

## Mote Marine Laboratory



### Increasing Capacity for Manatee Rehabilitation in Southwest Florida

Mote Marine Laboratory (Mote) is dedicated to advancing marine and environmental sciences through scientific research, education, and public outreach, leading to new discoveries, revitalization and sustainability of our oceans, and greater understanding of our marine resources.

This initiative, Increasing Capacity for Manatee Rehabilitation in Southwest Florida, will allow Mote to create a new manatee rehabilitative care facility, contributing to vital conservation efforts for this threatened species. The facility will provide noncritical care of sick and injured manatees that need clean water, healthy food and an indeterminate amount of time to recuperate before being returned to the wild. The Mote facility will relieve pressure on critical care facilities across the state, allowing them to admit new cases; it will also care for manatees impacted by cold-stunning and red tide. There are currently four critical care facilities and four rehabilitation facilities in the state of Florida. All are at or near capacity at any given time, with some manatees being turned away or requiring transport to facilities out of state.

Florida manatees are an essential part of a thriving ecosystem, influencing plant growth in our waters. They are a keystone species whose behavior can alert researchers to environmental changes that may otherwise go unnoticed. Manatees face many threats, from boat strikes, habitat loss, and harassment, to starvation, exposure and red tide and are considered “threatened” at both federal and state levels, dying at an unprecedented rate. Over 1,100 Florida manatees perished in 2021 alone.

Mote is a leader in manatee research and conservation, responding to stranded manatees and other marine animals since 1999. Working closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Mote serves as a local contact for reports of sick, injured, or deceased manatees in Sarasota and Manatee Counties through a 24-hour hotline, responding to approximately 600 calls per year. Mote participated last year in the rescue of 15 live-stranded manatees.

With this initiative, Mote will retrofit its existing monorail crane system to lift manatees into and out of rehabilitation water tanks. Mote is making an initial investment of \$107,330 to procure a tank that is large enough to care for up to four manatees at a time. Meanwhile, Mote has requested the life support system—ozonation, pumps, and filters—through a federal grant. The Impact100 SRQ grant would provide the funds necessary to purchase the remaining items: the crane and monorail equipment for \$6,000, two water storage tanks for \$52,000, a walk-in refrigerator cooler for manatee food storage for \$16,000 and \$36,500 for four chillers/heater. The entire initiative cost, as budgeted, is \$510,917, with the funds beyond the Impact100 SRQ grant already committed by other sources.

This initiative will result in sustainable, permanent infrastructure, enabling Mote to immediately begin providing rehabilitative care for manatees facing an unprecedented population crisis and to serve as a rehabilitation facility for many years in the future.