

MARINE MAMMALS

Manatee mortality at 3-year high in 2016

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According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, a total of 520 manatees died in 2016, reaching a high for recent years. Photo by Jim Reid/USFWS, courtesy of Flickr.

Florida manatees and boats did not mix well in 2016.

A record 104 manatees died due to watercraft in 2016, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's preliminary manatee mortality [report](#). The year also saw a recent high in overall manatee mortality, with 520 manatees reported dead from a variety of causes — cold stress, natural reasons and human-related causes, among others.

The 2016 death number is the highest in the past three years. In 2013, 830 manatees were reported dead, a spike likely due to a massive toxic algal blooms.

Out of the 520 deaths in 2016, 104 were due to watercraft, and the causes of 151 manatee deaths remain undetermined.

"Despite official happy-talk, Florida's manatees remain in a most precarious position," **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility** staff counsel Laura Dumais said in a statement.

FWC did not respond to a request for comment in time for publication.

Last year, the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed downgrading the West Indian manatee to a threatened status under the Endangered Species Act. FWS said in its proposed rule that the manatee populations seem resilient to large die-offs.

"It's really good news," Jim Valade, FWS's Florida manatee recovery coordinator, said at the time. "It's like taking manatees out of intensive care and putting them in a regular care facility" ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 7, 2016).

The sea cows also hit a record-high population in 2015, with a total of 6,063 manatees counted ([Greenwire](#), March 17, 2015).

But the high numbers aren't convincing everyone that manatees are in a good spot for delisting.

"Without stronger safeguards, population increases merely put more manatees in danger of being sliced up by speedboat propellers," Dumais said.

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