Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 13, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We urge you to reconsider and reverse the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision last week to downgrade protections for the Florida manatee.

This decision was disappointing and potentially very harmful to the survival of the iconic Florida animal.

Despite the agency's assertion that a downlisting from endangered to threatened would not affect federal protections for the manatee, the move could cause a broader reassessment of critical state and local protections for the animals

In fact, just days after this rule proposal was announced, the Brevard County commissioners approved a resolution requesting that the Florida Legislature review slow-speed zones currently in place for boats and called for a reconsideration of the state's Manatee Sanctuary Act, which established protections for manatees and their habitats in several counties, including Sarasota and Manatee."

As you may know, the manatee at one time was on the brink of extinction. We cannot support any action that could lead to such conditions again.

Manatees face a variety of threats to their existence, including watercraft collisions, habitat loss and red tide. Additionally, the warm water springs manatees depend on during the winter months are disappearing. We also would note that manatee deaths are on the rise, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

During the public comment period for the downlisting rule, nearly 87,000 comments opposed the rule with only 72 comments in support. We would also note that the scientists invited by the Fish and Wildlife Service to formally review the downlisting plan opposed weakening manatee protections.

Based on widespread opposition from the public and scientists, we urge you to overturn this decision and restore manatees to endangered status.

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Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter,

Sincerely,

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Daniel Webster
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Val Demings
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

Charlie Crist
Member of Congress