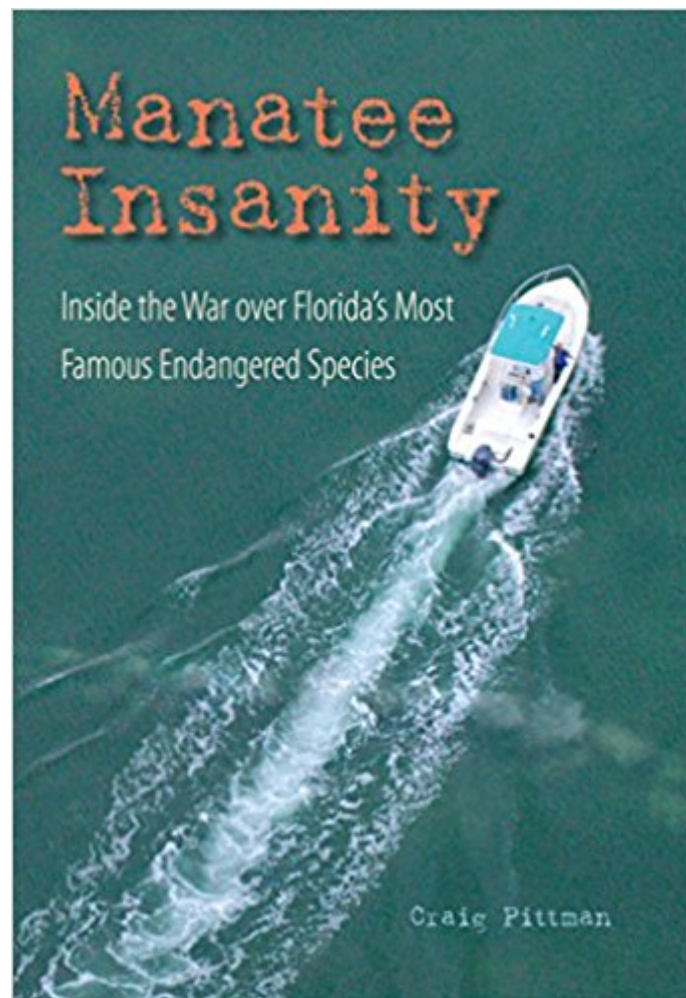




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# Manatee Insanity: Inside The War Over Florida's Most Famous Endangered Species



## Synopsis

Why is the manatee just as imperiled today as it was 40 years ago?"The best available, most factual account of the decades-long struggle to protect the Florida manatee, skillfully told by a veteran journalist who has followed the story closely. I've been involved in this controversy for over 30 years, and I learned countless things about it that I never knew!"--Daryl Domning, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

The Florida legislature gave the manatee its own license plate, and Jimmy Buffet sang poetic lyrics about the iconic creature, but Craig Pittman offers a whole new perspective--the manatee as battleground. With a cast of characters including environmentalists and biologists, developers and boaters, lawyers and lobbyists, politicians and shady citizens, *Manatee Insanity* is a colorful work of non-fiction."--Keith Rizzardi, South Florida Water Management District

Loveable or loathed? Poster child for conservation efforts or impediment to development? Nuisance or in need of protection? For the past two decades, the quiet manatee has been a flash point of frequent environmental debates. Included on the very first endangered species list issued in 1967, the docile creatures have stirred curiosity and passions for more than a hundred years. They are Florida's most famous endangered species, as well as its most controversial. Manatees appear on hundreds of license plates, attract hordes of tourists, and expose the uneasy relationships between science and the law and between freedom and responsibility like no other animal. As passions have flared and resentments have grown, the battle over manatee protection has evolved into a war, and no reporter has followed the story more closely than Craig Pittman. He's flown with scientists trying to count manatees from overhead. He's been on the water with the leader of the biggest pro-boater group. He's observed biologists dissecting the animals and politicians discussing their fate. *Manatee Insanity* provides the first in-depth history of the attempts to provide legal protection for the manatee. Along the way, Pittman takes a close look at the major and minor players in the dispute, from Jacques-Yves Cousteau to Jeb Bush, from Jimmy Buffett to O. J. Simpson, from a popular children's book author to a federal lawyer who dressed in a gorilla suit for the ultimate undercover assignment. A volume in the Florida History and Culture Series, edited by Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino

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## Customer Reviews

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Craig Pittman, native Floridian, is an award-winning journalist for the state's largest paper, the St. Petersburg Times. He is also the coauthor of *Paving Paradise: Florida's Vanishing Wetlands and the Failure of No Net Loss*.

A few years ago, I snorkeled with the manatees in Florida and was lucky to have one stop and stare at me in the eye on his was up for air. The memorable encounter left a lump in my throat, but it wasn't until a few weeks ago, when I picked up Craig Pittman's book, *Manatee Insanity: Inside the War over Florida's Most Famous Endangered Species*, did I fully appreciate the good fortune to have experienced a manatee moment. Pittman tells the story of the species' struggle to survive in a rapidly changing environment. He leaves no stone unturned in his comprehensive research of the manatee's story. More than five thousand manatees have been killed by speeding powerboats during the past four decades. The protection awarded them by the Endangered Species Act did little to keep these animals safe from boat collisions and propeller blades. Grassroots organizations, wildlife biologists, and concerned citizens who attempted to designate manatee sanctuaries and lower its speed limits for boaters, were vigorously opposed by politicians, and lobbyists for developers and construction companies. What ensued was the "Manatee War," which pitted the rights of an endangered animal against the rights of citizens who wanted to enjoy Florida's waterways without restriction. Pittman is a journalist whose research skills are unsurpassed. He tells an honest, accurate story; and one full of passion, frustration, failure, and success. His book reads like a true-life thriller. Just when you think the tables will turn in favor of the manatee, a major setback occurs making the species' survival seem impossible. I highly recommend *Manatee Insanity* to anyone passionate about environmental issues and endangered species and those who dedicate their lives to making a positive difference in our world.

Pittman does a superb job describing the now decades-long war between all the special interest groups, scientists, and the government, over this wonderful docile creature who has no natural

enemy except man. Manatees can offer no defense except to try and swim away from dangers and mothers cannot even protect their calves except to get between them and danger. They are total vegetarians but boats and development have ruined or destroyed many areas where the water grasses grow. The warm water they rely on from the natural springs is being pulled from the aquifer to water lawns and golf courses. (They cannot tolerate temperatures below 68 degrees and the springs are 72). He's dead-on with his insights on how money and politics have played major roles to trump development over science at the local, state, federal, and international levels. He does try to balance the equation by telling what the other sides have to say, however flawed I think their reasonings are. For me this book was almost a page-turner to see what arguments would be floated up next. Read this book; get your friends to read this book! The manatee is the "canary" in the mine. If we fail to save this animal and its habitat there is not a lot of hope left for anything at any time. Something is only "saved" as long as it has no perceived value (land, water, animals, etc.). Let someone figure out how to make a buck and they will use their money and influence to get the place or animal re-designated to their desires to make that buck. Oddly enough all the businesses mentioned in this book are mostly still in business no matter how loudly they squawked before that the restrictions to save manatees would run them into bankruptcy (if anything, the economy would have been responsible for that, not the manatee). Meanwhile, manatees are still dying by the hand of man.

"manatee insanity" by craig Pittman is a must read for anyone who loves manatees, or is interested in endangered species and the wars over them, or who wants to know the true stories behind one of the most controversial marine mammals on the planet. Pittman is an 'immaculate journalist' whose research is outstanding. He portrays how the gentle manatee has been used as a pawn for years. He writes about the politics and sentiments between the passionate environmentalists and the boating community and the developers. As he says: "as passions have flared and resentments have grown, the battle over manatee protection has evolved into a war." Never has there been a book which documents the full scope of what is happening in Florida to save and protect the manatee and the opposite, which could cause its demise. The book is written like a good juicy novel based on research and fact and one can only feel sorry for this gentle giant who wants to live peacefully in its own habitat instead of having to deal with boat hits and habitat destruction. five stars for this!

lynda green

Great book, and a fascinating read about the politics of protecting the manatee.

An excellent history of the manatee debates in which I've been closely involved over the years.

Really more detail than I needed.

A peek inside the fight over manatee conservation in Florida becomes page-turning reading in *Manatee Insanity*. In Florida, the interests of boaters and real estate developers (who want to build coveted boat docks to attract buyers) clash with those of manatees in literal and political collisions. In warm waters swarming with high-speed motor boats swim slow-moving, air-breathing mammals ripe for having their bones shattered and their flesh ripped to shreds by heels and propellers. Pittman takes us from the very beginning of Florida's settlement to the first manatee studies all the way to today's ongoing legal battles. It's a good read, and I don't say that as someone with an interest in manatees, boating, or environmentalism. I just like to have my attention captivated while learning new things, and *Manatee Insanity* filled the bill. It's obviously slanted towards the "manatee surviving and not being chopped to bits" side of the debate, not the boater and real estate magnate side -- frankly, I don't think most people will mind! A fascinating insight into the world of manatees, endangered species laws, and even Jimmy Buffett and the \*positive\* role local power plants serve in the survival of this unusual animal.

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