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## Manatee habitats face federal review

*BY JIM WAYMER  
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Federal officials plan to take a second look at their 1976 list of areas considered most critical for the long-term survival of the sea cow.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this week agreed to review the manatee's "critical habitat" list, after four environmental groups petitioned the agency. The agency assures that new critical habitat areas won't automatically mean more restrictions on the water.

But the environmental groups say the designation adds another level of scrutiny on permits for docks and other marine structures within the endangered species' most crucial habitats.

Some contractors worry because the spots under consideration are where residents might want a dock, mooring area or other structure. And the prospect of permit scrutiny comes at an inopportune time for an industry reeling from the recession.

"It is simply a means of trying to tie up the status quo in more knots," said Steven Webster, former executive director of Florida Marine Contractors Association, a trade group of dock builders. "When you create new designation in areas, you suddenly find that regulators do not know how to apply those new designations in those areas."

Webster lives on Merritt Island along Newfound Harbor, one of the waterways being considered as critical habitat.

New "critical habitat" designations could make permits for docks and other marine structures more difficult in natural tributaries to the Indian River Lagoon such as the Sykes Creek, Mullet Creek, Turkey Creek and Crane Creek.

Even manmade canals such as Barge Canal, Berkeley Canal in Satellite Beach and the C-54 Canal along Brevard's southern border are being considered for future "critical" habitat.

Other new areas proposed by the four environmental groups include: St. Sebastian River, Grand Canal and the Cocoa Beach residential canals, Rinkers Canal, Banana Creek, Haulover Canal, Bair's Cove, and the Mosquito Lagoon in Brevard and Volusia counties, and all other associated waterways.

Current "critical habitat" includes general geographic areas: the Banana River and all waterways between Indian and Banana River; and the entire inland section of the Indian River Lagoon, from its northernmost point south of the intersection of U.S. 1 and State Road 3.

The environmental groups that petitioned for the review want the "critical habitat" list to include more specific areas, as well as the reasons for listing them.

"It just ensures a more official review," said Pat Rose, executive director of the Save the Manatee Club, a Maitland-based environmental group.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials say "critical habitats" areas are designated, in part, to raise awareness, and don't always lead to changes in permitting.

"If manatees occur in the area, you may have to jump through that hoop anyway, regardless if that's critical habitat," said Chuck Underwood, spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The agency expects to complete its review by December, then decide whether to move forward with designating the proposed areas.

New areas won't affect current slow-speed boating zones, either, officials said.

But boaters say designating new "critical habitats," such as Barge Canal, would make it tougher to remove the slow zones there that they say are too restrictive and no help to manatees.

"It creates another layer, another impediment toward removing unnecessary zones," Webster said.

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## Additional Facts

Headed for list?

The environmental groups that petitioned for the review want the "critical habitat" list to include more specific areas, including the following in Brevard County:

- Sebastian River, C-54 Canal, Mullet Creek, Turkey Creek, Crane Creek, Berkeley Canal, Grand Canal and the Cocoa Beach residential canals, Newfound Harbor, Sykes Creek, the Canaveral Barge Canal, Rinkers Canal, Banana Creek, Haulover Canal, Bair's Cove, and the Mosquito Lagoon in Brevard and Volusia Counties (much of which is part of the Canaveral National Seashore), and all other associated waterways. Current "critical habitat" includes these geographic areas in :
  - The Banana River and all waterways between Indian and Banana River.
  - The entire inland section of the Indian River Lagoon, from its northernmost point south of the intersection of U.S. 1 and North Courtenay Parkway.
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