



Save the Manatee® Club

The Voice For Manatees Since 1981

September 15, 2026

The Honorable Harriet Hageman, Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee

The Honorable Val Hoyle, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries
House Natural Resources Committee

Save the Manatee Club's Statement of Strong Support: H.R. 9590

Dear Chair Hageman and Ranking Member Hoyle,

Save the Manatee Club ("SMC") enthusiastically supports H.R. 9590 and respectfully urges all members of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries to support this bill at the Subcommittee's Legislative Hearing scheduled for September 16, 2026. This bill directly addresses the greatest long-term threat to manatees: loss and degradation of essential habitat, especially warm-water winter habitat that manatees require to survive. This bill directs the Secretary of the Interior, with support from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to conduct a study to identify and assess sources of warm-water habitat for manatees that currently depend on industrial sources of warm water, like power plant outfalls, to survive cold weather.

Established in 1981 by former Florida governor Bob Graham and singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett, SMC is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to safeguarding manatees and preserving their habitat. Widely beloved by Floridians and our millions of yearly visitors, the manatee is the Florida state marine mammal, a major driver of tourism, and a strong example of success for the United States' and Florida's wildlife protection laws. However, recent challenges faced by this species — such as the tragic 2020-2022 Unusual Mortality Event, which claimed the lives of over 1,200 manatees largely due to starvation from pollution-driven seagrass loss — highlight why proactive protections for manatees are needed now more than ever.

Despite manatees' rotund appearance, they have very little fat on their bodies and thus, thermoregulate poorly. Prolonged exposure to waters cooler than 68°F can cause manatees to suffer from a condition called cold stress, similar to hypothermia in humans, which can be fatal. Historically, manatees utilized Florida's natural springs and rivers for warm water in the winter, but unsustainable development and degradation have diminished or altogether eliminated natural winter warm-water sources and driven manatees to become dependent upon

artificial sources. Currently, over 60% of Florida's manatees utilize industrial warm-water outfalls; this situation is unsustainable, as many power plants will inevitably be decommissioned or transition to technologies that do not discharge warm water. The SAFE for Manatees Act will generate a road map to navigate this complex issue.

Manatees hold tremendous ecological, economic, and cultural importance to Floridians and our millions of yearly visitors. Manatees are a keystone species, which means that their wellbeing can indicate the wellbeing of entire ecosystems. As grazers, manatees keep aquatic vegetation healthy and ecosystems balanced. Manatees additionally contribute tens of millions of dollars to Florida's economy annually through ecotourism, invasive aquatic vegetation control, and by supporting specific job types.

For the reasons stated herein, Save the Manatee Club urges the committee to support H.R. 9590 at the September 16, 2026 hearing. The SAFE for Manatees Act will help to resolve one of the greatest long-term threats to Florida's beloved manatees.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Neville

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