

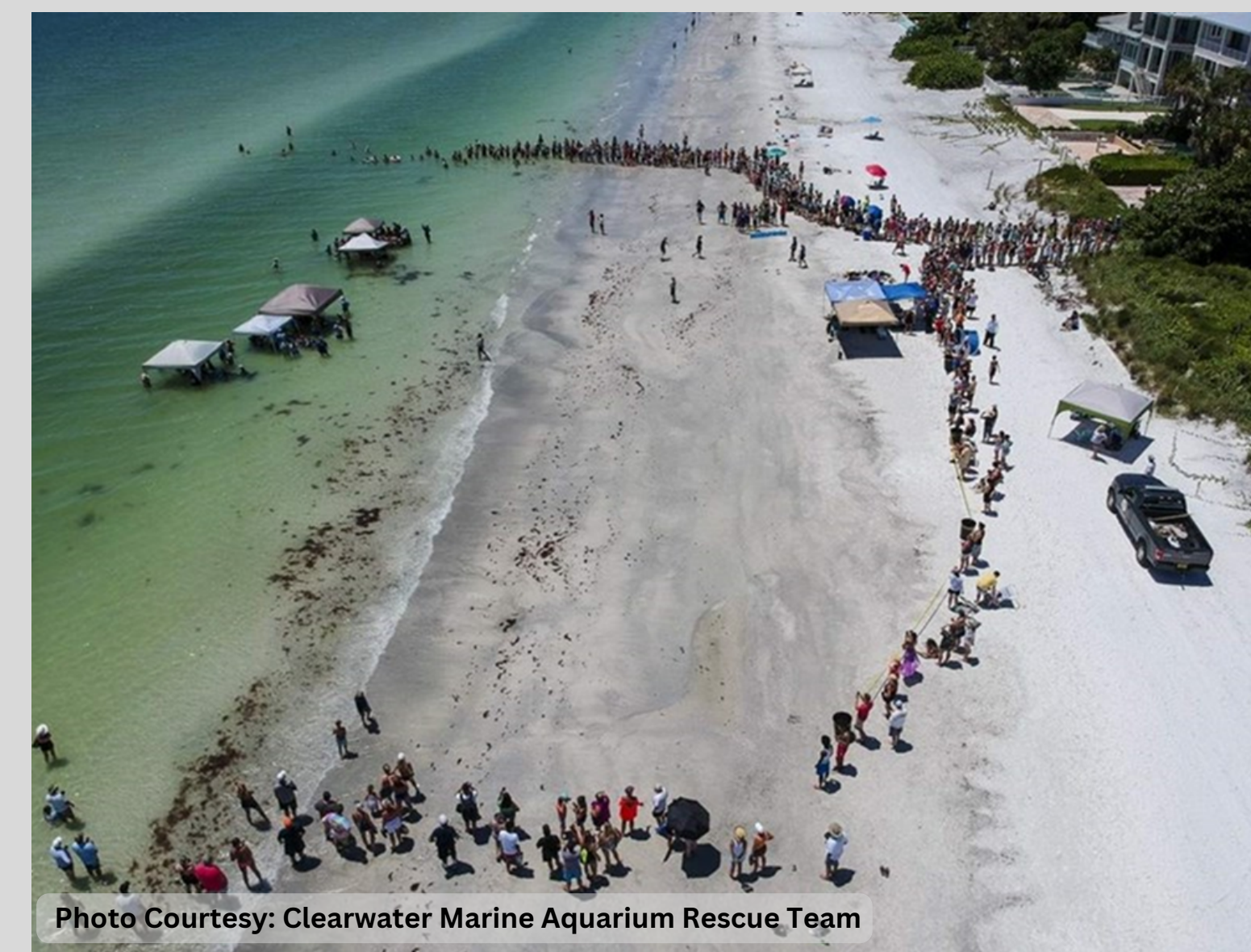
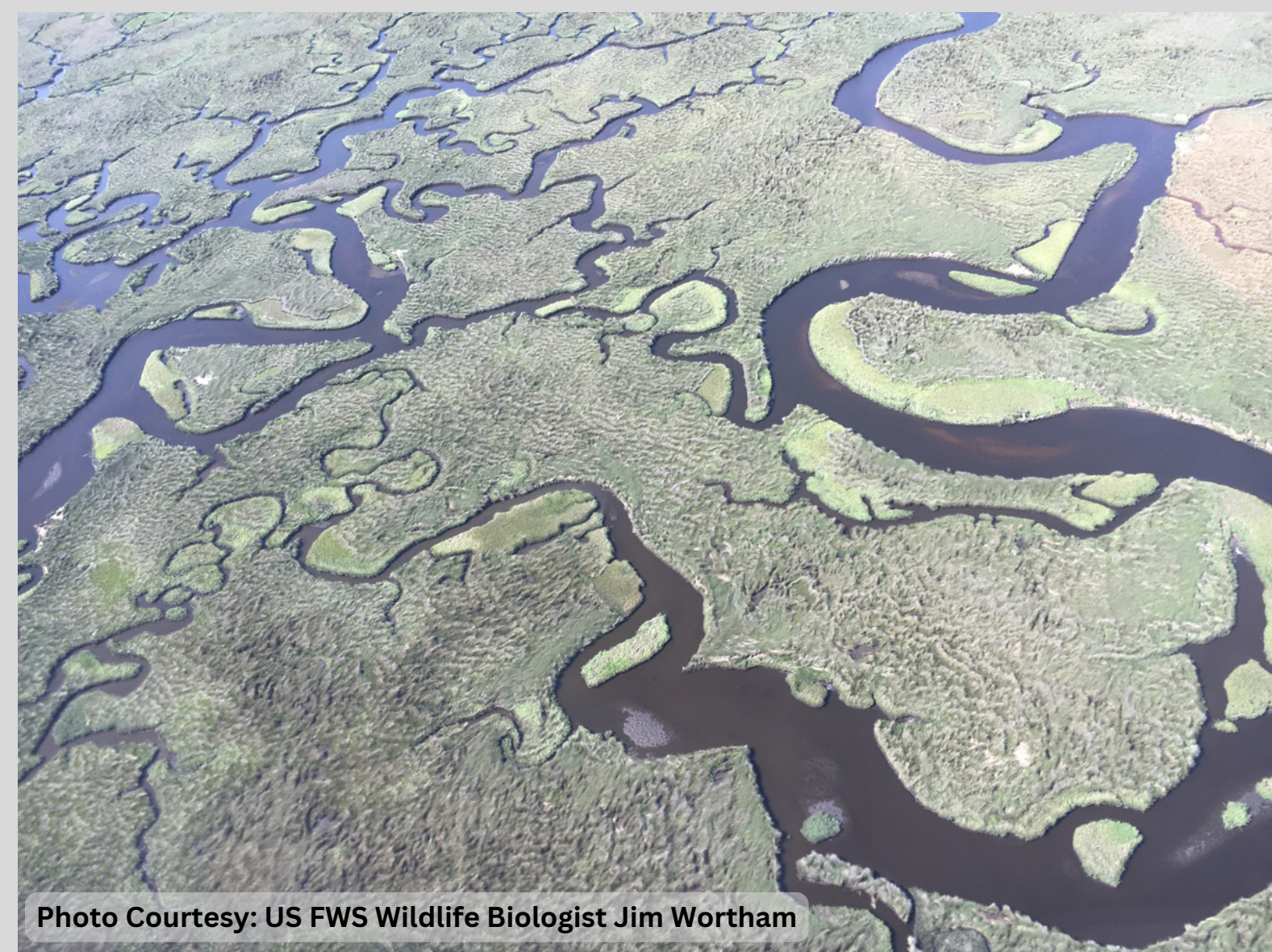
A review of marine mammal populations along the Big Bend of Florida

Suzanna T. Mickey¹, Stefanie K. Gazda², Michael T. Walsh¹

University of Florida Marine Animal Rescue¹, Cedar Key Dolphin Project²

Background

- UF Marine Animal Rescue (UF MAR) is a marine animal stranding program that responds to **Levy, Dixie, Taylor counties along the Gulf of Mexico in Northwest Florida** known as the Big Bend
 - The program was founded in 2016, and the area previously did not have dedicated stranding response
- Historically, long-term marine mammal population studies have primarily **been conducted in Levy County** or further south^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5}
- Only **5 known cetacean species** have stranded in this area, according to the NOAA MMHSRP Database
- **Little is known about spatial usage** for cetaceans or manatees in Dixie and Taylor counties aside from stranding data^{1, 3, 5}
- An undeveloped **natural coastline** with a sparse human population likely affects the number of sightings and reported strandings



Figures 1 and 2. Aerial views of short finned pilot whale mass stranding locations in Taylor County (left) and Pinellas County (right) showcasing the difference in habitat along the coastlines.

Cedar Key Dolphin Project Population Studies	
Study Area	Crystal River to Suwannee River
Focused Study Area*	Waccasassa Bay to Cedar Key
Individuals	821
Resident Individuals	410
Total Sightings	1334+
Dolphins Documented	6700+

Table 1. Cedar Key Dolphin Project (CKDP) population highlights from 2001 to 2022.

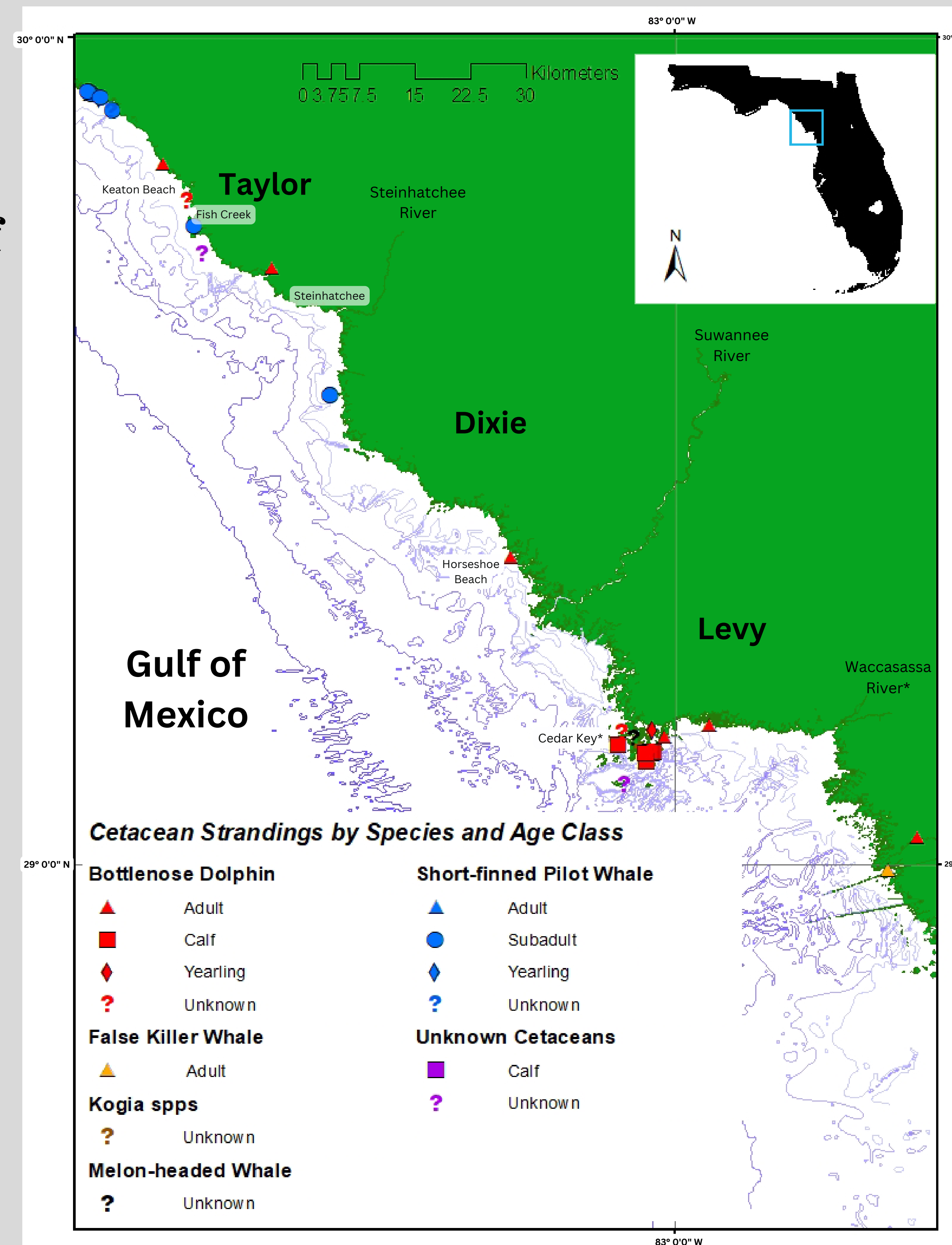


Figure 3. Cetacean strandings (live and dead) along Levy, Dixie, Taylor counties from 2001 to 2021. A total of 32 strandings. Asterisks (*) represent the CKDP's focused study area.

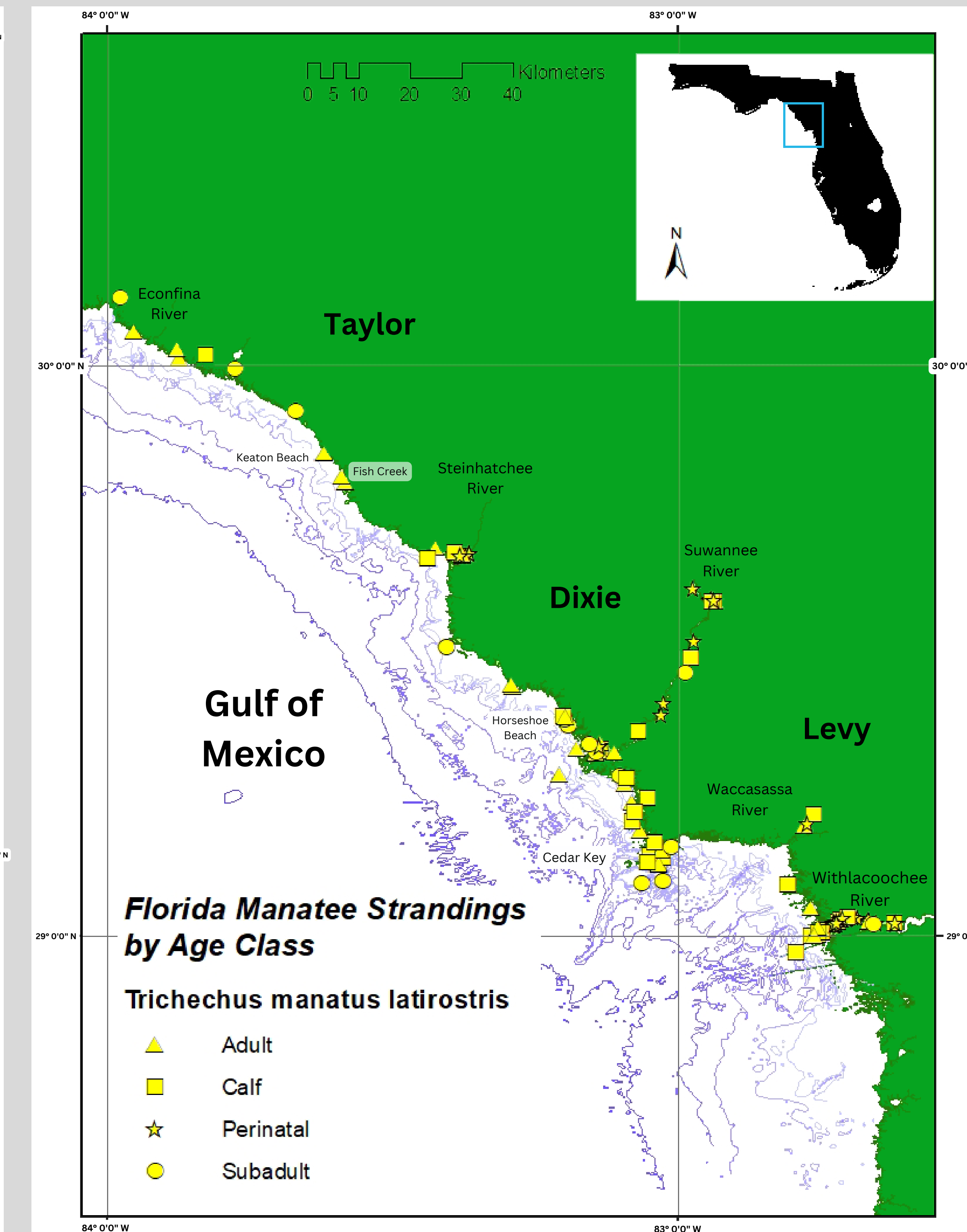


Figure 4. Florida manatee strandings (rescues and mortalities) along Levy, Dixie, Taylor counties from 2001 to 2021. A total of 18 rescues and 115 mortalities.

What are We Looking For?

Marine mammal population and stranding data in Levy, Dixie, Taylor counties along the Gulf of Mexico, adjacent rivers, and fresh water springs

- Stranding Data
- Published Population Data



Figure 5. Manatee rescued from Taylor County in January 2023.

Going Forward

- Increase surveillance in data deficient areas
- Expand research and identify trends (e.g. seasonality, age classes) within strandings to better inform management and conservation priorities
- Increase education efforts through community engagement in citizen science
- Partner with local citizens to identify animal presence and increase stranded animal reporting

