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Congress of the United States
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The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary, Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

It has been nearly a year since the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) downgraded protections for the Florida manatee from “endangered” to “threatened.” Since then, the State of Florida has witnessed a record number of manatee deaths. With this in mind - and on Manatee Appreciation Day - I am writing to again request that FWS reconsider its decision to downgrade protections for this beloved animal.

The manatee has become synonymous with Florida’s waters. It was designated the state’s marine mammal in 1975 and contributes to Florida’s \$5 billion wildlife viewing industryⁱ. The manatee is iconic in my home state, but they face a number of threats to their existence, including watercraft collisions and loss of habitat. Without the proper protections, I fear this gentle giant will not be around for future generations to enjoy and admire.

According to data compiled by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)ⁱⁱ, the number of manatee deaths between January 1st and March 16th of this year number 201, compared to 138 within the same timeframe in 2017 and 171 when averaged over a five-year period.

While Florida experienced severe and prolonged cold weather this year, the data shows that cold stress is not the sole reason for this rise in deaths. In 2017, for example, human-caused deaths (i.e., Watercraft, Flood Gate/Lock, and Other Human) resulted in a total of 18 manatee deaths. In 2018, that number nearly doubled to 34. When you include the Unrecovered and Undetermined categories, those numbers rise to 57 deaths in 2017 and 100 deaths in 2018. It is clear to me that these numbers are moving in the wrong direction and therefore warrant urgent review by FWS.

For this reason, I respectfully request that FWS reconsider and reverse its decision to downgrade protections for the Florida manatee. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

ⁱ <http://myfwc.com/about/overview/economics/>

ⁱⁱ <http://myfwc.com/media/4363669/preliminary.pdf>