

The 2nd iteration of the manatee population abundance estimate is **8,810**. The estimate is calculated through computer modeling and statistical analysis. This will be probably become known as the “2016 Abundance Estimate” because much of the analysis was based on data from prior years due to the amount of time and effort to complete the assessment. The highest actual statewide manatee count (synoptic survey) had been 6,620 from early February 2017

An overview of the abundance estimate process and findings was presented at the Fall Meeting of the *Manatee Forum*, held early this week at FWC’s Florida Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) in St. Petersburg. The findings, which were highly anticipated by those of us arguing that the manatee no longer should be listed within the Endangered Species Act, had been in work for several months. They were released to the public immediately following the discussion.

<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/FLFFWCC/bulletins/2234358>

This is the 2nd such estimate. You may recall that the initial estimate, released in 2012, was **6,305**. This number, along with an extensive population prediction model, was the foundation of the USFWS decision to reclassify the manatee from ‘*endangered*’ to ‘*threatened*’ in March of last year. Prior to the 2012 estimate, the highest statewide count had been 5,077 in January 2010.

<https://myfwc.com/research/manatee/research/population-monitoring/synoptic-surveys/>

For those of you statistically inclined, the 95% confidence interval for the 8,810 population estimate is from 7,520 to 10,280, but based on the usage of the previous 6,305 throughout the science, we fully expect to see the 8,810 widely referenced.

What does this mean?

First - Irrespective of the gnashing of teeth of those fearing the worst for the manatee due to high observations of red-tide and watercraft mortality, the population is not only surviving but actually increasing at a rate in excess of 5% annually. Many of us would use the terminology “explosive growth” to describe a population that is doubling every 10-15 years. We at CFFW have been pleading with the agencies to wake up to the fact that the manatee is more likely to become a nuisance than endangered. These estimates are consistent with that prediction.

Second – De-listing of the manatee accompanied with significant reduction of the:

- millions of tax dollars spent,
- thousands of Federal and State agency hours expended, and the
- continual OVER-regulation of Florida’s public waters for manatee protection, is long overdue.

Third – The focus on manatee protection should be realigned to improving the quality of the environment the manatee requires for survival, water quality and seagrass, and assuring it’s long-term sustainability. Managing the growing manatee population, as opposed to the current approach of promoting unlimited growth, will need to be a part of the preservation of the waterway ecosystem for all inhabitants and users, including man.