

Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team
August 19, 2015
Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
Meeting Notes

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendance: Larry Williams (FWS), David Shindle (FWS), Kevin Godsea (FWS), Erin Myers (FWS), Roxanna Hinzman (FWS), Robin Boughton (FWC), Dave Onorato (FWC), Darrell Land (FWC), Roy McBride (Ranchers Supply), Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association), Nancy Payton (Florida Wildlife Federation), Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife), Ron Clark (National Park Service), Tom Jones (Barron Collier Companies)

Phone: Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Laurie Macdonald (Defenders of Wildlife)

TRANSPORTATION SUB-TEAM UPDATE:

Nancy Payton provided update of July 28th Transportation Sub-Team meeting (see Transportation Sub-Team notes at <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRITTransportation.html>). Dan Smith's cost-surface analysis and mapping for habitat connectivity and identification of hotspots, especially north of the Caloosahatchee River will be discussed at the October 6th Sub-Team meeting.

Transportation Sub-Team has been developing a compendium of highway crossing structures (designs and costs) and reviewing alternative options for fencing designs, including neutralizing color and providing "jump-outs". Nancy requested that USFWS and FWC provide a letter of support to the South Florida Water Management District for the 260-acre BOMA lease to IFAS. Transportation Sub-Team will provide a detailed update at the October PRIT meeting on their reports and recommendations to date.

ACTION ITEM: Larry Williams and David Shindle will follow up with Nancy about a possible letter from FWS in regards to the BOMA property.

INVENTORY AND MONITORING (IM) SUB-TEAM UPDATE:

Dave Onorato (FWC) provided an update on the first phase of a feasibility study to estimate the density of Florida panthers using simultaneously collected remote camera capture and telemetry data within a spatial capture-recapture modeling framework. This study was initiated in 2014 by FWC in collaboration with USGS (Dr. Robert Dorazio) and the Conservancy of Southwest Florida (David Shindle). Phase 1 of this study involved collection of camera trap data from two camera arrays deployed on two parcels of public land in southwest Florida that are managed under different regimens. The FWC-Addlands (FWC-ADD) study area was located in the Addition Lands Unit of Big Cypress National Preserve. A second camera trap array (DS-FPNWR) was deployed and monitored by David Shindle from the CSWFL, the majority of which was deployed on the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) but with a portion that extended into the Picayune Strand State Forest and the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Photographic detections of all panthers (both marked and unmarked) were incorporated into a revised version of the model used by Sollmann et al. (2013) to derive estimates of panther density for each study area. The density estimates generated from the FWC-ADD study area were similar to those generated in Picayune Strand State Forest in a previous study (Sollmann et al. 2013). The density estimates generated from the DS-FPNWR study area were considerably higher than the FWC-ADD study area. These differences highlight the need to account for environmental covariates when deploying grids in multiple habitat types across the range. Phase II of this study will make an attempt to address

this issue and improve this analytical technique by better understanding those covariates that influence the model and attempting to deploy similar grids in additional study areas (possibly on private lands).

The Core Team discussed the need for consistent, clear, updated, and accurate messaging from the Agencies regarding the trends and size of the panther population and the techniques used to generate those data. The Core Team was informed that FWS had reached out to Dr. Robert Dorazio (USGS) to serve on the IM Sub-Team in order to provide additional independent expertise on the Sub-Team, especially given that the majority of the IM Sub-Team is composed primarily of FWC staff. The merits of Dr. Dorazio's inclusion on the IM Sub-Team were discussed and the Core Team concurred with inviting Dr. Dorazio to serve.

ACTION ITEM: The IM Sub-Team will revise and update FWC's "Statement on Estimating Panther Population Size" (the White Paper) to include the latest population information and the latest techniques the Agencies are using to monitor the size and trends of the panther population. These techniques include the recently published roadkill study and the camera surveys based on spatial mark resight models. Subsequent to the IM Sub-Team's update and revision of the White Paper, Robin will consult with communication experts in FWC and USFWS (e.g., Doc Kokol [FWC], Ken Warren [FWS], and Carol Knox [FWC]) to convert the revised White Paper into a plain language fact sheet for the general public. The IM Sub-Team will be consulted to verify that the fact sheet is scientifically accurate, but the outreach staff will be primarily responsible for translating the White Paper into plain language and developing the fact sheet.

ACTION ITEM: FWS will draft invite letter to Dr. Dorazio to serve on the IM Sub-Team.

RECOVERY CRITERIA SUB-TEAM UPDATE (Core Team Only):

Core Team members discussed a list of potential candidates that were recommended to serve on the Recovery Criteria Sub-Team. The Core Team also discussed the merits of this Sub-Team including individuals representing various stakeholder perspectives (e.g., conservation NGOs and private lands representatives) in addition to the recommended technical experts. The Core Team discussed the need to develop a purpose statement for the sub-team and incorporates the fact that this sub-team will first be tasked with evaluating the existing criteria and making the determination if new scientific data are available to better guide the Service on how recovery criteria for the panther should be defined. If revisions to the existing criteria are recommended to the Implementation Team based on the best scientific and commercial data available, it is important that these criteria be "SMART": specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-referenced. The Core Team agreed that regardless of whether FWS decides to include stakeholder representation on the Recovery Criteria Sub-Team, at least 2 additional technical experts need to be considered for this team given the importance of the Recovery Criteria Sub-Team's tasks.

ACTION ITEM: FWS will seek 2 additional technical experts that would be willing to serve on the Sub-Team and FWS will provide those names as part of a final list of candidates to the Core Team.

PANTHER MANAGEMENT OUTREACH

Roy McBride presented an update on a field guide for identifying panther depredations that he is developing. The value of Roy's field guide as a tool for one-on-one outreach efforts with interested landowners and lessees was discussed. It was agreed that providing cattle ranchers with examples of the types of evidence they would need to provide Agency personnel to satisfy third-party verification of depredation events could help streamline compensation programs such as the Livestock Indemnity

Program. Team agreed that Lindsey Wiggins could provide valuable guidance in this effort and could recommend the next step forward based on what her contacts tell her they want. The Team also agreed that any plans for public workshops on this issue should be shelved and instead effort should be focused on smaller meetings and outreach opportunities with individual landowners and lessees that are receptive to FWS providing assistance with streamlining third-party verifications for depredation events and submitting depredation claims under existing compensation programs (e.g. LIP).

ACTION ITEM: David Shindle and Erin Myers will meet with Lindsey Wiggins and FSA representatives to discuss the utility, applicability, and receptivity of the Livestock Indemnity Program for panther depredations on livestock in southwest Florida.

PAYMENT FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES UPDATE:

An update was provided on the status of the pre-proposal submitted to the Natural Resource Conservation Service to be considered for their Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This project is a 5-year pilot intended to introduce the PES concept to ranchers within the range of Florida panthers. Over the 5-year life of the project, approximately \$850,000 (\$600K from NRCS and \$250K from the Service) in financial assistance would go to landowners to manage their land for panthers. Annually, about \$170,000 would be awarded to landowners for managing panther habitat on about 9,000 acres per year. The Core Team was informed that the pre-proposal was selected to move on to the full proposal stage. The full proposal will be due November 10th, and the announcement of which proposals are selected for funding should be announced in December 2015. Talking points will be prepared prior to Dan Ashe and Cindy Dohner's visit to Florida the following week and Larry will share these with the Core Team so that PRIT members could speak on behalf of this project when the opportunity arises. Laurie Macdonald and Tom Jones discussed opportunities to seek additional funding and support from Washington D.C. The Team also discussed the fact that several high level officials are expected to attend the Annual Everglades Coalition Conference in January which could afford team members an opportunity to meet with these officials to discuss the merits of the PES program while they are in Florida.

ACTION ITEM: Larry Williams will provide PES Talking Points to PRIT.

ACTION ITEM: Tom Jones will update Larry on any communications with congressional staff members regarding opportunities for additional funding for the PES program.

ACTION ITEM (optional): Defenders of Wildlife to will submit letters of support for the RCCP application.

FWC POSITION STATEMENT ON PANTHER POLICY

Team discussed FWC's revised Draft Position Statement on Panther Policy that will be discussed at the September 3rd FWC Commission Meeting in Ft. Lauderdale (<http://www.myfwc.com/media/3214423/6b-panther-position-statement.pdf>). Non-FWC PRIT members provided input to FWC staff on the proposed changes and made additional suggestions on how to improve the messaging on specific components and where concerns remained on the revised draft. Defenders and FWF would be submitting comment letters to FWC. FWS was pleased with the revised changes but had not decided if written comments would be submitted on behalf of the Service.

USFWS OPTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR RECOVERY EFFORTS NORTH OF RIVER

Larry Williams briefed the Team on preliminary discussions held within the Service on regulatory options for expanding the panther population north of the Caloosahatchee River and in areas of their historic

range. These discussions were focused on the options that would provide the appropriate regulatory relief and management flexibility that would increase the receptivity of any future proposed reintroductions efforts, especially in consideration of the of the critical role that private lands and associated stakeholders would play in these efforts. The pros and cons of using Safe Harbor, Non-essential Experimental Population rules, or a combination of both were discussed. The Service felt that further discussion and research on the potential application of a non-essential experimental population approach was warranted and would be formulating a more detailed review of this option.

ACTION ITEM: The Service will provide PRIT a more detailed evaluation of both Safe Harbor and Non-essential Experimental Population options and how these could apply to theoretical reintroduction efforts.

TEAM ROUND-TABLE AND PARKING LOT (Core Team Only)

Conservation NGO Vacancy on Core Team

Team discussed the Conservation NGO vacancy on the Core Team resulting from Laurie Macdonald's pending retirement from Defenders of Wildlife the week of September 11, 2015. Core Team made recommendations and discussed potential candidates from conservation NGO's that would be suitable to fill this vacancy. It was clear from the discussions that many individuals within the Conservation NGO community would be qualified and well-suited to serve on the PRIT. Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife) was the consensus choice and will be recommended to the FWS Regional Director for appointment to the PRIT and replace the position currently held by Laurie Macdonald.

ACTION ITEM: FWS will draft invite letter for Elizabeth Fleming to serve on the PRIT as the Conservation NGO Representative.

Items for Future Discussion and Action

ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will ask Bob Frakes to attend the October PRIT meeting and provide an update on his panther habitat modeling work.

ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will send the draft Terms of Reference to the Core Team for review and comments.

ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will solicit from the Core Team members via email a re-ranking of the 8 action items and present these results for discussion at October PRIT Meeting.

NEXT MEETING: Week of October 12th. Doodle Poll will be sent to PRIT for specific date. Given that Transportation Sub-Team will present at next meeting, the FDOT facility in Bartow would be a logical choice so that we can accommodate Transportation Sub-Team members.