second child from the same family can take the class for \$30. A parent can also attend for \$30. Hands- on instruction in firearm safety, archery, camping, canoeing, wildlife identification and much more is included. Register by Tuesday; (813) 980-6047.

This story can be found at: <http://www.tampatrib.com/Sports/columns/MGAPHEYH0KD.html>

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