

VERN BUCHANAN
DISTRICT 16, FLORIDA



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

October 6, 2014

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

Dear Director Ashe,

I am writing to express my strong concern over reports that the Fish and Wildlife Service may weaken protections for Florida manatees under the Endangered Species Act.

While it is heartening to see the manatee population increase in Florida in recent years, significant threats remain to the full recovery of these gentle giants. Watercraft collisions, habitat loss and red tide pose a significant threat to Florida's state marine mammal.

The disappearance of warm-water springs is of particular concern since Manatees need access to these springs during the cooler winter months. Over half the state's manatees rely on warm water near power plants that will eventually be phased out. As your staff has stated in public meetings, this is a troubling threat to the Manatee population.

Recent years have seen large numbers of manatees dying from unexpectedly cold weather or the increasing blooms of harmful algae, known as red tide. In the winter of 2010-2011, more than 600 manatees died in a prolonged cold snap. In the past 3 years alone, over 1,600 manatees have died as a result of cold or red tide.

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 close to 5,000 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,

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

2104 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 226-5015
FAX: (202) 226-0828

111 SOUTH ORANGE AVENUE
SUITE 202W
SARASOTA, FL 34236
(941) 951-6643
FAX: (941) 951-2972

1051 MANATEE AVENUE WEST
SUITE 305
BRADENTON, FL 34205
(941) 747-9081
FAX: (941) 748-1564