

Manatee Regional Monitoring in the Mesoamerican Reef Region

Belize



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Photo: Annelise Hagan

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Current Threats

- Watercraft collisions (mostly in Belize City)
- Entanglement in fishing gear
- Poaching
- Watershed impacts – water contamination / pollution
- Coastal Development
- Climate change affecting ecosystems
- Direct Tourism Impacts (feeding, changing behaviour)

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Emerging Threats

- Oil Exploration
- Increased development and cruise tourism in key coastal and marine areas (manatee areas)
- Increased watershed impacts (new dam construction, oil exploration)
- Climate change (more sedimentation in rivers etc., alteration of habitats)

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Priorities and Needs (required resources)

Priorities

- Declaration of Placencia Lagoon as a Wildlife Sanctuary 2
- Address increasing manatee deaths in Belize River- Protection status for Belize River key manatee area (special management area)
- Understanding transboundary connectivity – affects ability to manage the species in Port Honduras / Corozal Bay (north is less of a priority – more knowledge).
- Strengthening of transboundary collaboration, communication and management and research across boundaries
- Building capacity within Forest Department for management of manatees, strengthening prosecution
- Need more accurate abundance / population estimate
- Strengthening mainstreaming of biodiversity in national planning – e.g. NEAC
- Revision of Wildlife Protection Act – higher fines
- Formalise requirement for tour guide training / tour boat captains for manatee guiding
- Strengthening the National Manatee Working Group and collaboration between members (e.g. Port Authority, BTB etc.)
- Strengthening of manatee rescue and manatee Rehabilitation Centre facilities

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Needs

- Finalize revision of Manatee Recovery Plan
- Address weak protected area management effectiveness in key manatee protected areas (Gales Point / Swallow Caye)
- Monitoring manatees and resource use outside protected areas and engaging stakeholders (e.g. Hopkins)
- Health assessments of manatees
- Transboundary movements in southern Belize
- Use of improved technology for monitoring manatees in specific locations
- Financial resources for all of the above

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Strengths

- National Coordinating Mechanism – National Manatee Working Group
- Manatee Program coordinator
- Strong protected area network, with revised NPAS Act.
- Technical capacity for research and planning
- Rescue, and Rehabilitation Facilities
- Supportive population (mostly)
- Good national policies, plans and strategies
- Strong international partners
- Have tools and materials for education and outreach
- National strengths in GIS mapping of ecosystems (Forest Department)

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Weaknesses

- Weak enforcement and prosecution
- Lack of financial resources
- Weak implementation of good national policies, plans and strategies
- Weak compliance in the tourism sector
- Need strengthened stranding network
- Work with co-management agencies to implement standardized education and outreach activities
- Strengthen Forest Department's role in protection of manatees and enforcement of legislation
- Strengthen designation and enforcement of No Wake zones

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Regional Strengthening

- Improving / strengthening technical transboundary and regional communication and collaboration
- Improve regional management and research
- More regional meetings and local exchanges

How will aerial surveys assist?

- Identify abundance and population trends / estimates over time
- Distribution and trends in localised, under surveyed area
- Boat mapping
- Identify Watershed / coastal land use change
- Coastal /marine ecosystem mapping – seagrass and coastal ecosystem (finer scale)

Thank You for your attention!