

Impromptu whale visit boosted revenue at Sebastian Inlet



Credit: ERIC HASERT/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

"This is wonderful, I've lived here over fifty years, they've never ever done this that I know about," said Jim Angy, (right), of Indiatlantic, while photographing the right whales in the Indian River Lagoon in Sebastian along side Layton Parham (second from right), of Palm Bay. "These whales don't come up in the inlet like this," Angy said. (ERIC HASERT/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS)

*By Lamaur Stancil of TCPalm
February 10, 2016 8:04 p.m.*

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY — A mother whale and her calf made waves in more ways than one when they spent a couple of days in the Sebastian Inlet this week.

Parking receipts at the Sebastian Inlet State Park show 6,275 motorists paid for entry to the inlet on Monday and Tuesday, officials said. That's 56.8 percent more cars than showed up Saturday and Sunday, when 4,000 cars entered, they said.

Monday's and Tuesday's parking receipts were also almost 31 percent more than the same two days last week. About 4,800 cars parked at the inlet on Feb. 1 and 2, park officials said.

<http://www.tcpalm.com/news/indian-river-county/impromptu-whale-visit-boosted-revenue-at-sebastian-inlet-2b6c8f76-36b9-586d-e053-0100007f11bf-368370501.html>

It cost \$4 for an individual to park at the inlet, or \$8 for cars with up to eight people in them. The receipts don't include the cars that parked alongside State Road A1A on Monday and Tuesday.

Park rangers first noticed the North Atlantic right whale, named Clipper, and her calf early Monday morning in the inlet on the west side of S.R. A1A. It surprised experts because whales normally stay in the Atlantic Ocean and miles east of the coast. A steady stream of onlookers began arriving at the park when word spread Monday.

The crowds only posed a problem Tuesday when onlookers filled the south side catwalk, which runs underneath S.R. A1A, said Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Officer Lenny Salberg.

"Each time the whales would approach the bridge to leave, the people would cheer," Salberg said.

FWC officers speculated the noise from the people on the catwalk might have had an adverse effect on the whales. Clipper and her calf made 16 attempts to pass under the bridge Tuesday morning but turned around each time, said staff from **Hubbs SeaWorld Research Institute**. Salberg said he and other officers cleared the catwalk and the whales passed under the bridge about noon.

Staff from Hubbs SeaWorld and members of the Marine Resources Council of Palm Bay observed the whales during the two days and said the pair appeared healthy. However, they had no explanation as to why the whales swam into the inlet.

Park rangers said some inlet visitors still were asking Wednesday whether they could see the whales.

Instead, Clipper and her calf are more likely back on their migrational path to the northeast part of the country, said Julie Albert, spokeswoman for the Marine Resources Council. The whales feed in the north during the spring and summer, then swim south in the colder months.