

February 7, 2019

RE: Moore's Creek Manatee Protection Status

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is considering a reduction in the manatee protection status of Moore's Creek from "motorboat prohibited zone" to "idle speed zone" in response to requests from a Fort Pierce citizen to open the Moore's Creek boat ramp during the winter months. Their recommendation is based on preliminary data analyses indicating lower manatee utilization in Moore's Creek since the H.D. King power plant was decommissioned in 2008.

The Manatee Observation and Education Center (MOEC) opposes any change to the manatee protection zone in Moore's Creek, based on the following:

- 1. Moore's Creek manatee sightings have not decreased appreciably** between 1996 and 2019, as evidenced by on-the-ground data collected from MOEC staff and volunteers through the years.
- 2. Moore's Creek manatee sightings are significantly higher in the winter months**, when the Moore's Creek boat ramp is currently closed.
- 3. There are six (6) public boat ramps within less than five (5) miles of the Moore's Creek Boat Ramp**, allowing for minimal inconvenience to boaters in the wintertime when the Moore's Creek Boat Ramp is currently closed.
- 4. Moore's Creek is an important natural habitat for manatees** with freshwater access, warmer temperatures due to shallow depths, and minimal disturbance from boats.
- 5. Public perception of a shift away from manatee protection at this time would likely be negative**, especially given manatee mortality in 2018 was the 2nd highest ever recorded.
- 6. Tourists visit Fort Pierce, FL from around the world for their chance to learn and see a manatee in Moore's Creek**, specifically during the winter months, which is also the local high season.

The Manatee Center also recognizes significant opportunity for growth in citizen science and restoration efforts of this local lagoon habitat in Downtown Fort Pierce. A rule change of this magnitude in direct opposition to our mission could weaken our position as future hosts of research and family-friendly environmental education and entertainment.