



## BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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February 2, 2026

Michelle R. Pasawicz  
Manatee Management Program Coordinator  
Imperiled Species Management Section  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Subject: Seasonal closure request for Manatees within Hospital Hole, Weeki Wachee River

Dear Ms. Pasawicz,

The Hernando County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and many concerned citizens believe that there are major threats to our local manatee population in warm-water refuges that come from boat traffic and both commercial and recreational water activities such as paddling sports like canoeing, kayaking, and paddleboarding, as well as swimming, fishing, and diving near these habitats. Because warm-water sites are few, small, and heavily used by manatees, these activities increase the chances of disturbance, injury, or death. Management tools such as boat speed limits and restrictions on human access have helped reduce these impacts, but many secondary warm-water sites, some with the potential to become primary refuges, still face serious management challenges.

Weeki Wachee River Springs Complex is listed as a primary warm-water refuge in the Florida Manatee Warm-Water Refuge Action Plan (FWC 2020). Several springs make up the Weeki Wachee River system, including Hospital Hole. Hospital Hole is approximately 145 feet deep, depending on tide, is shaped like a sock and has a cloud-like layer approximately 70 feet deep. Manatees can often be found within Hospital Hole during colder months since the water is a couple degrees warmer than the river water. As Hospital Hole is a congregation area for manatee, the County is concerned about increased harassment from citizens participating in recreational activities in the river.

As such, the Hernando County BOCC requests the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) establish seasonal closures of Hospital Hole to assist manatee migration to warm waters ensuring survival during winter months.

We appreciate your review and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Jerry Campbell".

Jerry Campbell, Chairman  
Board of County Commissioners  
Hernando County, Florida