



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0916

June 14, 2021

The Honorable Martha Williams
Principal Deputy Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Director Williams:

I write to request that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) exercise its authority to upgrade the manatee's status from "threatened" to "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

According to FWS, there are around 6,500 Florida manatees living in the southeastern United States. Tragically, a staggering 761 manatees have died so far this year. That number is on pace to shatter the previous record set in 2018 with a total of 804 deaths.

As you know, in 2017 your agency downgraded their status to "threatened," which I formally objected to at the time and warned would "lead to a decline in the manatee population."

Manatees are beloved, iconic mammals in Florida, and we should be doing everything in our power to protect them and ensure their continued survival. Considering the number of manatee deaths so far this year, redesignating the manatee as endangered, which provides for the highest levels of federal protection and conservation efforts, is critical.

There is a broad consensus among marine biologists and conservationists that the driving force behind the rapidly growing death rate is the degradation of the water quality in manatee habitats, growing levels of water pollution and an increase of harmful algal blooms that kill off seagrass.

As seagrass disappears, manatees starve to death. Wildlife observers noted earlier this year that many of the dead manatees washing up on the shores were seriously emaciated.

Manatees faced extinction in the late 1960s and it took decades for them to recover under the ESA's robust regime of protections.

Again, I urge you to re-designate the manatee as endangered to ensure the survival of these gentle giants. Time is of the essence.

I look forward to your prompt reply on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vern Buchanan".

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress