Boat Strikes Fatality File

Boat strike to blame for manatee death in Orange Beach, Alabama

Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Manatee Sighting Network (DISL/MSN) received reports of a deceased manatee in Orange Beach, Alabama on Tuesday, November 1. When the team found the animal there were signs of acute trauma consistent with a boat strike.

A local resident on the southern shore of Bear Point in Bayou Saint John reported the deceased manatee to the DISL/MSN. Heavy boat traffic is common in the area.

Partners with the Orange Beach Police Department and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources helped recover the manatee, which was brought to the DISL Marine Mammal Research Center for a post-mortem examination (also known as a necropsy).

"The animal had a series of deep cuts on its back, consistent with propeller trauma," Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network (ALMMSN) Stranding Coordinator Mackenzie Russell explained. "Other signs of internal injury and blood loss point to a boat strike as the cause of death for this manatee."

Boat strikes are the leading cause of human-related manatee mortalities in Florida, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), but boat-related deaths are on the rise in Alabama. This case marks the third confirmed boat strike in Alabama waters since 2015 and the fifth boat strike in the northern Gulf of Mexico responded to by DISL/MSN since 2013.

Prior to 2015, no watercraft-related manatee deaths had been recorded in Alabama; however, in recent years researchers have documented an increase in both manatee sightings and strandings in the state.