

## **Boat and Aircraft Operations**

### **Safety:**

Boats/crews must meet all safety requirements per their ICS-204 form for environmental and safety information.

### **Avoiding Vessel Strikes to Wildlife in Boat Operations:**

The US Army Corps of Engineers has prepared a document for “STANDARD MANATEE CONDITIONS FOR IN-WATER WORK 2011” at:

[http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Regulatory/DOCS/endangered/2011\\_StandardConditionsForIn-waterWork.pdf](http://www.saj.usace.army.mil/Divisions/Regulatory/DOCS/endangered/2011_StandardConditionsForIn-waterWork.pdf). This document outlines standard practices to minimize vessel impacts to Manatees.

Vessel Strike Avoidance and Injured/Dead Protected Species Reporting – Bureau of Ocean Energy Management/Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BOEM/BSEE)

<http://www.bsee.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Notices-to-Lessees/2012/2012-JOINT-G01-pdf.aspx>

### **Manatee Restrictions:**

There are numerous state and federal manatee protection areas established along Florida's Gulf and Atlantic coasts. These protected areas are the locations where manatees are most likely to be found and are most vulnerable to death or injury due to collisions with boats. Therefore these protection areas typically require waterborne vessels to travel at reduced speeds although some manatee protection areas are designated as no entry or motorboat prohibited zones (*See the Manatee Guidelines for Oil Spill Response Appendix*).

The exception to these restrictions is if action is necessary to prevent the loss of life or property due to weather conditions or other reasonably unforeseen circumstances, or to render necessary assistance to persons or property. In these cases, “property” refers to waterborne vessels.

Therefore, unless there is a need to protect human life or prevent the loss of a vessel, there should be no need to violate these restrictions during the spill response.

Regarding no entry areas, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission issued Executive Order 10-23 that allows entry into specified No Entry and Motorboat Prohibited areas provided that entry is part of an activity authorized by Unified Command, the United States Coast Guard, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The areas that are covered and the specific guidelines of this order can be found at:

[http://www.myfwc.com/docs/AboutFWC/ExecutiveOrders/2010/EO\\_10\\_23\\_ManateeZoneExemption.pdf](http://www.myfwc.com/docs/AboutFWC/ExecutiveOrders/2010/EO_10_23_ManateeZoneExemption.pdf)

In the event that a vessel in the response strikes a manatee; the vessel should remain on-scene, if possible, and the operator should immediately contact the Wildlife Alert Hotline at **1-888-404-3922** and be prepared to provide the incident location, weather conditions, boat specifications, and other relevant

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information. Accidental collisions in conjunction with otherwise lawful activities are not likely to be prosecuted.

**Private Property:**

Do not trespass on private property. If appropriate, ask permission to access the property from the land owner. If permission cannot be obtained to access the property, make a note, record waypoints, and move on to the next portion of the survey.

**Public Property:**

See the *Special Conditions for Access to Public and Private Lands Appendix* for special conditions on public lands.

**Communications:**

All Boats are to be equipped with VHF radios. Each designated staging area will have a Task Force Leader stationed at the boat ramp. Boats will be able to communicate with Task Force Leader. See the *Florida Wildlife Operations Contacts Appendix* for general contact information.

**Boat Launches:**

Boat ramps are mapped in the Area Contingency Plan - Geographic Response Plan maps that can be found as interactive PDF atlases by USCG Sector Digital Area Contingency Plan.

<http://ocean.floridamarine.org/acp>

Boat ramps are also mapped in the FWC/USCG Geographic Response Plan interactive web mapping viewer (an online Geographic Information System).

<http://ocean.floridamarine.org/ACPGRP/GRPViewer/>

Boat ramps can also be found on the FWC Office of Boating and Waterways internet portal specific to Public Boat Ramps in Florida.

<http://www.myfwc.com/boatramps>

**Transport of Ground Teams:**

There are some locations that will need to be searched by ground teams, but are only accessible via boat. Some boat operations will be deployed to drop off and pickup ground teams at their search locations. Anytime boats are employed solely to transport ground teams, these boats will be required to stay on location, within communication distance of the ground team, for safety and support purposes.

Shorelines/Barrier Islands:

- Boat and propeller must come to a complete stop before crew members attempt to climb out of the boat.

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- If boat can't get close enough to shore for safely climbing out of boat, attempt will be made at another point along shoreline. If the boat is not able to get close enough for passengers to safely climb out of boat, delay getting on island until another boat can be acquired to safely access the island. No swimming from boat to island.
- If a large boat has a small skiff or inflatable to get to shore, that is an acceptable practice.
- Avoid scouring and prop-scarring of submerged aquatic vegetation (sea grass).

Marsh Shoreline:

- Boat and propeller must come to a complete stop before crew members attempt to climb out of the boat.
- Ability of marsh ground to support human weight can be variable. If unsure or new to area, test supportability of ground to ensure footing is sufficient. In addition with bayou or creeks, check water depth before exiting the boat.
- Minimize damaging marsh vegetation/habitat with boat operations as well as search and recovery efforts.

**Shoreline monitoring and on-water live oiled wildlife and oiled carcass retrieval:**

Boat operations will be directed to monitor sensitive marsh shorelines that are inaccessible to ground teams, capture live oiled wildlife on the water, and retrieve oiled carcasses from the water and along marsh shoreline habitats.

Boat operation teams assigned to monitor shoreline habitats should use appropriately sized vessels for shallow shoreline work and avoiding damage to submerged habitats. While monitoring and searching for carcasses, the vessel speed should be slow enough for a thorough search based on observer skills.

**Aircraft Use over coastal lands:**

All aircraft are requested to maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above the surface of lands and waters administered by the NPS, FWS, or USFWS Wilderness areas unless other altitudes and horizontal buffer distances are permitted by incident specific authorization. The [FAA Advisory Circular \(AC 91-36C\), "Visual Flight Rules \(VFR\) Flight Near Noise Sensitive Areas,"](#) defines the surface as: the highest terrain within 2,000 feet laterally of the route of flight, or the uppermost rim of a canyon or valley. All aircraft are requested to maintain a minimum altitude of 500 feet over any shorebird, seabird, wading bird, or white crowned pigeon nesting areas. Maps of active nesting sites should be obtained through the Incident Command System via the Environmental Unit in Planning, the Wildlife Branch in the Operations Section or by contacting the FWC or FWRI and requesting such maps. An additional reference is the Florida Shorebirds Database Internet Portal, which maintains recent survey data on shorebird and shorebird nesting activity in Florida. <https://public.myfwc.com/crossdoj/shorebirds/index.html>.