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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

January 7, 2016

Dan Ashe
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3359
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Director Ashe:

I am writing to express my opposition to your agency's decision to reduce protections for Florida manatees under the Endangered Species Act.

I urge you to withdraw this misguided and premature proposal.

I am pleased that the population of manatees has grown over the last five decades. But at only 6,000, it defies common sense to view these animals as unworthy of protection.

Since 1966, manatees have been listed as an endangered species. These gentle giants face a variety of threats to their existence, including watercraft collisions, habitat loss and red tide. In fact, hundreds of these animals die each year.

Moreover, manatees need access to warm water during the winter months. But warm water springs are disappearing and over half of Florida's manatees rely on warm water near power plants that will eventually be phased out.

This is not the time for the federal government to reduce its protections for manatees and their habitats. In its 2007 status review, a government biologist projected a 50 percent probability that the current population of manatees in Florida could drop to 500 within the next century.

Manatees have become an iconic symbol for the wilderness and beauty of Florida. They are an engine in our economy even as they are a restorative presence in our tranquil waters. We must do everything possible to protect this treasured species.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vern Buchanan".

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

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