

## **NEWS BREAK**

Article: **Habitat destruction drives alarming Florida manatee die-off**

Section: **MAIN, A10**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, June 6, 2021** of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

***\*Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.***

### **Standards:**

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1**

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2**

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

### **Objectives:**

***Students will talk about the destruction of the manatees' habitat and brainstorm possible solutions to help the struggling population and aquatic ecosystems. They'll discuss the importance of keeping the ecosystems in balance and why water health and quality is so important. They will also talk about why government laws aren't protecting water resources.***

### Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using only this picture?
- Are there any clues?
- What can you infer?

### Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

“Many washed up **emaciated**, indicating they’d starved to death.”

#### ***Emaciated* Guess:**

#### ***Emaciated* Definition:**

### Comprehension Questions:

1. Wildlife researchers first noted the trend as the winter weather set in late last year. Florida \_\_\_\_\_ — the peaceful, lumbering marine mammals iconic to the Sunshine State — were dying in alarmingly high numbers.
2. Manatees are a “sentinel species.” What does that mean?
3. Florida’s manatee conservationists have warned for years that water pollution does what?
4. The problem is so serious that the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ in one manatee hot spot have been nearly wiped out.
5. An update last week from state wildlife officials captured the magnitude of the devastation: At least \_\_\_\_\_ Florida manatees — more than 10% of

- the estimated manatee population — have died this year, already surpassing the total manatee deaths recorded in 2020.
6. Officials declared the deaths an “unusual mortality event,” which the federal government defines as what?
  7. State wildlife commissioners and private groups are considering potential solutions. What are two the article suggested?

**Discussion Questions (small/large groups), Journal Prompts or Essay Questions:**

- ***What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?***
- ***At first I thought \_\_\_\_\_, but now I think \_\_\_\_\_?***
- ***What things did you already know from prior experience?***

“But the gradual destruction of the manatees’ habitat, combined with the long-term menace of climate change, means there’s no panacea.”

- ***What does panacea mean?***
- ***Brainstorm a few solutions that could help the struggling manatee population.***

Manatee grazing makes seagrass beds more productive, which in turn attracts a greater diversity of organisms to their habitats. If manatee numbers continue to decline, other plant and animal populations will suffer, too. “They’re kind of like the gardeners of the aquatic ecosystem,” said Patrick Rose, a biologist and executive director of Florida’s Save the Manatee Club. “And they’re just so defenseless.”

- ***How does this description of the aquatic ecosystem cycle show the importance of keeping them all in balance?***

Water quality degradation emerged as a top concern long before manatee deaths reached their current levels. Runoff from farming, pesticide sprays, sewage treatment, leaky septic systems and other human sources causes an excess of micronutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus to build up in the water. Massive algae blooms form. Eventually, they grow so large that they deplete the water of oxygen and block out the sunlight seagrass needs to thrive. What’s left are murky wastelands with nothing for the manatees to eat.

- ***Water health and quality is so important. Why aren’t government laws protecting our water resources?***

News Break is posted to the Web on Monday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please [register online](#) or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.

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