

Marine Mammal Commission
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

21 April 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist
Governor, State of Florida
Office of the Governor
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Dear Governor Crist:

The Marine Mammal Commission seeks your support for efforts to maintain warm-water refuges essential for the winter survival of Florida manatees. Perhaps half of all manatees rely on warm-water outfalls at various power plants in Florida to survive cold winter temperatures. Although two of those plants have recently been repowered to run on natural gas, most others are aging, oil-fired plants that may soon be retired or replaced by new facilities that will not discharge warm-water effluent. Closure of these plants could lead to the deaths of large numbers of manatees from cold stress, concentrate remaining animals at fewer sites (e.g., Miami and Fort Lauderdale, where food resources for manatees are limited), and precipitate the need for controversial new protection measures in those areas. The results could undermine past progress toward manatee recovery and removal from state and federal endangered species lists. Management actions are urgently needed to avoid such adverse effects.

The development, testing, and implementation of alternative warm-water sources likely will cost several million dollars annually over the next decade or more. We have written to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recommend that they establish a revolving fund to make the necessary resources available for such an effort. A copy of our letter is enclosed. One possible approach would be asking the Florida Power Commission to authorize a one- to three-cent per month increase in Florida electric utility bills, with proceeds going to the fund. We also recommended that the two agencies consult with Reliant Energy to construct a prototype warm-water refuge. A recent study supported by the Marine Mammal Commission and Reliant Energy suggests that such a prototype might cost \$1.5 million.

I enclose two papers that the Commission prepared to analyze background information on this issue, as well as the report we funded to develop a conceptual design and cost estimates for a prototype refuge. Any help your office could provide with establishing a revolving fund of the nature we suggest would be greatly appreciated.

As you may know, members of the Marine Mammal Commission are appointed by the President of the United States to provide advice on marine mammal research and conservation. The Chairman of the Commission, Dr. John Reynolds of St. Petersburg, Florida, has studied manatee biology and their use of warm-water refuges for more than 30 years. If it would be helpful, Dr.

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Reynolds would be pleased to meet or talk with you or your staff about this or other manatee conservation issues.

We thank you for your efforts to promote proactive, collaborative solutions to difficult conservation issues involving the Florida manatee. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about our request.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Enclosures