

Massive whale slowly dies off Florida coast as helpless beachgoers watch, photos show

March 11 2024, by Mark Price, The Charlotte Observer



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A tragedy played out along Florida's Gulf Coast during spring break as a stranded 44-foot whale slowly died while stuck in the surf.

The endangered sperm whale was discovered Saturday, March 9, off Venice and attempts to offer aid had been hampered by dangerous conditions, according to the Venice Police Department. Venice is about a 70-mile drive south from Tampa.

It was still alive and struggling to breathe late Sunday, but things worsened in the night, officials wrote.

"NOAA officials have confirmed the whale has passed away," Venice city officials wrote in a Facebook post early Monday, March 11.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission reports the whale died around 3 a.m. and the cause remains a mystery.

"Today (Monday), biologists will collect samples to attempt to determine cause of illness and death and better to understand sperm whale health, and life history," FWC officials said. "Results of the samples will likely take several weeks to confirm a cause of death."

Video posted by police showed the struggling marine mammal was thrashing its fins at one point over the weekend.

The whale is estimated at 50,000 to 70,000 pounds and was stuck on a sandbar about 50 yards off Service Club Park, officials said.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Mote Marine Laboratory staff are among those who monitored the whale's status, officials said.

A perimeter was set up around the whale in the water and along a stretch of beach, officials said.

The saga has gotten thousands of comments on social media, including some people who begged officials to put the whale out of its misery. Others held out hope it could be saved.

"I can't stand to read this anymore. Devastating!" Kerry Kee Pierson wrote on the police department's Facebook page.

"Saddest thing ever. Can't believe we have to just let it sit out there and die. Of all the technologies in this world and we can get this big giant back out to sea?" Stephanie Hensley posted.

"Can someone tell me why it can't at least be sedated to stop the suffering? I understand they can't get close, but can't they shoot something into him?" Tracee Chapman said.

Sperm whales are found in every ocean and can reach 90,000 pounds, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says.

"Sperm whales hunt for food during deep dives that routinely reach depths of 2,000 feet and can last for 45 minutes," NOAA reports. "They are capable of diving to depths of over 10,000 feet for over 60 minutes."

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