

A bipartisan bill could save the manatees

- Preston Robertson, Florida Wildlife Federation
- [The Citrus County Chronicle](#)
- Dec 15, 2019



Like many other forms of aquatic life the manatee lives in a delicate ecosystem. Harmful algae can harm manatee, fish and humans if not controlled.

Floridians love our manatees, the gentle, lumbering aquatic mammals that gather by the hundreds each winter at freshwater springs replete with warm water and seagrass. Having this kind of wildlife experience in our backyard is part of what makes Florida such a great place to live.

Unfortunately, the future of the manatee cannot be taken for granted. Today, many places where manatees congregate for the winter are facing an ongoing problem. Invasive algae grows into thick mats and smothers eelgrass and other plants manatees depend on. Algae blooms are also problematic for fish, scallops and even people.

This is an economic as well as environmental problem. In Citrus County, manatee viewing is reportedly the main reason visitors come to the county, while scalloping and fishing place second and third. Algae outbreaks place all these activities at risk. Statewide, economic activities that depend on wildlife such as fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing generate nearly \$15 billion in economic activity.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) works to protect and restore the places where manatee congregate, but the FWC lacks the funding to fully implement its plan to help manatees and the nearly 700 other wildlife species that face threats.

Just as we invest in a business, we need to invest in the future of Florida's wildlife, including manatee-watching sites like Crystal River and Homosassa Springs.

That's why a bipartisan group of nine Florida House Representatives — Crist, Demings, Gaetz, Hastings, Lawson, Mast, Rutherford, Shalala and Soto — have gotten behind a bill called the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. This bill would send more than \$40 million annually to the FWC to support proactive, locally led voluntary wildlife conservation.

We encourage every member of the Florida delegation in Washington to join the list of cosponsors. Citrus County's representative, Daniel Webster, sits on the House Natural Resources Committee, which will soon vote on the bill. His vote could be critical for its passage.

I hope generations to come will be able to experience the magic of manatees. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will make smart investments in wildlife, our economy, and our children and deserves all Floridians' support.