

# Manatee Recovery Unified Command Communications Plan and Processes v.7

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**Unified Command Communications Team:** Core team members are Chuck Underwood (FWS), Carli Segelson (FWC HSC), Kelly Richmond (FWC FWRI), Sarah Barrett (FWC HSC). FWC staff, Lisa Thompson, Carly Jones, Carol Davis, Jessica Pernell, Jonathan Veach, Taylor Proctor, and Ryan Sheets are involved in the day-to-day communications activities.

## General

- Proactively promote a variety of relevant topics via news release, media event or social media as appropriate to include but not limited to:
  - General UME updates
  - Unified Command staff working in the field
  - UME investigation status, when appropriate
  - Manatee mortality and necropsy
  - Manatee captures
  - Manatee releases
  - Highlighting partners efforts in rehabilitation
  - New rehab facilities coming on-line
  - Limited feeding trial implementation
  - Promote Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida (Foundation) reaching their donation goal.
- Work with outside partner communication staffs when appropriate to aid in keeping their organizations generally informed on UC enhanced operations and possible joint opportunities for targeted communications; these partners include but are not limited to Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) leadership and participating facilities, Florida Power and Light (FPL), and the Foundation.

## Content Clearance Process

In keeping with the direction from our respective Executive Leadership and the Unified Command (UC) communications objectives, external and internal information must flow within the context of the Incident Command System and in a timely manner. This means communications efforts are executed outside our normal respective agency communications processes. Extensive delays in receiving and clearing information allows other parties to set the communication agendas and control messaging that is out of sync with the overall response efforts.

- The Unified Command Joint Communications Team (JCT) is responsible for working with subject matter experts to compile, edit content for public and internal consumption, and, where necessary, getting UC staff reviews and clearances.
  - Exceptions to this internal UC process include situations that are precedent setting, discuss new or changing operational policy, unusually controversial, or anything that may need executive leadership awareness/involvement prior to moving forward. In these rare cases, the JCT will provide the information to the UC senior staff including co-commanders and agency administrators. The UC senior staff will request review and approval directly from FWS Southeast Regional Director and/or the FWC Executive Director or their designees. For clearing DOI Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks quotes, FWS Unified Command PIO will work directly with FWS HQ-EA to facilitate DOI Office of

Communications clearance. In all cases, the approval turn-around time of two (2) working days is requested.

- JCT will update and repurpose most content from existing approved information and further clearance beyond the JCT is unnecessary.
- JCT will vet new content through appropriate subject matter experts. The timely release of information is critical, so SMEs and supervisors should anticipate review turnaround times to be very short. Jargon will always be converted for public and media consumption.
- Reporting of statistical data (# of rescues, releases, etc.) is a standing request of executive leadership in both agencies, as well as the media. Therefore, while the communications team understands that much of what is reported is preliminary, we still need that information updated. Weekly statistical updates are sufficient for this purpose. As appropriate, shared statistical data will carry a disclaimer like the following:
  - For Reports: *The following data is considered preliminary and may change as datasets are processed and refined. Information is shared for general awareness and should not be considered final unless otherwise noted. Data are updated weekly as available.*
  - Web version: *Data are preliminary.*
- Florida Power & Light, Cape Canaveral Clean Energy Center (CCEC): Per FPL communications, all photos and videos taken at the TFRS will be reviewed by the JCT. As appropriate, photographers/videographers and/or their photos and video will also be reviewed and cleared by FPL communications prior to use.

## Media in General

- All UME response media requests come to the JCT. The communications team will determine how requests are addressed.
  - A communications team member will request the reporter submit questions via e-mail.
    - Focus is to repurpose existing approved content (FAQs, prior release, briefing papers) for most responses. When appropriate, draft responses with new content will be sent to experts for review before responding.
  - Set up interviews as appropriate.
  - Set up opportunities in the field when appropriate.
- Post updates online weekly during winter season, and then once a month for May, June, and November during off-season with option for additional postings as operational needs warrant.
  - Updates are populated with information from recurring Executive Leadership Report.
  - Due to the dynamic nature of the situation and to ensure the information is timely and accurate, SMEs will receive updates for review the day before publishing.
  - Cut-off for content input is noon on the day of publishing.
    - Anything received after that will get included in the next update unless it is of an emergency/urgent nature.
- Virtual Press Call (VPC)
  - VPC calls are scheduled as follows:
    - **Winter season** - weekly
      - Winter Season for VPC purposes – mid-December through mid- April.
      - Weekly each Wednesday at 11 AM ET.
    - **Off-season** – as noted below
      - Off Season for VPC purposes – May through November

- Monthly in May, June, and November with an option available for an additional VPC as operational needs warrant. Date and times to be determined closer to the start of the off-season.
- Virtual press calls typically feature UC's spokesperson with other experts selected to participate depending on the operational focus or emerging news. These experts would include:
  - Captain Thomas VanTrees – FWC Incident Co-Commander
  - Jon Wallace – FWS Incident Co-Commander
  - Andy Garrett – FWC for rescues/recovery/release branch
  - Ron Mezich – FWC for provisioning branch
  - Martine deWit, Leslie Ward or Margaret Barlas – FWC/FWRI for necropsy/mortality branch
  - Terri or Scott Calleson – FWS for the federal perspective on UME Investigation and the status of rehabilitation efforts
  - Monica Ross/Jon Peterson – Manatee Rescue & Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP) leadership to discuss their role
    - Other MRP Representative when appropriate
  - Others as needed
- A standard media advisory reminder is sent 1-2 days prior to the call with instructions on how to register.
- The JCT wants to take advantage of all possible positive news and information. Therefore, we recommend FWRI and MRP field staff conducting releases be allowed to continue their well-established process of addressing on-site public and media questions about rescues and releases. If there are questions about the UME not related to specific animal(s), they will defer back to the JCT.

## Social Media

- All social media content will be created by the JCT with help from appropriate SMEs. Content will follow the UC content clearance process.
- FWS to implement a FWS social media posting strategy that compliments and is consistent with the FWC UME posting. This includes resourcing an FWS social media lead to work jointly with FWC social media lead in implementing the FWS strategy.
  - FWS tagging of FWC and other partners is limited to non-fund-raising content.
- JCT staff to routinely interact with public comments posted on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.
  - FWC and FWS social media leads monitor comments and will address as appropriate.
- Weekly (winter season) or monthly (off-season) Facebook updates in coordination with web updates and virtual press call.
- Highlight various FAQs as they become hot or trending topics with the public and/or media.
- Send tweets about:
  - General updates
  - Tips on ways to help
  - Select focal topics related to the UME operations, water quality, brief/specific FAQs, rescues, manatee health

## Webpage Updates

- UME website is updated weekly (winter season) or monthly (off-season) via an update tab on the UME information page to include:
  - additional FAQs as needed,
  - short narrative on past week efforts, and
  - highlight message of the week mirroring social media efforts.
  - links to mortality, rescue data
  - add photos and b-roll as available to media resource page
  - add VPC recording w/ VTT file to media resources page
- Numbers to add later, if provisioning is implemented, include pounds of lettuce distributed, pounds of lettuce retrieved, number of animals present at the TFRS (when available). Posting this information is valuable and as with all data sets will carry a caveat that data are preliminary and may change in the future.

## Executive Leadership UC Updates

- Compiled by a JCT member
- Broadly distributed
  - Primary Distribution to executive and senior leadership
  - Secondary (courtesy copy) to broader list of agency staffs, private partners, and others, as appropriate
- Frequency
  - During enhanced-response periods (wintering season same as noted for VPCs)
    - Distributed weekly, every Thursday by close of business.
  - During reduced/normal operation periods (off season same as noted for VPCs)
    - Distributed monthly, every third Thursday of the month
- Content
  - Due to broad distribution, content should be limited to what is consider fully releasable under federal and state law.
  - Possible repurposing of existing content

## Congressional (Federal & State)

### Congressional

- Virtual Briefings as needed
  - Hosted by FWS congressional liaison (CLA) staff.
  - Coordinated through FWS and FWC CLAs:
    - Alyssa Hausman, FWS CLA (Federal DC offices)
    - Deke Tompkins, FWS Region 4, CLA (Federal FL district offices)
    - Jessica Melkun, FWC Acting Legislative Affairs Director (State)
    - Vacant, FWC Deputy Legislative Affairs Director (State)
    - Brian McManus, FWC Legislative Specialist (Federal)
  - Communications Team will assist in identifying SMEs with concurrence of UC senior staff.
  - A communications team member, in coordination with CLAs and SMEs, develops a proposed briefing outline and distributes to all participants.
  - Briefing Format
    - Virtual/Video platform

- Briefings and overviews will take up no more than one-third of the allotted time: 10-minutes for a 30-minute brief, 20-minutes for a 60-minute brief.
- At least two-thirds of time made available for congressional staff Q&A.

## For Field Use

- Business cards
  - Content to include “for more information” and key “how you can help” points for field staff, including Law Enforcement, to hand out as needed
    - Completed in 2022, content can be updated as appropriate

**RECOMMENDATION:** Upon approval/clearance, make this this document (as a PDF) available to:

- Executive leadership of all Unified Command agencies and partners,
- Internally with all UC staff;
- Externally to the UC staff such as
  - Other FWC and FWS communications staff
  - FWC program division leaders and key staff
  - FWS program leads: refuges, ecological services, fisheries, law enforcement, external affairs
  - Partners: MRP, FPL, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Foundation and so forth and where appropriate.
- Feel free to share with others as seen fit