



The gentle giants right under the surface

BY FRIENDS OF MANATEE LAGOON • PHOTOS PROVIDED BY FRIENDS OF MANATEE LAGOON

Anyone who lives here and loves our waterways has seen a manatee – or knows they’re often just below the surface. Boating is a way of life in South Florida; with over 1 million boats registered in the state, safe boating is everyone’s responsibility for the benefit of manatees and people alike.

Boat strikes are the leading cause of death for manatees in Florida. Over 90% of manatees alive today have identifiable scars due to boat encounters.

Ask Anne Messer about manatees’ precarious situation. She’s the Executive Director of Friends of Manatee Lagoon (FoML), a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting our state’s official marine mammal and restoring and protecting their aquatic habitat. “We raise funds to educate the community about our manatees, promote awareness of their threats, engage the community in marine life conservation

efforts, and safeguard the critically important seagrass, which is their primary food source, ultimately leading to a healthy, global ecosystem.” FoML expands environmental education opportunities for all ages in Palm Beach County and beyond through future enhanced exhibits and experiential learning opportunities at Manatee Lagoon, An FPL Eco-Discovery Center® located along the Lake Worth Lagoon estuary near the Port of Palm Beach and the Palm Beach Inlet.

In addition to boat strikes, habitat loss is a significant issue for manatees and many other aquatic creatures. Seagrass and overall habitat loss are due to development, pollutants like oil, pesticides, and fertilizers (harming manatees’ health or even causing death), and climate change affecting water temperatures.

“Manatees are beloved as our aquatic ‘gentle giants,’ and in our very water-centric community, I am often asked how we can be the best possible stewards of manatees and their habitat,” says Anne. “There are many ways – from small to significant – that we can help ensure the survival of this keystone species and help renourish the seagrass that sustains the health of our waterways.”

How can you help? Anne Messer and Friends of Manatee Lagoon ask that you...

- Slow down and be aware of manatees when boating. Manatees are slow-moving and not always easy to see, making boat strikes their leading cause of death.
- Support organizations working to protect manatees. You can donate money, volunteer your time, or simply spread the word about their work. Visit Manatee

Lagoon, visit its educational exhibits, and see them up close!

- Reduce the use of pollutants that get into our waterways including oil, pesticides, and fertilizers. Help by recycling, using fewer pesticides, and fertilizing lawns less often.
- Adopt-A-Manatee! In partnership with Save the Manatee Club (founded by the late Jimmy Buffet), Friends of Manatee Lagoon provides the unique opportunity to adopt a living manatee who frequents our area or other parts of Florida’s coastline. “Adoption fees” go toward efforts to help protect manatees, their calves, and their fragile habitats.
- Help by donating \$500 for Friends Of Manatee Lagoon to purchase a sign to remind boaters about manatees. A marina, private dock, or port can protect manatees by donating to purchase a “Caution Manatee Area” sign with your name on it. As an

individual, you can help by donating to purchase a sign, and FoML will work with private and public entities to place it in critical areas.

- Buy stamps! The U.S. Postal Service recently introduced a new “Save Manatees” stamp on March 27th -- National Manatee Appreciation Day. It’s the first USPS manatee stamp since 1996 and features an illustration by Nancy Stahl of a grey-green West Indian manatee doing what manatees do best – placidly swimming just under the water’s surface. This species of manatee lives in our inland waterways, as warm waters on the coastal Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico.

Friends of Manatee Lagoon is located at Manatee Lagoon in Riviera Beach, Fla., working with environmental partners to conduct research and present information that will lead to healthier coastal ecosystems. Friends of Manatee Lagoon is a tax-exempt not-for-profit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. For more information, visit FriendsOfManateeLagoon.org or contact Anne Messer directly at anne.messer@friendsofmanateelagoon.org or 561.322.8857.

