

“Gifford Cut” is located just north of the Vero Beach Municipal Marina and east of Joe S. Earman Park. The ICW is located on the west side of the islands and allows the skiers some relief from boat traffic. Another favorite ski location, the "Jungle Trail Narrows," is a congested and hazardous area.

Wabasso Causeway Park can be best described as the County's premier multi-use area. Swimming, fishing, canoeing and boating are regularly observed at the park. Sailboarders are known to congregate toward the west end of Wabasso Causeway Park. Also, PWC users are often found utilizing Wabasso Causeway, since the causeway is one of only a few places in the county where PWCs have public access to a launching site. A watercraft testing area is located in an unregulated zone near the south county line between Channel Markers 149 and 156.

Recent Modifications to Speed Zones

In January 2000, a number of non-governmental environmental organizations filed suit against the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) alleging that the FWC had not done enough to protect endangered manatees in the state. In September 2002, as part of a settlement of that lawsuit, the FWC approved increased boating speed zone restrictions in the Jungle Trail Narrows and at the Vero Beach Power Plant.

- **Vero Beach Power Plant**

The Vero Beach Power Plant and surrounding IRL waters are considered by the State to be a manatee sanctuary of statewide importance. Prior to September 2002, the speed zone within the Vero Isle “finger” canals, just north of the Vero Beach Power Plant, was “idle speed” year round. In September 2002, boating restrictions within the westernmost finger canal and the western most part of the entrance canal were changed to “no entry” from November 15 through March 31 and idle speed the remainder of the year. Property owners within the ‘no entry’ area receive a decal to allow them access to their property at idle speed.

- **Jungle Trail Narrows**

The Jungle Trail Narrows is a sensitive area with respect to manatee protection. In 2001, the State identified the Jungle Trail Narrows as one of eight “hot spots” in Florida warranting additional manatee protection through revised boating speed restrictions. The sensitivity of the area is largely due to multiple-uses (i.e., water-skiing, existing residential marinas and the Intracoastal Waterway channel) occurring in a narrow section of the Lagoon that serves as a “gauntlet” for migrating manatees. As a result, in September 2002, the State revised boating speed restrictions in the Narrows to slow-speed year-round outside of the Intracoastal channel.

The State’s strengthening of boater speed zone restrictions in IRL waters adjacent to the Vero Beach Power Plant and in the Jungle Trail Narrows is indicative of the sensitivity of those areas with respect to manatee protection. Due to that sensitivity, the establishment of new or expanded boat facilities in those areas should be prohibited or otherwise discouraged, except

Zone 8

Although no manatee mortalities attributed to watercraft have been recorded in Zone 8, the probability of watercraft impacts to manatees is high, since Zone 8 is a dense manatee abundance area. Large manatee aggregations have been documented in various areas of this zone including the Moorings Subdivision and Round Island Park. Part of the reason for the manatee abundance may be the warm water refuge at the City of Vero Beach Power Plant located across the IRL west of the ICW in Zone 9. The existing maximum 1:100 powerboat to shoreline density ratio should be retained for Zone 8.

Zone 9

Within this zone, most of the land adjacent to the IRL has been deemed environmentally sensitive due to the presence of estuarine wetlands. Five watercraft-related manatee mortalities have been recorded in Zone 9, including 2 in 2000 and 1 in 2001. The City of Vero Beach Power Plant is a significant manatee aggregation area resulting from the warm water discharge. Portions of the residential canal system associated with the Power Plant have been identified by the FWC as one of eight “safe havens” in the state. The purpose of these “safe havens” is to provide areas for feeding, shelter, and birthing associated with warm water refuge sites. Seagrass density and manatee abundance increase just south of the South Relief Canal outfall, and combined with the abundance associated with the Power Plant increase, the probability of manatee impacts with watercraft in Zone 9. Therefore, the existing maximum 1:100 powerboat to shoreline density ratio should be retained for Zone 9.

In addition to zones, specific criteria found in the Action Plan section will be applied to each request for a new boat facility or for the expansion, rearrangement, or conversion of an existing boat facility. These site-specific criteria have been designed to account for site-specific issues related to manatee protection. These site-specific criteria will be in addition to the boat facility siting zone requirements and criteria.

Siting of Boat Ramps

The FWC siting factors/considerations for multi-slip dock facilities also provide a basis for developing criteria for the siting of new boat ramps, or for the rearrangement, or expansion of an existing boat ramp. In order to minimize adverse impacts to manatees and the resources of the IRL, boat ramps are best located:

- in areas with few natural resources;
- in areas where water depths are appropriate for the type of vessels using the boat ramp;
- in areas with low manatee abundance; and
- in areas with low manatee mortality.

Based on analysis of maps of the IRL depicting natural resources, water depths, existing boat ramp facilities, manatee abundance, and manatee mortality, specific criteria should be applied to each application for a new boat ramp or for the expansion, rearrangement, or conversion of