

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Search Underway For Manatees Seen In St. Croix Waters

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On one of the coldest Florida winter days in history, a young male Florida manatee calf floats and enjoys the warmth over a blue freshwater spring outflow, with an atlantic needlefish at his side. T

ST. CROIX -- A major search effort is underway for two manatees last seen in St. Croix waters, with the National Park Service, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the Puerto Rico Manatee Conservation Center and the U.S. Fishery and Wildlife Service teaming up to find the mammals.

They are looking for an adult male manatee last seen in Frederiksted waters and is said to be between 6 to 8 feet long. A second, younger manatee that was last seen Tuesday near the Buck Island Reef National Monument is also being sought, according to the National Park Service.

It is not known how the manatees wound up in the territory, but it's been 50 to 75 years since they've been sighted on St. Croix, according to N.P.S. officials.

Manatees, part of the Trichechidae family, are large, fully aquatic, mostly herbivorous marine mammals sometimes known as sea cows. There are three accepted living species of Trichechidae, representing three of the four living species in the order Sirenia: the Amazonian manatee (*Trichechus inunguis*), the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), and the West African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*). They measure up to 4.0 metres (13.1 ft) long, weigh as much as 590 kilograms (1,300 lb),^[1] and have paddle-like flippers.

N.P.S. is asking snorkelers and boaters for help in finding the mammals.