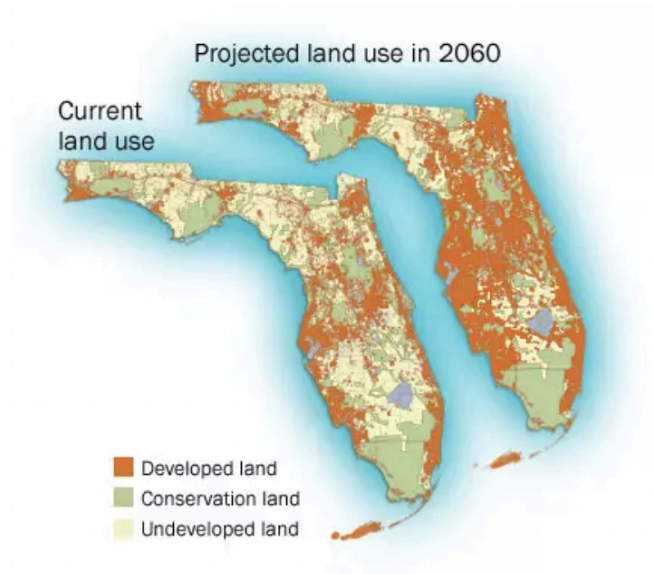


Advocating For Protected Manatee Habitats in Florida

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Isabella Trais and Alyssa Kruse

Over the last few years, it has become increasingly popular to move to Florida. It is predicted that if the population in Florida doubles by 2060 7 million acres of land will be converted from natural areas, where wildlife could thrive, to urban areas where the development of buildings, roads, housing, and more will take over and push wildlife from their homes. Competition between animals and humans will be at an all-time high. This puts Florida species at risk along with the health of the waterways and land.



The increased traffic in Florida is putting biodiversity at risk. Biodiversity is the richness and abundance of species that make up the vast life on our planet and is largely threatened due to anthropogenic (human-caused) impacts. This includes marine pollution and habitat destruction, such as deforestation and urban development. Biodiversity benefits humans and allows us to thrive by providing food, clean air, clean water, and pharmaceutical benefits. Maintaining biodiversity is also crucial for all species on Earth, allowing them to better adapt to the changing climate.

The West Indian and the Antillean manatee are essential species in Florida that are impacted by biodiversity loss. Manatees help maintain seagrass beds and with a decrease in species numbers, seagrass health will decline. Seagrass is significant to the health of Florida waters, it acts as a filter and provides habitat to many marine species. Because manatees are so important to Florida, we found it vital to advocate for creating more marine-protected areas for

them to inhabit. Preserving manatee habitats will allow biodiversity to thrive, and further protect manatees from other harms like boat strikes.

We created an advocacy campaign, to get Linda Chaney, a Florida Representative, to address the issue of decreasing manatee populations. Our advocacy campaign is trying to influence policy. We want her to allocate resources to protect manatees and work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to designate the amount of space they believe manatees should be given ([Fish and Wildlife Service Proposal](#)). Another goal we had in mind was teaching people about the importance of biodiversity.

The important part of our project was getting Linda Chaney to care about our advocacy campaign. The design of our project intended to do that, talk to an elementary school about biodiversity and manatee populations and have them help us advocate for more marine-protected areas. We wanted to speak to a younger audience to show Linda Chaney that future generations care about Florida's health and evoke emotion. We first sent a proposal to Linda Chaney requesting that more designated marine protected areas for the manatees in Florida be allocated. Then we got to talk to first through third-graders in St. Petersburg, FL. We created a presentation ([Biodiversity Presentation.pptx](#), [access presentation here](#)) for the children to follow and asked them to draw pictures of what nature meant to them, which allowed them to be engaged. Then at the end of the presentation, we asked them to draw a picture of a manatee and to include a message about saving the manatees. The message was short and memorable which helps show our goal. Originally we had them writing about why manatees are important to them, but switched to a drawing thinking it would fit our audience better. We hoped to amplify the voices of students to make them feel like they were making a difference in issues they cared about. We included public participation, which allowed people to share their concerns and be involved in environmental decision-making. We then mailed the children's drawings to Linda Chaney, and attached a note, reinforcing the importance of manatee habitat loss and population decline. We sent physical copies, using visual rhetoric, which offers a more compelling way to convey the urgency of an issue. The drawings by students are a form of environmental art as well.

Overall, our advocacy campaign has had some successes. For instance, presenting at the elementary school and getting a response from Linda Chaney's associate saying they would look into our request next year, was a couple of wins for us. We want to continue urging the Florida government to allocate more protected areas for manatees and marine species. Then we want to continue to work with Linda Chaney advocating for biodiversity conservation.



Drawings by students at an elementary school in, St. Petersburg, FL. Sent to Linda Chaney.

Google Doc Link:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ygUKLQQKGhF7aNvAEMg32aDRTv3yFSC76hV_DGCaan0/edit?usp=sharing

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