

Clearwater Marine Aquarium Receives Grant Over \$17K for Manatee Research

Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida grant funds to monitor manatee use of Silver River

Tallahassee, Fla. (November 21, 2019) – Clearwater Marine Aquarium is the proud recipient of a \$17,098 grant from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida to monitor manatee use of the Silver River. The project seeks to learn more about how manatees are using the river, how often they return to it and if it is an optimal habitat for refuge.

“Clearwater Marine Aquarium is dedicated to preserving our environment and that begins with research and education,” said Dr. James “Buddy” Powell VP of Research and Conservation. “With thanks to the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida, we will be able to continue our mission by providing data that is vital to help preserve and protect the Silver River springs and the manatees that use them.”

Thanks to a citizen sighting network, several manatees were observed using the Silver River, a tributary of the Ocklawaha River, during the winter of 2017-2018. Last winter the river hosted an increased number of manatees because of a loss in vegetation at nearby springs. This adaptation in the manatees’ behavior highlighted the importance of maintaining a diversity of warm water sites within the St. Johns River in case a catastrophic event occurs at one or more springs.

Healthy warm water sites benefit more than manatees. Increased tourism for manatee sightings provides economic opportunity for the communities and businesses near Silver River. However, additional tourists on the water present opportunities for conflict with manatees, decreasing the animal’s ability to feed or rest. To mitigate these concerns, a key component of the project includes public education on the best practices for recreational viewing. Senior research scientist from Clearwater Marine Aquarium Monica Ross shared that “spotting a manatee is a cherished experience, but getting too close can be to their detriment, especially when they need to conserve energy for winter survival. Give a manatee at least 25 feet of space and never follow or pursue if they move away from you.”

“This project will not only help manatees in Silver River now, but has far-reaching, long-term benefits,” said foundation president and CEO Andrew Walker. “Ultimately this project will provide critical data to federal and state partners outlining a sustainable warm water network, helping to protect these habitats and the animals that depend on them.”

Grant funding came from the “Protect Florida Springs” license plate containing the image of a scuba diver. \$25 from each purchase of the springs tag supports the research, conservation and restoration of Florida’s freshwater springs. Grants were approved by the foundation board of



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directors at its September 30 meeting. This funding follows a recent partnership with The Nature Conservancy that involved a \$120,000 commitment to study manatees in the Panhandle and improve their habitat at Warm Mineral Springs.

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About the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida

The Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and other public and private partners to conserve Florida's native animals and plants and the lands and waters they need to survive. Since its founding in 1994, the foundation has raised and donated \$36 million to conservation and outdoor recreation and education. More information can be found at wildlifeflorida.org.

About Clearwater Marine Aquarium:

Clearwater Marine Aquarium (CMA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working marine rescue center dedicated to inspiring the human spirit through leadership in education, research, rescue, rehabilitation and release. CMA is home to rescued dolphins, sea turtles, river otters, stingrays, nurse sharks and more. Winter the dolphin's story of survival, after an injury that caused her to lose her tail, has impacted millions of people around the world. Major motion picture *Dolphin Tale* (2011) features Winter's story and its sequel *Dolphin Tale 2* (2014) features the incredible story of Hope, a young resident dolphin of CMA. Clearwater Marine Aquarium also conducts important global research focused on protecting manatees, right whales and sea turtles. The mission and potential to change people's lives differentiates Clearwater Marine Aquarium from any other aquarium in the world.

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WE BELIEVE in preserving our environment while inspiring the human spirit through leadership in the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of marine life, environmental education, research and conservation.

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A Florida non-profit 501(c)(3) organization