



June 1, 2022

RE: U.S. House Resolution 4946 – Manatee Protection Act of 2021

Florida Delegation
117th U.S. Congress
Washington, D.C.

Dear Honorable Members of the Florida Delegation:

On May 27th, 2022, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) Policy Board expressed unanimous support for proposed federal legislation to relist the West Indian manatee, *Trichechus manatus*, as an endangered species ([U.S. House Resolution 4946](#)). Approximately 1,101 manatee mortalities were reported in 2021, bringing the total statewide population to about 7,500 individuals. This recent mass mortality event has been attributed to significant losses of seagrass along Florida's east coast – the primary food source for the manatee. Recent seagrass losses along Florida's southwest Gulf coast are prompting additional concerns for the long-term status of this iconic Florida species. Likewise, watercraft-related mortalities averaged 113 deaths per year from 2017-2021 and remain a pressing concern in our region.. It is with these recent statistics that the TBEP Policy Board felt that additional protections are warranted for this species.

The TBEP is one of 28 federally-recognized National Estuary Programs, an independent special district of the state of Florida, and an intergovernmental partnership between Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco and Pinellas counties; the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD); and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The TBEP's mission is to build partnerships to restore and protect the natural resources endemic to the Tampa Bay watershed and estuary. These partners have pledged, through a binding [Interlocal Agreement](#), to achieve the science-based goals and priorities of [Charting the Course: The Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan](#) for Tampa Bay (CCMP). Chief among these goals is preserving the diversity and abundance of bay wildlife ([Goal FW-6](#)) that make our piece of Florida unique and support our regional economy.

2022 is already on pace with last year's mass mortality event, with an additional 559 manatee mortalities estimated so far. It is with this sense of urgency that the TBEP and its Policy Board respectfully request action by Congress. Currently, H.R. 4946 has been referred to the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife. Relisting the manatee as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 will ensure that continued efforts to rebuild the population are coordinated and appropriately funded among local, state and federal interests. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone (727) 893-2765 or email (eshерwood@tbep.org), if you have any questions regarding TBEP's support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ed Sherwood".

Ed Sherwood
Executive Director

TAMPA BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM

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POLICY BOARD: HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, MANATEE COUNTY, PINELLAS COUNTY, PASCO COUNTY, CITY OF CLEARWATER, CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG,
CITY OF TAMPA, FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, SOUTHWEST FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT,
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY.