

## THE MANATEE DILEMMA

This is a fast breaking issue that has been dominating FMCA efforts for some months. As you know, on January 4th the federal government (Army Corps of Engineers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service) caved in to the Save the Manatee Club (SMC), et al, and we inherited the egregious Manatee Agreement, the Interim Manatee Guidance Document, and the ACOE Manatee Key. The industry interveners (Marine Industry Association of Florida, National Marine Manufacturers Association, and two other industry groups) accepted the "Agreement." Two days later, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission aerial survey showed a forty-seven percent increase in the manatee population in one year. But, the die was cast and we were faced with an explosion of manatee habitats, an extortion of contributions before permit applications could be considered, severe new application requirements, and inordinate delays in the permit processing.

In a parallel action at the state level, the FFWCC staff recommended to the Commission acceptance of the plaintiff's draft agreement "as being in the best interests of the agency." Again, the promises of more refuges and sanctuaries, more enforcement, and surrendering staff oversight to the SMC. Before reaching a decision, the Commission met in Orlando on April 19th to take public input. The Executive Office of the Governor dominated the meeting and lobbied effectively for acceptance, over the vocal objections of some 45 speakers and some ten organizations. The vote for acceptance was 5:1. Two commissioners did not show up.

Your FMCA fought hard for a different outcome. Ed Day and Doug Speeler made a lobbying trip to Tallahassee. A week later Ed Day was back at it in Tallahassee for three days and even got an audience with the Governor. Rick Fender and Ed Day fought hard in Orlando and presented five good reasons for the Commission to reject the state agreement. On the bright side, two developments offer some real promise:

--- We were able to get the FFWCC to direct their staff to prepare an improved "Recovery Plan" that could remove the manatee from their endangered species listing. We are lobbying hard to insure that the plan includes hard numbers, rather than calling for population growth to infinity. We know the manatee should be off the list now and is not endangered. The FWS is also reexamining its "Recovery Plan." The latest conversations were held with the FWS at our Board meeting in Clearwater on April 28th. They still are not willing to identify a number of manatees that will "insure survivability." We won't give up on this matter.

--- We have reached a side-bar agreement with the Executive Office of the Governor that could spell the end of the Manatee Guidance Document and the associated permit fee extortion within a couple of months. The details of that agreement should not be published here; however, FWS officials relate that the possibility is real and the discussion process ongoing.

At the same time, eight FMCA members did a superior job of representing the Association at eight statewide public hearings held by the FWS. In each case, the FWS came away bloodied and our people received splendid press.

In all this, FMCA was there, is there, and will continue to be there for you, our valued members.