

Florida Manatee Movement And Habitat Use In The Northern Gulf Of Mexico

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West Indian manatees (*Trichechus manatus*) have been documented historically in the northern Gulf of Mexico (NGOM) during warmer months. With recent population increases, their use of this region has also been increasing, but their distribution, movements, and resource use have not been well documented. Since 2007, USGS researchers have been conducting studies on manatee movements and habitat use in the NGOM. Our current study seeks to document the extent of migrations and determine patterns of habitat use to aid the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and other agencies to better understand manatee interactions with energy industry shipping and operations in the region. This study is providing information on spatial and temporal use of the NGOM by manatees, the health and disposition of individual manatees traversing the study area, and the extent and quality of the habitat they may use. Tools that are being used to create maps of functional habitat types include capturing and assessing manatees that use this region, documenting individuals through photo-id, interpreting their movements through satellite telemetry, and investigating use areas. Additionally, detailed assessments of the underlying habitat components (i.e., water body physical characteristics, water quality, vegetation species assemblages, coverage and density) contribute to our knowledge of manatee habitat use and movement patterns within the region. This information will help managers in the NGOM understand and protect and this federally-threatened species.