

Florida Voters Consider Manatee Protection

March 2001

Introduction

As the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission considers new rules and regulations aimed at protecting the manatees, Environmental Media Services, a non-profit communications group, asked Belden Russonello & Stewart to measure Florida voters' concerns about manatees and their support for specific policies to increase protection of this endangered species. In March 2001, Belden Russonello & Stewart conducted a random sample survey of Florida registered voters. The interviewing was conducted March 9 through 14, 2001. The survey used a random digit dial (RDD) sample of households across Florida. A total of 600 interviews were conducted. The margin of sampling error for the entire survey is plus or minus 4 percentage points at the 95% level of tolerance.

The survey reveals that Florida voters are knowledgeable, concerned, and willing to take action to protect the manatees. The main points to come out of the survey are:

- 1) Florida voters are knowledgeable and aware of the dangers affecting manatees.
- 2) Large majorities express concern about the current state of manatee protection and *strongly* support increased efforts to protect the manatees.
- 3) Voters in Florida trust local environmental groups and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission more than the governor, state or federal government, or boaters to make decisions about protecting the manatee.
- 4) When it comes to funding manatee protection, Floridians look to the state government and boating registration fees.

Findings

1. Top environmental issues: Water pollution and destruction of natural habitats

According to Florida voters the top environmental problems facing Florida are water pollution (54% very serious problem) and the destruction of natural habitat (52%). Following closely behind these are the extinction of endangered species that make Florida their home (45%) and damage being done to the beaches (42%). Less of a concern is air pollution (27%). (Chart 1 and Table 1)

Concern about endangered species is higher among younger Floridians (under 55), those with lower income, Democrats, and independents. Voters in northern Florida express the least amount of concern about endangered species. (Table 2)

2. High level of recognition of manatees

Florida voters are very aware of and knowledgeable about manatees:

- Nine in ten (90%) voters correctly identify manatees as large mammals that live in the coastal waters off of Florida. Only three percent believe manatees are human-eating fish in the South Pacific. Younger voters (under 55), boating households, and upper income Floridians are the most knowledgeable. (Chart 2 and Table 3)
- Eight in ten voters (78%) correctly identify the manatee as an endangered species. Women, younger voters (under 55), middle and upper income voters, and non-boaters are more likely than others to correctly identify manatees as an endangered species. Voters in north are the least likely to say manatees are endangered species. (Chart 3 and Table 4)
- Three quarters (76%) believe that the biggest threat to the manatees comes from speeding boats, while one in ten (11%) says it is the loss of habitat from coastal development, and less than one in ten cite pollution (8%) or fishing activities (1%) as the biggest threat. Non-boaters are more likely than boaters to say speeding boats are the biggest threat to the manatees (78% to 67%). (Chart 4)

3. *Strong and broad support for increased manatee protection*

Not only are Florida voters very aware of the dangers facing manatees, they also believe more needs to be done to protect the manatees, and large majorities favor a wide array of policies to make this a reality.

Two-thirds (65%) of Florida voters believe we should be doing more to protect manatees and four in ten (42%) believe “a lot” more should be done. Less than three in ten (29%) voters believe enough is being done currently to protect the manatees. (Chart 5)

The desire to increase protection efforts is stronger among women, lower income voters, Democrats, and voters in the southern part of Florida than others. (Table 5)

The survey tested six specific policy options to ensure manatee safety. Each of the initiatives receives strong support from large majorities of Florida voters. Specifically, we find:

- 73% *strongly* favor increasing the current average fine of \$50 to \$100 for breaking the boating speed limit in manatee protection areas, and nearly half (47%) *strongly* favor increasing the fine to \$200. When those who *somewhat* favor are included, support for \$100 fines stands at 86%, opposition at 13%; and support for \$200 fines at 64% and 33% opposed.

Support for increasing the fine is higher among women and Democrats.

- Similarly, large majorities endorse reducing the boating speed limit and more funding for enforcement of the speed limits.
 - Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Floridians *strongly* support reducing the speed limit for boats on more of Florida's waterways (overall, 84% favor and 12% oppose).
 - Six in ten (59%) *strongly* favor increasing the funding for enforcement of speed limits (overall, 81% favor and 15% oppose).

Women, voters over 35 years old, Democrats, and non-boaters are more supportive of these measures than are their counterparts.

- Floridians also want to increase areas of manatee protection.
 - Two-third of voters (65%) *strongly* support increasing the number of manatee sanctuaries and making them off-limits to boats and jet skis (overall, 83% favor and 13% oppose).

- Six in ten (60%) *strongly* favor limiting boat access to areas where manatees live and breed (overall, 81% favor and 15% oppose).

Women and Democrats and independents are among the strongest supporters of these proposals.

- Six in ten Florida voters (61%) favor reducing coastal development by preserving natural areas that would be off-limits to developers as a way to protect the manatees (overall, 84% favor and 13% oppose). Boaters are more in favor of this proposal than non-boaters.

Voters in the northern and central parts of the state are less enthusiastic than others regarding many of the proposals.

(Chart 6 and Tables 6 and 7)

4. *Environmental groups and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission trusted to make best decisions*

Florida voters place the most trust in local environmental groups and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to make decisions about manatee protection. To a lesser degree voters have confidence in Governor Bush, the state legislature, and the federal government. Floridians express the least confidence in boating clubs to make the best decisions about manatee protection.

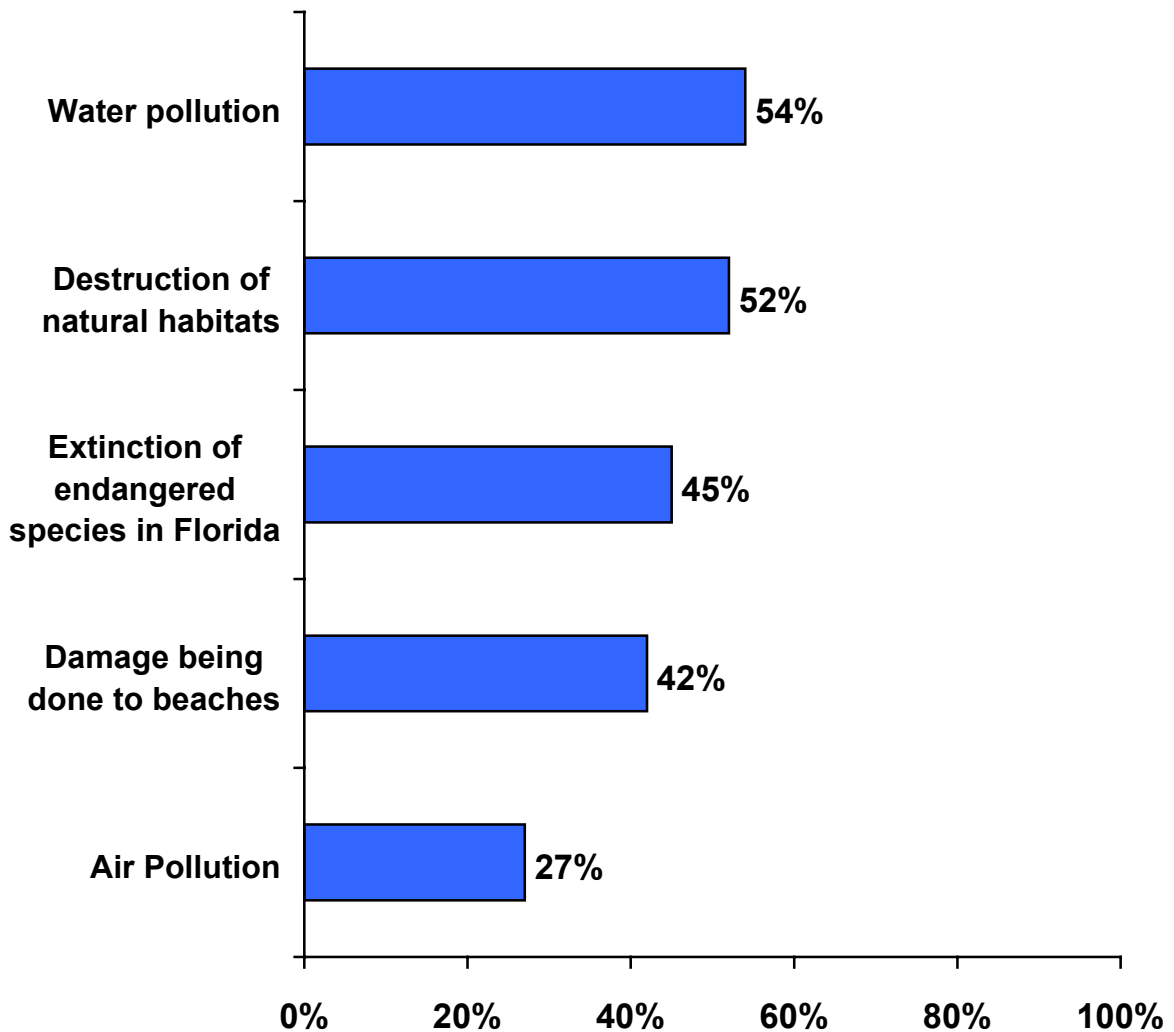
Eight in ten voters (79%) say they have a great deal (36%) or some (43%) of confidence in local environmental groups or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservative Commission (84%). Over half report having confidence in the state legislature (58%), the Governor (55%), or the federal government (49%) to make decisions about manatees. Less than four in ten (36%) report having confidence in boating clubs. (Chart 7)

Women, younger voters, middle to upper income Floridians, and Democrats express more trust than other in local environmental groups. (Table 8)

5. *Funding manatee protection*

When it comes to funding manatee protection, Floridians look to the state government and boating registration fees. Three in ten (31%) voters say the state government or boater registration fees (32%) should be the main source of funding for manatee protection. Two in ten (21%) look to the federal government for funding and only one in ten (11%) places the burden on individual donations. (Chart 8)

Chart 1: Florida's Environmental Problems
% saying "very serious problem"



Thinking specifically about Florida's environment, please tell me if you think each of the following is a very serious problem, somewhat of a problem, not much of a problem, or not at all a problem.

- Q2. Air pollution
- Q3. Water pollution
- Q4. The destruction of natural habitats
- Q5. The extinction of endangered species that make Florida their home
- Q6. Damage being done to beaches

BRS survey for EMS. N=600 Florida voters. March 2001.

Table 1: Florida's Environmental Problems

Q2-6. Thinking specifically about Florida's **environment**, please tell me if you think each of the following is a very serious problem, somewhat of a problem, not much of a problem, or not at all a problem.

	Very serious problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not much of a problem	Not at all a problem	DK/Refuse
Water pollution	54%	30	9	5	2
The destruction of natural habitats	52%	32	8	5	4
The extinction of endangered species that make Florida their home	45%	34	10	6	5
Damage being done to beaches	42%	33	9	6	9
Air pollution	27%	41	23	7	2

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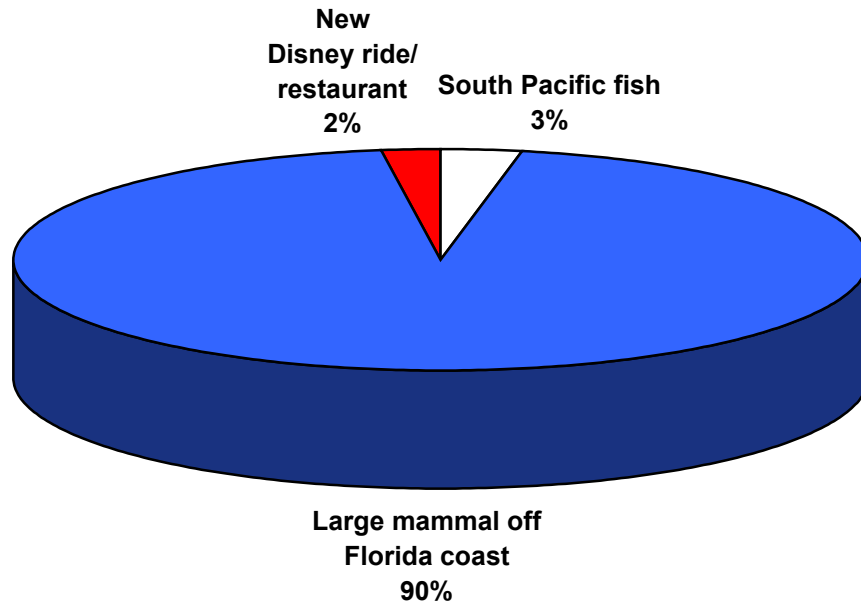
Table 2: Concern About Extinction of Endangered Species

Q5. **The extinction of endangered species that make Florida their home:** Thinking specifically about Florida's **environment**, please tell me if you think each of the following is a very serious problem, somewhat of a problem, not much of a problem, or not at all a problem.

	Very serious problem	Somewhat of a problem	Not much of a problem	Not at all a problem	DK/Refuse
Total	45%	34	10	6	5
18-34	51%	31	8	5	5
35-54	50%	36	6	8	1
55 and over	37%	34	15	6	8
<\$25K	51%	26	9	6	8
\$26K-\$49K	44%	38	8	6	4
\$50K+	45%	35	11	8	2
Democrat	51%	33	7	3	6
Republican	33%	37	15	11	4
Independent	50%	30	10	6	4
North	26%	45	12	12	4
Central	46%	35	9	5	5
South	57%	26	8	3	7
West	45%	32	12	7	3

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Chart 2: What are Manatees?



Q7. As far as you know, are manatees a) a human-eating fish found in the South Pacific, b) a large mammal that lives in the coastal waters off of Florida, c) a new chain of fast-food restaurants, or d) a new ride at Disney World?

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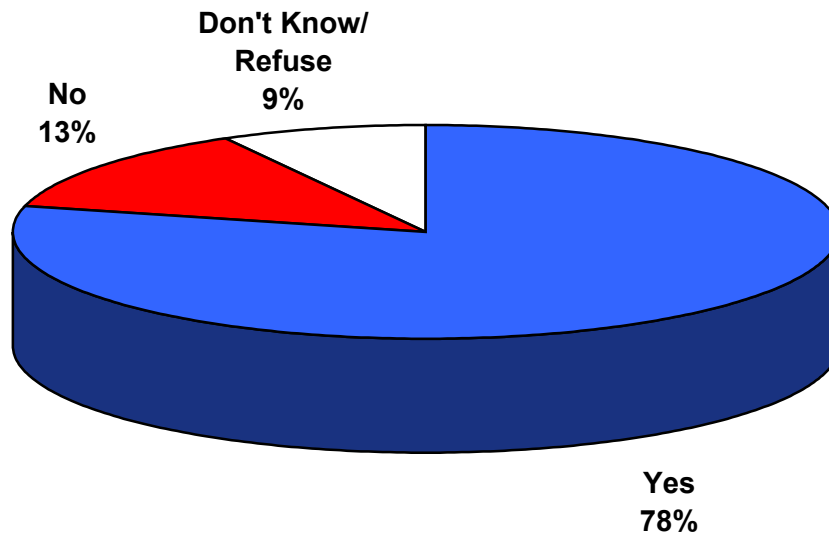
Table 3: Manatees Are...

Q7. As far as you know, are manatees a) a human eating fish found in the South Pacific, b) a large mammal that lives in the coastal waters off of Florida, c) a new chain of fast-food restaurants, or d) a new ride at Disney World?

	Mammal off Florida coast	Human eating fish	Ride at Disney World	Fast food restaurant	DK/Refuse
Total	90%	3	1	1	6
18-34	93%	4	1	--	2
35-54	93%	2	1	1	3
55 and over	85%	2	1	2	10
<\$25K	83%	5	2	--	11
\$26K-\$49K	88%	3	1	2	6
\$50K+	97%	1	1	1	1
Boating household	96%	1	--	1	2
Non-boating household	89%	3	1	1	6

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Chart 3: Manatees are Endangered Species



Q9. As far as you know, are the manatees and endangered species?

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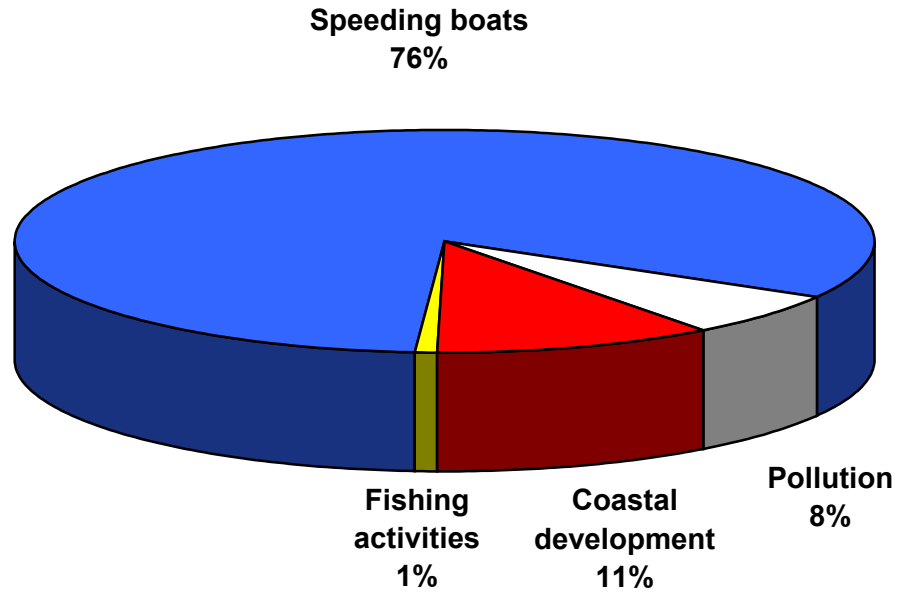
Table 4: Manatees are Endangered Species

Q9. As far as you know, are manatees an endangered species?

	Yes	No	DK/Refuse
Total	78%	13	9
Male	73%	17	11
Female	82%	10	8
18-34	83%	10	7
35-54	80%	11	9
55 and over	72%	17	11
<\$25K	69%	18	13
\$26K-\$49K	86%	10	4
\$50K+	78%	13	8
Boating household	72%	21	7
Non-boating household	79%	11	10
North	67%	16	17
Central	79%	15	6
South	82%	8	10
West	80%	15	5

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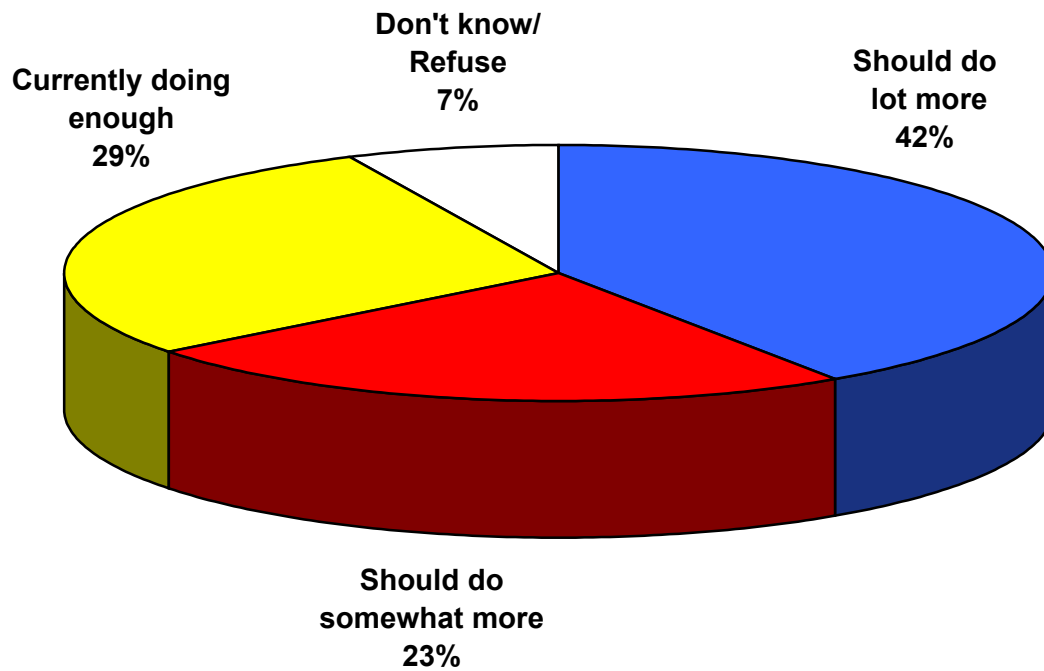
Chart 4: Biggest Threats to the Manatee



Q10. From what you know, what do you think is the BIGGEST threat to the manatee: pollution, loss of habitat from coastal development, fishing activities, or speeding boats?

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Chart 5: Need to Increase Manatee Protection



Q8. Actually, manatees are large mammals that live in the coastal waters of Florida. In your opinion, should we be doing more to protect the manatees, or are we currently doing enough to protect the manatees? (A lot or somewhat more?)

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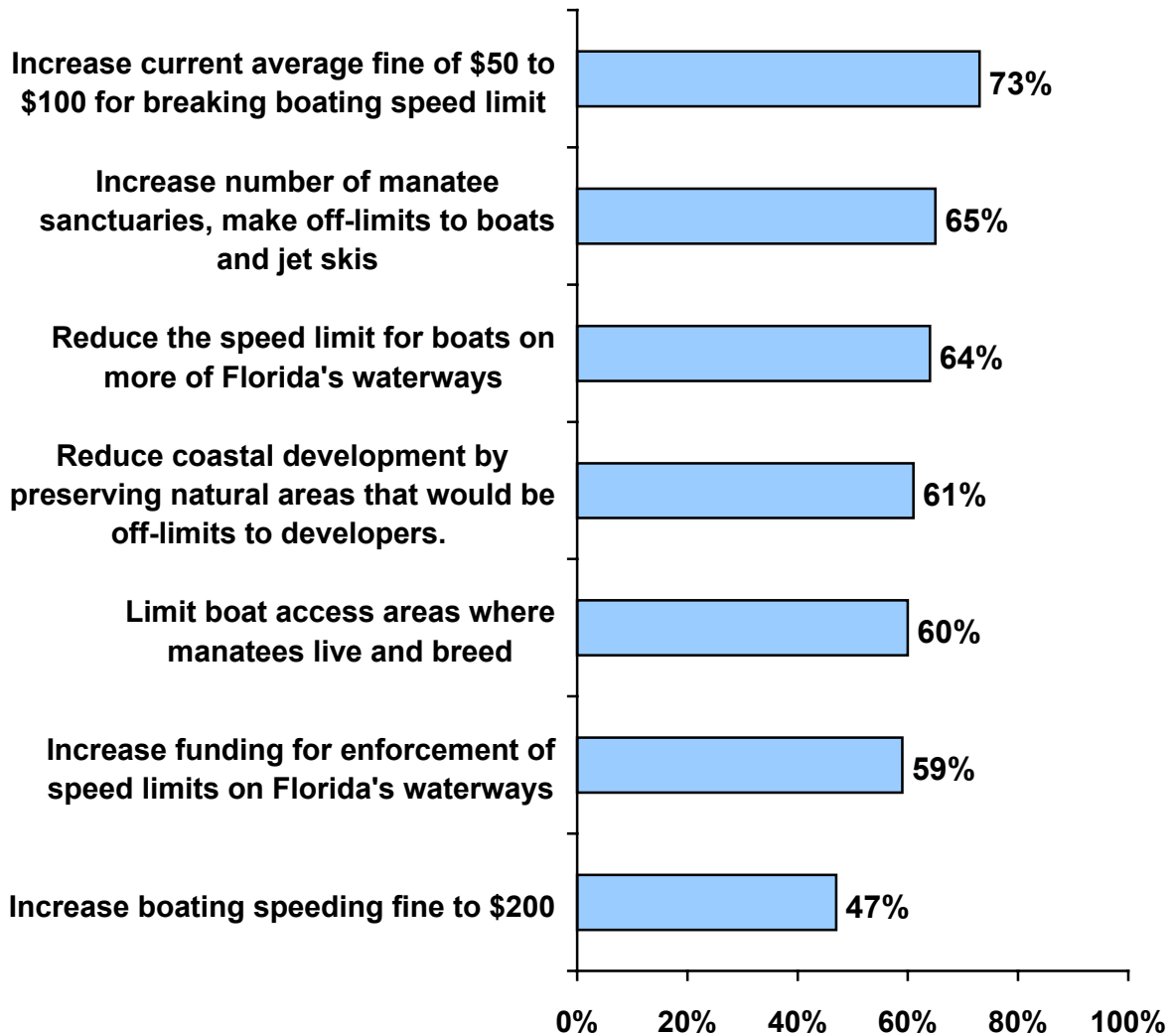
Table 5: Need to Increase Manatee Protection

Q8. Actually, manatees are large mammals that live in the coastal waters of Florida. In your opinion, should we be doing more to protect the manatees in Florida, or are we currently doing enough to protect the manatees? [A lot more or somewhat more?]

	A lot more	Somewhat more	Currently doing enough	DK/Refuse
Total	42%	23	29	7
Male	38%	20	36	6
Female	45%	25	23	7
<\$25K	51%	20	24	5
\$26K-\$49K	44%	26	23	7
\$50K+	36%	25	36	3
Democrat	50%	24	20	6
Republican	33%	21	40	5
Independent	43%	22	30	6
North	38%	21	31	9
Central	36%	19	41	5
South	51%	18	22	9
West	40%	31	26	3

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Chart 6: Proposals to Protect Manatees
% saying "Strongly favor"



Currently, the manatee is considered an endangered species. Here are some proposals for protecting manatees in Florida. Do you favor or oppose.... (Somewhat or strongly?)

Q11. Reducing the speed limit for boats on more of Florida's waterways.

Q12. Limiting boat access to areas where manatees live and breed.

Q13. Increasing funding for enforcement of speed limits on Florida's waterways.

Q14. Reducing coastal development by preserving natural areas that would be off-limits to developers.

Q15. Increasing the number of manatee sanctuaries and making them off-limits to boats and jet skis.

Q16. Increasing the current average fine of \$50 to \$100 for breaking the boating speed limit in manatee protection areas.

Q16b. Increase the average fine from \$50 to \$200?

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Table 6: Proposals to Protect Manatees

Q11-16b. Currently, the manatee is considered an endangered species. Here are some proposals for protecting manatees in Florida. Do you favor or oppose... (Somewhat or strongly?)

	Strongly favor	Somewhat favor	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	DK/Refuse
Increasing the current average fine of \$50 to \$100 for breaking the boating speed limit in manatee protection areas.	73%	13	5	8	1
Increasing the number of manatee sanctuaries and making them off-limits to boats and jet skis.	65%	18	8	5	3
Reducing the speed limit for boats on more of Florida's waterways.	64%	20	6	6	3
Reducing coastal development by preserving natural areas that would be off-limits to developers.	61%	23	7	6	3
Limiting boat access to areas where manatees live and breed.	60%	21	9	6	3
Increasing funding for enforcement of speed limits on Florida's waterways.	59%	22	6	9	4
Increase fine to \$200.	47%	17	12	8	3

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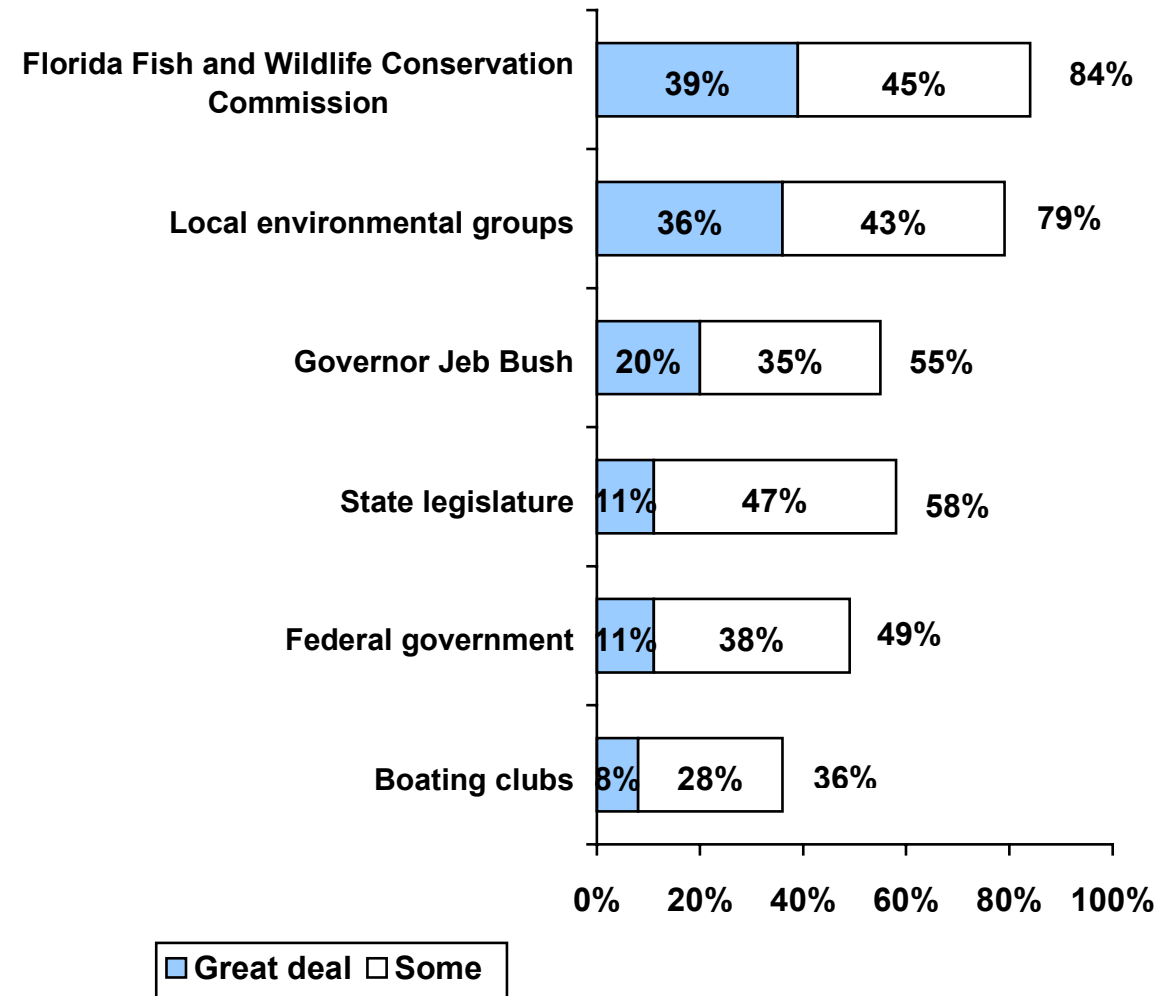
Table 7: Proposals to Protect Manatees

Q11-16. Currently, the manatee is considered an endangered species. Here are some proposals for protecting manatees in Florida. Do you favor or oppose... (Somewhat or strongly?) % saying "strongly favor"

	Increase fine to \$100	Increase manatee sanctuaries	Reduce speed limit for boats	Reduce coastal development	Limit boat access where manatees live	Increase funding for speed limit enforcement	Increase fine to \$200
Total	73%	65%	64%	61%	60%	59%	47%
Male	66%	60%	56%	57%	51%	52%	44%
Female	78%	70%	71%	64%	68%	65%	49%
18-34	68%	70%	58%	58%	61%	50%	44%
35-54	76%	68%	68%	65%	57%	62%	49%
55 and over	73%	61%	66%	59%	63%	63%	47%
<\$25K	66%	65%	66%	59%	62%	61%	43%
\$26K-\$49K	78%	69%	65%	66%	66%	59%	52%
\$50K+	76%	65%	60%	58%	53%	58%	48%
Democrat	80%	70%	71%	63%	66%	64%	48%
Republican	63%	56%	55%	52%	49%	50%	40%
Independent	73%	68%	65%	67%	64%	58%	51%
Boating household	73%	62%	60%	69%	59%	53%	56%
Non-boating HH	73%	66%	66%	59%	61%	61%	44%
North	59%	59%	59%	52%	53%	47%	33%
Central	79%	62%	68%	59%	54%	59%	46%
South	80%	70%	68%	65%	67%	69%	58%
West	72%	67%	63%	63%	61%	57%	45%

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Chart 7: Confidence to Make Best Decisions to Protect Manatees



How much confidence do you have in each of the following to make the best decisions on protecting the manatee in Florida? Do you have a great deal, some, not very much, of no confidence at all in....

Q18. Governor Jeb Bush

Q19. The State legislature

Q20. Local environmental groups

Q21. Boating clubs

Q22. The federal government

Q23. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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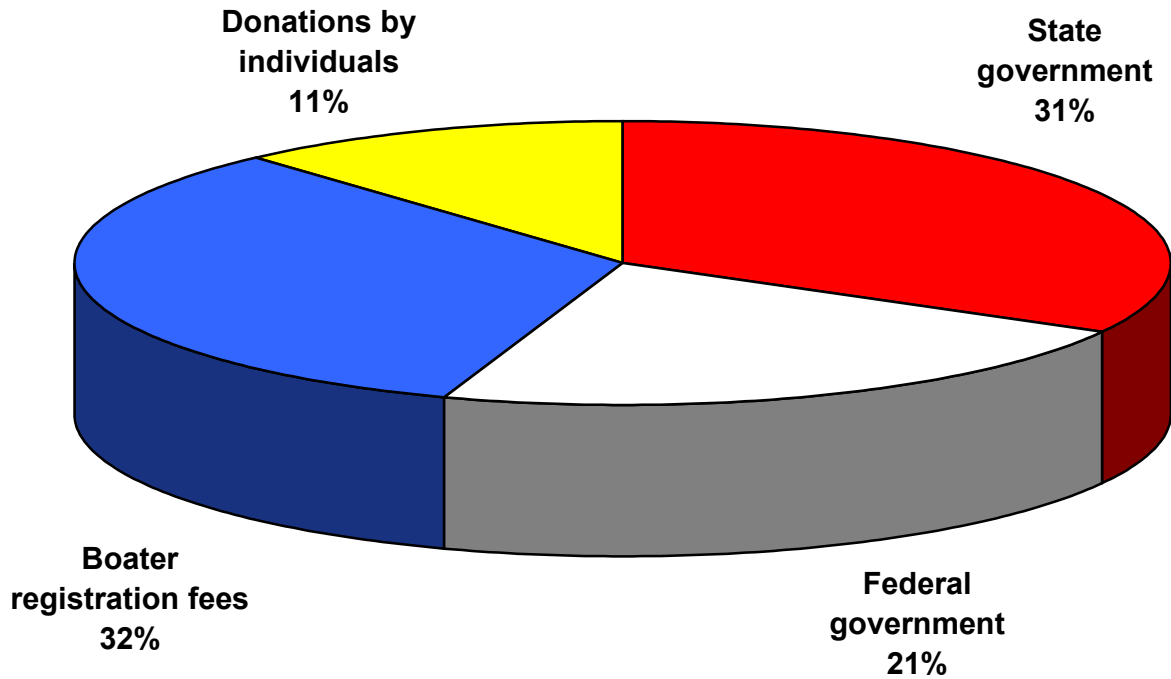
**Table 8: Confidence to Make Best Decisions
 to Protect Manatees**
 % saying "great deal"

Q18-23. How much confidence do you have in each of the following to make the best decisions on protecting the manatee in Florida? Do you have a great deal, some, not very much, or no confidence at all in...

	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	Local environmental groups	Governor Jeb Bush	The State legislature	The federal government	Boating clubs
Total	39%	36%	20%	11%	11%	8%
Male	37%	31%	22%	9%	14%	9%
Female	40%	40%	18%	12%	9%	7%
18-34	45%	41%	15%	11%	11%	5%
35-54	38%	42%	16%	9%	13%	9%
55 and over	36%	28%	26%	12%	9%	8%
<\$25K	47%	29%	20%	11%	17%	11%
\$26K-\$49K	40%	42%	20%	14%	13%	6%
\$50K+	38%	38%	21%	10%	9%	6%
Democrat	41%	41%	9%	9%	10%	7%
Republican	39%	30%	36%	16%	13%	12%
Independent	36%	37%	19%	7%	10%	5%
Boating household	41%	37%	25%	13%	13%	11%
Non-boating household	38%	36%	19%	10%	10%	7%
North	38%	34%	21%	8%	11%	8%
Central	39%	34%	26%	15%	10%	12%
South	37%	37%	13%	9%	13%	4%
West	41%	38%	22%	11%	10%	9%

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Chart 8: Preferred Main Funding for Manatee Protection



Q17. In your opinion, what should be the MAIN source of funding for manatee protection: a) state government, b) federal government, c) boater registration fees, or d) donations by individuals?

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