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Genetic Variability in the Florida Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*)

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Journal of Mammalogy, Volume 69, Issue 3, 30 August 1988, Pages 481–488,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1381339>

Published: 30 August 1988 **Article history** ▼

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Abstract

Tissue was obtained from 59 manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) carcasses salvaged from 20 counties in Florida. Allozyme phenotypes at 24 structural

loci were determined by gel electrophoresis. Averages for the proportion of polymorphic loci and mean heterozygosity were 0.300 (range, 0.167–0.417) and 0.050 (range, 0.028–0.063), respectively. These estimates are equivalent to or higher than those generally reported for other species of marine mammals and do not support the hypothesis that body size and heterozygosity in mammals are related inversely. Among-region gene diversity accounted for only 4% of the total diversity. High rates of gene flow probably account for genetic homogeneity across regions. An *F*-statistic analysis revealed a general tendency toward excess homozygosity within regions. Management efforts to prevent future reductions in population size that would erode existing genic diversity should continue.

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Online ISSN 1545-1542

Print ISSN 0022-2372

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