
TOXIC THIRST: Manatees drinking from sewage contaminated upwellings near Stock Island Wastewater Treatment Plant Shallow Wells

Volunteers from Friends of the Lower Keys (FOLKs) have observed manatees drinking from five upwellings in the sea bottom 300 feet from the shallow sewage effluent disposal wells used by KW Resort Utilities Corp, the privately owned wastewater treatment plant. Don DeMaria, president of FOLKs, announced that FOLKs has sent the National Marine Sanctuary, the Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and KW Resort Utilities Corp evidence packages containing multiple videos and sucralose data and analyses of the waters near the shallow sewage wells indicating the presence of human sewage effluent in the upwellings where the manatees are drinking.

“Our hope is to put an end to shallow sewage wells in the Keys,” DeMaria stated. “They don’t work. Sewage effluent is more buoyant than marine waters. It’s injected down shallow wells and it flows right up through the porous limestone and upwellings in the sea bottom.”

“Our lawsuits have been successful in getting a deep well for Cudjoe Regional and another for the City of Marathon,” said Caron Balkany, one of FOLKs’ lawyers. “But Marathon first wasted a lot of money fighting us in court for about two years. We hope just giving everyone the evidence will convince them to save time and money and do the right thing.”

What is in the sewage effluent being dumped down shallow wells? In Marathon – and there’s no reason to think Stock Island sewage is any different – there are opiates, antibiotics, hormones, blood pressure medicine, endocrine disrupters, heavy metals, as well as “forever chemicals” and other harmful substances and cancer-causing chemicals. See **Exhibit D** to FOLKs’ letter and evidence package to the Sanctuary, DEP, FWC and KW Resort Utilities Corp on the FOLKs webpage at www.friendsofthelowerkeys.org

Dr. Matt Finn, a marine biologist and underwater videographer, helped FOLKs install an underwater online video camera donated by Fathom Ocean. The camera captured the images of manatees congregating to drink the sewage effluent from the seabed upwellings.

“It’s been proven for years that sewage is damaging to marine mammals like manatees, as well as fish, shrimp, and other prey fish. It causes reduced reproductive rates, among other things. Manatees certainly shouldn’t be drinking sewage effluent, and human beings shouldn’t be swimming in it or eating the shrimp and fish that consume it. It’s killing the seagrass habitat, too. Those videos made me heart sick, really,” said Finn. “The water around the upwellings is pretty disgusting,” he added.

“Let’s all hope they convert to deep well sewage effluent disposal. We’ve given them plenty of evidence showing shallow sewage wells don’t work. See the evidence package: www.friendsofthelowerkeys.org, said Balkany.”

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