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Alligator and other animals see human visitors on Friday



An alligator points his snout at the warmer water flowing from the springs into the Suwannee River on Friday morning

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 5, 2018 at 11:37 p.m.

(Except the two photos of manatees further down in this story, which are by Karen Parker of the FWC)

LEVY AND CITRUS COUNTIES -- A quick tour of Manatee Springs State Park early Friday morning (Jan. 5) showed one fisherman walking to exit from the dock on the Suwannee River.

Except for the fisherman walking away from the river, and except for one intrepid journalist challenging the subfreezing weather, no other human beings were seen from the parking lot to the river for at least 20 minutes.

Some campers remained huddled around campfires or were staying snug in their sleeping bags. The general park area was clear of humans.

It was about 27 degrees Fahrenheit at the state park that morning at approximately 8:30 a.m.

There were no manatees seen in Manatee Springs, in the spring run or in the river just outside of the springs; although they have gone there in cold weather before, because the spring flows provide warmer water than the Suwannee River.

Various species of birds were in the trees and on the shoreline at the park.

One huge alligator, probably at least 10 feet long, floated with his head facing toward the spring run about 30 yards into the Suwannee River from the place where the warmer spring water empties into the big river.

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These many dark-colored birds in the trees are not huge crows. They are turkey vultures.



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Various birds look for breakfast fish as shown in the three photos above.

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This photo shows the lack of boat traffic on this one section of the Suwannee River on Friday morning.



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This state park has picnic pavilions and built in grills. There is also a playground.

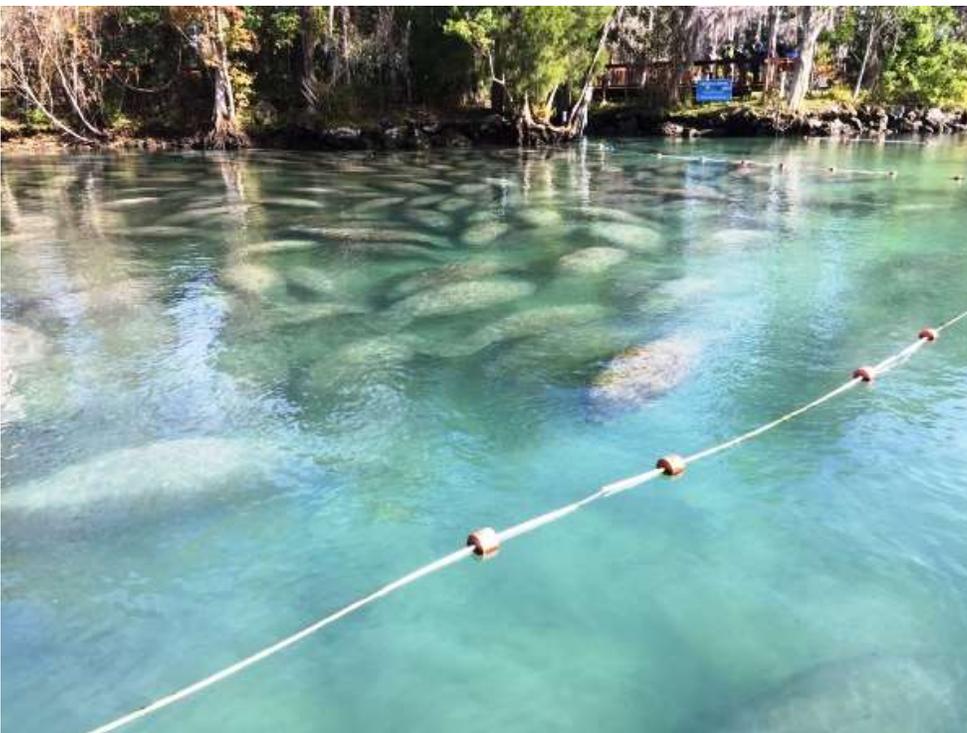


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There are no manatee in the springs at Manatee Springs State Park. The water level in the spring run may be too shallow for the animals to make their way to the springs.

Meanwhile, farther south in the Crystal River area, however, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Regional Public Information Coordinator Karen Parker was among the many people looking at hundreds of manatees that had gone to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge.



These manatees are in the Three Sisters Springs sanctuary in Crystal River. When it gets cold, the manatees gather in the springs where it remains a constant 72 degrees Fahrenheit.

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These photos were taken this morning Friday, Jan. 5. There were approximately 200 animals in the springs this morning.

Two Photos above are by Karen Parker of the FWC

This refuge in Citrus County is a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which includes the Lower Suwannee NWR in Levy County and hundreds of other national parks all over America.

As noted on the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge's website, "Established in 1983, Crystal River National Wildlife

Refuge is the only refuge created specifically for the protection of the threatened Florida Manatee, a subspecies of the West Indian Manatee. This unique refuge preserves the last unspoiled and undeveloped spring habitat in Kings Bay, which forms the headwaters of the Crystal River.

Florida manatees are present in Kings Bay and Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge year round. The highest aggregation is during the same period that winter visitors come to Florida from Up North to Florida -- from November to March, according to information on the website.

During the late fall and to early spring, though the winter, this type of manatee number approximately 600 in that part of Florida, and this is in contrast with the summer months when there are approximately 30 manatees there, the website notes.

"The Florida manatee (*Trichechus manatus latirostris*) is a subspecies of the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*)," the website notes. "These aquatic mammals have elongated round bodies that taper to a flat, paddle-shaped tail. They have two forelimbs, called flippers, with three to four nails on each flipper. Their head and face are wrinkled with whiskers on the snout. The manatee's closest relatives are the elephant and the hyrax (a small, gopher-sized mammal).

"Manatees are believed to have evolved from a wading, plant-eating animal known as the Pezosiren," the website continues. "The Florida manatee is related to the West Indian manatee, the West African manatee, the Amazonian manatee, the dugong, and Steller's sea cow, which was hunted to extinction in 1768. The average adult manatee is about 10 feet long and weighs between 800 and 1,200 pounds."

To learn more about the Crystal River NWR, please click [HERE](#).