



Fact Sheet: Three Sisters Springs

Size: 57.8 acres

Location: City of Crystal River, Citrus County (to see the property in Google Maps, click [here](#).)

Cost: \$10.5 million

Funding Sources:

- Florida Communities Trust = \$3,707,000
- Land and Water Conservation Fund = \$3,225,000
- Private fundraising = \$1,915,000
(The combined fundraising efforts of The Conservation Fund, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, the Friends of Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the Save the Manatee Club, the Felburn Foundation, Jane's Trust and many individuals in the local community)
- Southwest Florida Water Management District = \$1,278,000
- City of Crystal River = \$100,000
- Citrus County = \$100,000
- Citrus County Tourism Development Council = \$100,000
- North America Wetlands Conservation Act = \$75,000

Partners:

- The Conservation Fund
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Wildlife Refuge Association
- Southwest Florida Water Management District
- City of Crystal River
- Friends of Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge Complex
- Save the Manatee Club
- The Brunckhorst Foundation
- The Milton and Tamar Maltz Family Foundation

Ownership/management plans: The land will be sold to the City of Crystal River and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). The state's Florida Communities Trust program will hold a conservation easement on the site. The city and SWFWMD will then enter into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), which will manage the property as an addition to Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge. SWFWMD will construct flow through wetlands to capture and treat urban runoff now directly entering canals adjacent to the property, which, along with the main springs, are critical cold weather manatee habitats.

Significance: Three Sisters Springs is one of Florida's last remaining urban springs, an ecological marvel that supports a winter population of manatees in excess of 150, who rest, breed

and give birth in the springs. Located close to the City of Crystal River's business district, the property plays a stop-gap role in filtering run-off from pavement and concrete before the water enters the canals of Kings Bay. Three Sisters Springs is also a critical element of local ecotourism. People journey from around the world to the site and the adjacent Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge to see and swim in proximity to manatees in the crystal-clear waters. The refuge aids in preserving Florida's most significant, naturally occurring, warm water area for the manatee and provides critical habitat for approximately 25 percent of the nation's manatee population. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has ranked Three Sisters Springs as its highest priority acquisition for conservation as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System in the 10-state Southeast Region.

Facts about the West Indian (Florida) manatee:

- **Status:** The manatee is classified as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In 2009, USFWS estimated that the manatee population in Florida was around 3,800.
- **Habitat and range:** Manatees can be found in shallow, slow-moving rivers, estuaries, saltwater bays, canals, and coastal areas — particularly where seagrass beds or freshwater vegetation flourish. Manatees are a migratory species. Within the United States, they are concentrated in Florida in the winter. More than 150 manatees congregate at Three Sisters Springs each winter. In summer months, they can be found as far west as Texas and as far north as Massachusetts, but summer sightings in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina are more common.
- **Breeding and reproduction:** Many of the manatees that migrate to Three Sisters Springs use the area to give birth. The reproductive rate for manatees is low. Some female manatees do not sexually mature until they are five years of age, and males mature at approximately seven years of age. It is believed that one calf is born every two to five years. The gestation period is about a year. Mothers nurse their young for one to two years, during which time a calf remains dependent on its mother.
- Humans and habitat loss are the two greatest threats to manatees. **Human threats:** collisions with watercraft; crushing and drowning in canal locks and flood control structures; ingestion of fish hooks, fishing line and litter; and entanglement in crab trap lines. **Threats to habitat:** Manatees need warm water (above 68 degrees) to survive. During the winter of 2009-10, at least 220 manatees died from exposure to cold temperatures. Increasingly, warm springs like Three Sisters Springs are threatened by demand for water supply and commercial and residential development. Other habitat threats include pollution and toxic algae blooms like red tide.

Contacts for additional information:

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