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WANDERING MANATEE TURNS BAHAMA MAMA *Sea to Shore Alliance Confirms Cape Cod Rescue is Now In the Abacos*

SARASOTA, Fla. (Dec. 2, 2016) – Washburn, the manatee that made headlines this September when she was rescued in Cape Cod, Mass., has made another unusual trek. This week, scientists from **Sea to Shore Alliance**, with assistance from the Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation (BMMRO), confirmed the pregnant manatee is now swimming in the waters off the northernmost islands of the Bahamas. Manatees are rare in the Bahamas and though researchers have documented some Florida individuals in the Bahamas, this is the *first* manatee researchers have ever tracked crossing from Florida to the Bahamas in real time.

“As the number of manatees slowly increases, environmental conditions change, and public awareness of manatees rises, we have been seeing Florida manatees show up in unusual places like Massachusetts, the Bahamas, and Cuba,” said Monica Ross, research scientist for Sea to Shore Alliance. “Our tracking study is investigating where manatees go when they leave Florida and what areas unknown to us are important to them. Washburn is proving to be a particularly interesting manatee for this study; she definitely has us on our toes wondering where she’ll go next.”

Washburn was rescued from the cooling waters of Cape Cod, Mass. on Sept. 22, 2016, by the International Fund for Animal Welfare and began her rehabilitation at the Mystic Aquarium in Conn. before being flown to SeaWorld Orlando by the Cape Cod Coast Guard Air Station. Her rescue and rehabilitation were coordinated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Manatee Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), a cooperative group of more than two dozen private and governmental agencies that pool resources to rehabilitate injured manatees and then release them back into their natural habitat, where they are monitored by Sea to Shore Alliance to ensure their success.

After treatment for cold stress, Washburn was released on Nov. 1 in the waters near Oak Hill, Fla., an ideal habitat for manatees. Sea to Shore Alliance scientists placed a satellite tag on her as part of a manatee movement study. Washburn spent 11 days in the area, feeding and resting normally with other manatees, before traveling south down the coast past Ponce Inlet, then east offshore and into the Gulf Stream. Scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, and Sea to Shore Alliance analyzed data from Washburn’s tag as she crossed the Gulf Stream. Washburn passed just south of Walker’s Cay on Thanksgiving Day and was photographed by BMMRO scientists east of Walker’s Cay on Nov. 26. However on Nov. 29, satellite data showed the tag was not moving and scientists became concerned. BMMRO scientists recovered the belt and tag but so far have not had luck locating Washburn.

“Thanks to the efforts of the Bahamas Marine Mammal Research Organisation, we have photos and video of Washburn’s current condition. With the loss of her tag and belt, it now becomes much more difficult to monitor her but we are hopeful for a sighting. The area she is in has good food sources for manatees and as long as she is eating enough and is able to find fresh water, she could remain in the Bahamas through the winter,” said Dr. James Powell, executive director of Sea to Shore Alliance. “But if she gets into trouble or we find her condition deteriorating, Sea to Shore Alliance, along with BMMRO and other members of the MRP, will be ready to assist in her rescue.”

Sea to Shore Alliance, a Florida-based 501(c)(3) non-profit, employs a two-tiered approach to conservation — scientific research and public education. Our science is applied not only to the benefit of endangered species and their imperiled habitats, but also for the people who depend on those coastal resources for their livelihoods and recreation. Each of our projects incorporates public outreach to bring our scientists together with local stakeholders to shape conservation initiatives, protections, and policies to address the welfare, interests, and survival of all. To learn more, please visit us at facebook.com/SaveOurOceans or sea2shore.org.