

Hickory Mound death brings total to 881:

2021 manatee mortality rate shatters record

As the statewide manatee mortality rate continues to climb -- shattering previous annual records -- one local is encouraging boaters to learn how to respond to distressed mammals.

Catherine Williams, of Shady Grove, is sounding the alarm after a manatee was found dead in an area of Hickory Mound on July 16 -- bringing the 2021 Florida manatee mortality rate to 881 and counting.

Williams reported multiple stranded manatees to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) on July 15 through its Wildlife Alert Hotline.

"I stayed all day until the team arrived

way too far from our Gulf areas to actively help."

"The public needs to be taught how to handle specific emergencies. The helplessness I felt when they told me I could not get into the water to help them cannot be described. It broke my heart!" Williams said.

The FWC manatee stranding team arrived on site the next day, discovering a deceased adult female manatee. No other deceased or distressed manatees were located in the area at that time.

The deceased female manatee was necropsied to determine the cause of

manatee mortality report for 2021, with the first being found on January 29. The first manatee was not necropsied.

From Jan.1 to July 23, 881 manatee deaths were reported to the FWC statewide.

The University of Florida Marine Animal Rescue (UFMAR) coordinates volunteer training courses for Taylor, Dixie and Levy County. Those interested can contact UFMAR at (352) 477-0344 for the next training date.

"We all need to be aware that manatees are federally protected by the Endangered Species Act, and only the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) have the federal permit to catch, rescue, treat,

transport or any other type of manipulation required to protect or save a manatee's life. Your support is needed, and I know that sometimes it might be frustrating, but we all need to comply with national and state regulations pertaining to this beautiful creature."

Accordingly to protect your life and the manatee's life. Remember, manatees are large mammals and might threaten your life if you come in close contact with them," Blanco said.

"Manatees are heavy and powerful, and they can easily injure or kill a person. So, keep your distance, take pictures and videos of the animal, share the information with the authorities, especially the location (coordinates really help), the number of animals distressed and the status of the animal (dead, alive, injured, stranded, etc.," Blanco said.

According to the FWC, the average manatee mortality rate for the previous five years has been just 375 per year.

"So the 2021 records represent an increase of 230% in just seven

months," Blanco said.

While the leading cause of death is watercraft collision, the vast majority of the deceased manatees -- a total of 531 -- were not

necropsied to determine the cause of death.

In the Big Bend (from Citrus to Wakulla County), 34 manatee deaths have been reported this year, including: 18 in Citrus, seven in Levy, four in Dixie, three in Wakulla and two in Taylor.

"The unprecedented increase in manatee mortality is an issue of concern to the state, however, we can say that our region and Taylor County has a low record of deaths of the natural population, which is unlikely to have a long-term impact on them," Blanco said.

Because watercraft collisions are the leading cause of manatee deaths across the state, Blanco emphasized the need for boaters to remain alert and the importance of following all posted waterway rules, especially in the local canals, which are

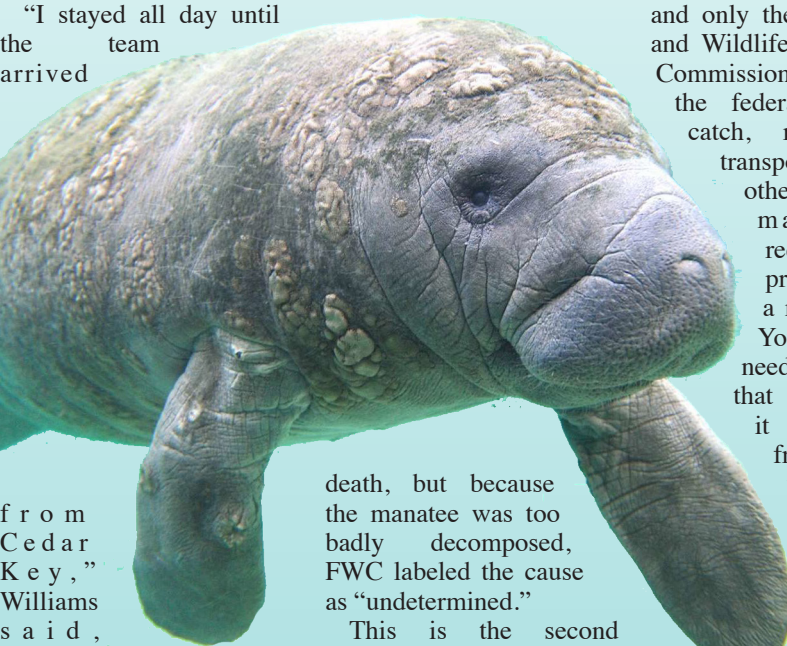
frequented by manatees. "Being an alert boater reduces the probability of injuring or unintentionally killing a manatee due to watercraft collisions," Blanco said, continuing, "Manatees can hold their breath for long periods of time, and most of the

waterways or coastal areas is not clear enough to spot an animal from a distance, so try to go slow."

Blanco recommends all boaters wear polarized sunglasses, as the polarization reduces the glare of the sun on the water, improving visibility as manatees surface.

"If a manatee comes close to your boat, shift your motor into neutral and wait until the manatee swims away," Blanco said.

Alert boaters can also help decrease the mortality rate by spotting and reporting distressed manatees, as well as other wildlife, to the FWC Hotline Wildlife Alert (1-888-404-3922) or the UF Marine Animal Rescue 24/7 Hotline (352-477-0344).



from Cedar Key," Williams said, continuing, "I think this is a huge deal since more than 800 manatees have died in 2021 alone. Four hours is

death, but because the manatee was too badly decomposed, FWC labeled the cause as "undetermined."

This is the second manatee that has been found dead in Taylor County waters this year, according to the FWC preliminary

Taylor County Extension Marine Agent Victor

School-specific procedures will be in place

MASKS
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BUS TRANSPORTATION AND STUDENT DROP-OFF PRECAUTIONS

- Bus drivers are highly encouraged to wear a mask and/or shield.
- Students riding a bus are highly encouraged to wear a mask before boarding unless there are documented health conditions that prevent wearing a mask.
- Students will have assigned seats on buses.

SPECIFIC TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

- Elementary students' learning environment will be with limited transitioning.
- Breakfast and lunch will be eaten in the cafeteria with social distancing as room permits. Lunch will be eaten in the cafeteria.
- Special area transitions will be evaluated by each school.
- One class will be allowed at recess or in one general area. Classes will not combine or interact.
- Parents will not be allowed to walk their children to class as has typically been allowed on the first day of school.
- We are working on a plan to help with the first day of drop-offs.

SPECIFIC TO SECONDARY STUDENTS

- Students will transition between classes with social distancing encouraged and monitored.
- Breakfast will be eaten as students get to school.
- Lunch will be eaten in the cafeteria or designated area.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- If a student or employee tests positive, what are the procedures?

The Department of Health in Taylor County

(DOH) will notify the school district and receive directions on how to proceed. The DOH will do contact tracing and notify any person who the school district believes to be at risk of being infected.

Each situation may have different procedures. The school disitric has employees trained on how to specifically handle contact tracing. The district will rely on the expertise of the health department and their trained medical staff.

- If a teacher has a student whom he/she thinks is showing signs of COVID, what are the procedures? As with any child appearing to be ill, that child should be sent to the clinic.
- Employees feeling ill/having COVID-like symptoms are asked to remain home and seek medical attention or advisement.

SCHOOL-SPECIFIC ORIENTATION AND FIRST DAY TAYLOR COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Individual parent meetings have been scheduled for Friday and Monday. Regular car drop-off or preschool (3's & 4's) drop-off will be from 7:30-7:55 a.m. in the drop-off loop. Unfortunately, we are unable to let parents walk their child to class for the first day of school. We are allowing all parents to park and walk their child to the building.

K-2 students need to be walked up to the drop-off doors. We ask for you to come to the drop-off door because these are the doors your child will be using on a regular basis.

Preschool students will need to be walked to the preschool doors (blue double doors in front parking lot). Walk-up/drop-

off will be from 8-8:30 a.m. If you choose this option, please do not walk up to the doors until 8 a.m.

TAYLOR COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Teachers are scheduling individual and small group orientation on Friday, Aug. 6, and Monday, Aug. 9. Most parents have already been contacted by the teachers. If parents have not been contacted, they should call the school at 850-838-2530 and ask for information about their child's meet the teacher time.

Under guidance from the Taylor County Department of Health, TCES has made the difficult decision to not allow parents to walk their children in on the first day of school. We are eager to have visitors back on campus, however we will follow guidelines from the DOH and the CDC. When all parties believe it is safe

to resume having visitors on campus, we will notify the public. We appreciate everyone's patience and understanding in making these difficult decisions.

TAYLOR COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Due to the recent increase in COIVD cases, we are limiting visitors on campus. Orientation for TCMS will now be as follows: Tuesday, Aug. 10, 1-3 p.m. for sixth grade students only. Please limit to one adult per student.

We will open FOCUS Tuesday, Aug. 10, at 1 p.m. for seventh and eighth graders to view their schedule. Schedule change requests will be accepted starting Wednesday, Aug. 12. Forms will be available in the homeroom classes. Guidance will not accept schedule change requests by phone or email. Please fill the form out and return it with your student.

TAYLOR COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Freshman/new student orientation will be Monday, Aug. 9. Students whose last name begins with letters A-H are asked to come at 2 p.m., and students whose last name begins with letters I-Z will come at 3 p.m.

We ask that only students and one parent come to orientation to decrease the number of people in the gym and that you wear a mask if you are not vaccinated. Returning students can pick up their schedule and buy parking passes on Tuesday afternoon, Aug. 10, from 1-3 p.m. in the gym.

STEINHATCHEE SCHOOL

Steinhatchee School will host our 2021-22 Student Orientation for Pre-K today (Friday) from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Due to updated health guidance from the Taylor County Health Department

and our District Crisis Management Team, we have adjusted our plan for campus access.

All student orientation meetings will be by appointment only.

Kindergarten through fifth grade student orientation will be held Monday, Aug. 9, from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

School staff has been reaching out to parents to schedule appointments. For convenience, families with multiple students will have coordinated appointments.

Masks are optional, but social distancing is required.

First day procedures for students that are not riding the bus will be for parents to drop students off at the student drop-off area or front office lobby. Parents and visitors will not be allowed on campus at this time, with the exception of pre-scheduled appointments.

Florida's sales tax holiday ends Monday

Parents and students buying supplies for the upcoming school year can save some money during the 2021 "Florida Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday," which began last weekend.

During the holiday, which will run through Monday, Aug. 9, there is no state or local sales tax charged for certain purchases, including clothing, footwear and certain accessories selling for \$60 or less, as well as certain school supplies selling for \$15 or less.

Additionally, the first \$1,000 of the sales price of personal computers and certain computer-related accessories will be tax free when purchased for non-commercial home or personal use.

According to the Florida

Department of Revenue (DOR), during the holiday, no tax is due on the sale or purchase of any article of clothing, wallet or bag, including handbags, backpacks, fanny packs and diaper bags with a price of \$60 or less.

This exemption does NOT include briefcases, suitcases and other garment bags.

"Clothing" is defined as any article of wearing apparel, including all footwear (except skis, swim fins, roller blades and skates), intended to be worn on or about the human body. Clothing does not include watches, watchbands, jewelry, umbrellas or handkerchiefs.

Meanwhile, "school supplies" are defined as pens, pencils, erasers,

crayons, notebooks, notebook filler paper, legal pads, binders, lunch boxes, construction paper, markers, folders, poster board, composition books, poster paper, scissors, cellophane tape, glue, paste, rulers, computer disks, staplers and staples (used to secure paper products), protractors, compasses and calculators.

As for "personal computers," DOR says they include electronic book readers, laptops, desktops, handheld devices, tablets and tower computers. The term does not include cellular telephones, video game consoles, digital media receivers or devices that are not primarily designed to process data.

"Personal computer-related accessories"

includes keyboards, mouse devices, personal digital assistants, monitors, other peripheral devices, modems, routers and non-recreational software, regardless of whether the accessories are used in association with a personal computer base unit.

Computer-related accessories do not include furniture or systems, devices, software or peripherals that are designed or intended primarily for recreational use. The term "monitor" does not include a device that includes a television tuner.

None of the exemptions included in the sales tax holiday apply to sales in a theme park, entertainment complex, public lodging establishment or airport.

LEGALS

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SUWANNEE RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT PUBLIC NOTICE OF APPLICATION

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Chapter 373, Florida Statutes, the following application for permit was received on July 9, 2021:

Holdings, LLC, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082 has submitted an application for an Individual Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) number ERP-123-240416-1. The project is located in Taylor County, Section 26, Township 9 South, Range 9 East, and includes 1.0-acres. Interested persons may comment upon the application or submit a

written request for a staff report containing proposed agency action regarding the application by writing to the Suwannee River Water Management District, Attn: Resource Management, 9225 C.R. 49, Live Oak, Florida 32060. Such comments or requests must be received by 5:00 PM within 14 days from the date of publication. No further public notice will be

provided regarding this application. A copy of the staff report must be requested in order to remain advised of further proceedings. Substantially affected persons are entitled to request an administrative hearing, pursuant to Title 28, Florida Administrative Code, regarding the proposed agency action by submitting a written request after reviewing the staff report.

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