

MEETING NOTES

Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team

October 15, 2015 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

FDOT District 1 Office, Elizabeth Moore Rm 214

801 North Broadway

Bartow, FL 33831-1249

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendance:

PRIT Core Team: Larry Williams (USFWS), David Shindle (USFWS), Kevin Godsea (USFWS), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Robin Boughton (FWC), Laurie Macdonald (Defenders of Wildlife), Ron Clark (National Park Service), Tom Jones (Barron Collier Companies), Lindsey Wiggins (UF-IFAS, Florida Cattlemen's Association)

PRIT Transportation Sub-Team: Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife), Nancy Payton (Florida Wildlife Federation), Amber Crooks (Conservancy of Southwest Florida), and Brent Setchell (Florida Department of Transportation)

Invited Guest: Dr. Robert Frakes (USFWS-retired)

Phone: Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association) and Dave Onorato (FWC, Inventory and Monitoring Sub-Team).

TRANSPORTATION SUB-TEAM UPDATE

Nancy Payton gave an introductory presentation on the Transportation Sub-Team and its active projects (see handout "Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team Transportation Sub-Team and PowerPoint Presentation). Active projects include: 1) identifying southwest Florida hotspots for panther roadkills (state and local roads in Collier, Lee, and Hendry counties); 2) cost surface mapping south of I-4; 3) developing format for recommendations; 4) developing a compendium of existing panther/wildlife crossings; and 5) reviewing Metropolitan Planning Organization's vehicle-animal crash databases. Nancy Payton discussed the possibility of a future presentation of Dan Smith's work and a Google Earth view of the cost surface mapping/least cost pathways work was displayed. Nancy Payton circulated a draft of the initial format for the compendium. Larry Williams requested that the compendium be made broadly available to the public. Lindsey Wiggins asked about the funding source for crossings and specifically the funding for exotic/invasive vegetation control on SR80 fencing. Brent Setchell recommended sending this type of information (reporting that a fence is not being maintained) to FDOT.

Amber Crooks gave a presentation of the Sub-Team's completed product (see handout "FDOT Wildlife Crossing Guidelines" and PowerPoint Presentation). An overview of the FDOT Guidelines, which were developed in 2008 in consultation with wildlife agencies, was provided. Purpose of the Guidelines is to provide FDOT guidance on when wildlife crossings and other related structures/exclusionary devices (fencing, walls, etc.) are appropriate. These Guidelines apply to new roadways, projects that involve addition of travel lanes, or retrofit projects. The identification of wildlife movement issues and impact minimization measures are best identified early in the project planning. Review and revision of FDOT Wildlife Crossing Guidelines was identified as a Transportation Sub-Team project at their first meeting in October 2014. Suggested revisions for the FDOT Guidelines were discussed by the Transportation Sub-Team over two meetings in early 2015 and a final consensus on suggested changes was reached. Examples of suggested revisions were presented.

Larry Williams asked if having conservation lands on both sides of a crossing should be interpreted as a requirement. Brent Setchell stated that these are just guidelines and not set in stone and provided an example of incorporating bridge shelving in a new retrofit project that has budget constraints. Larry Williams stated that he does not want the conservation land constraint to be a policy that precludes having a crossing located in a specific area. Amber Crooks mentioned the addition of "are planned to be" to take this into account. Lindsey Wiggins asked whether crossings, exclusionary devices (fencing, walls, etc.), or other related structures would ever be forced on a private landowner. Larry Williams stated that this was not the case. Brent Setchell discussed the differences between limited access roadways and regular roadways. FDOT can fence the entire corridor on limited access roadways and then gave the example of the requirement to put a gap in the fence for a private landowner's driveway. Nancy Payton expressed appreciation to Tom Jones and private landowners. Tom Jones provided a hypothetical example of where protected land on only one side of a designated crossing/fencing would create a problem by affecting permitting process if a

private landowner would want to develop the other side. Lindsey Wiggins asked about incorporating automatic gates for private landowners. Examples were given where automatic gates have had reliability/maintenance issues (e.g., BCNP electric gate on US41). A question was raised as to why NMFS was referenced in these guidelines and examples were given where NMFS would be involved with highway crossing structures (e.g., manatees on US41 and sturgeon in the Panhandle).

Amber Crooks then summarized the major themes of the changes the Sub-Team made to the FDOT Guidelines (see PowerPoint presentation). Next steps are to get the CT's approval of the final work product of the Sub-Team. The hard copy handed out at meeting may not have incorporated some of the changes, most updated version will be sent to CT for review. Larry Williams expressed his appreciation to the Sub-Team and their efforts. Larry Williams stated that the PRIT needs to discuss what Transportation Sub-Team products need to be put into action and then to shift gears towards future products. Brent Setchell informed PRIT that the FDOT Guidelines drafted by the Sub-Team were already under review by FDOT. Larry Williams suggested that the section in the guidelines that made reference to new technology should include a specific example like RADS. There was a consensus with the CT that they needed more time to review the Sub-Team's revisions of the FDOT Guidelines and to make edits.

Larry Williams stated that he wants to have clear recommendations coming from PRIT to address hotspots and that he wants the Transportation Sub-Team to provide those recommendations to make it official so that they are clearly official recommendations from PRIT.

There was significant discussion on the appropriate role of the Transportation Sub-Team and their charge not to take into consideration or examine specific development projects that may have transportation impacts. Sub-team members present at the meeting confirmed that there was consensus that the Sub-Team did not want to comment on a specific project. The Rodina DRI and State Road 29 were discussed as an example of where the sub-team did not take into account individual project needs; rather they only considered panther needs. Kipp Frohlich asked how projects for individual sections of roadways are considered. Larry Williams clarified that the sub-team should not get into details on specific regulatory reviews and to be respectful of the regulatory process. Kipp Frohlich asked about whether the sub-team looked at the unfenced section of I-75 east of the Naples tollbooth. Nancy Payton discussed the Florida Wildlife Federation hiring Dr. Dan Smith to conduct a review of this stretch of roadway and to provide a cost-estimate for extending the wildlife fencing on the unfenced portion of I-75 east of the tollbooth. The review and recommendations were not a sub-team product. Nancy Payton asked what FDOT, FWC, and USFWS were doing in response to FWF's submitted report and recommendations. Kipp Frohlich asked why this specific transportation issue was not given to the experts on the sub-team for review. There was discussion about this specific road project being a timing issue, especially for FDOT because of the available funding. Amber Crooks asked if PRIT had suggestions for how to prioritize areas, otherwise the sub-team may have to rely on specific projects as a means to prioritize. Tom Jones expressed some concern of looking at individual projects as a means to prioritize and inquired what the sub-team has used for prioritization given that the SR29 segments have been addressed. Nancy Payton clarified that the sub-team relied on Dan Smith's work for decisions north of the Caloosahatchee River and that prioritization south of the river relied on sub-team knowledge. The sub-team started with SR29 but then determined that a format was needed. Larry Williams requested that the sub-team product prioritize hotspot recommendations. Larry Williams requested that the PRIT be respectful that work is not done on specific projects, especially given that individual sub-team members may be taking action on specific projects independently.

Amber Crooks requested clarity from PRIT on the prioritization issue and how the sub-team moves forward and towing the line between prioritizing based on taking advantage of opportunity versus not focusing on specific projects. Larry Williams suggested that the sub-team should be respectful of boundaries and that the sub-team itself will be the best resource for determining where those boundaries lie.

ACTION ITEM: CT will review FDOT Guidelines submitted by Transportation Sub-Team and provide comments to David Shindle by October 22nd. David Shindle will incorporate CT edits and submit back to Transportation Sub-Team. Once finalized by Sub-Team, Larry will sign letter on behalf of PRIT and send to FDOT.

ACTION ITEM: Transportation Sub-Team will continue work on compendium and provide CT a proposal for a Compendium Format with the next step being the first batch of recommendations (first 10 problem areas, conducted county by county).

INVENTORY AND MONITORING SUB-TEAM UPDATE:

Robin Boughton (FWC) provided the Core Team (CT) a draft of the revised/updated FWC document “Determining the Size of the Florida Panther Population”, hereafter “White Paper”, and a draft of the public outreach document, hereafter “Outreach Document”, developed to summarize and simplify the concepts and methodologies described in the “White Paper”. The drafting of these documents was an Action Item from the August 19th PRIT Meeting. These documents had not been reviewed by the entire Inventory and Monitoring (IM) Sub-Team. The current version of the White Paper (August 2014) is now published on FWC’s PantherNet (<http://www.floridapanthernet.org/>). There was discussion among CT members on whether the White Paper should now be considered a PRIT document given that the task to revise and include recently published methodologies came at the direction of the CT. CT also discussed whether the White Paper should be considered an interagency product as opposed to an FWC document, especially given that the funding for the Rancher’s Supply Annual Panther Count is shared between FWC and USFWS. Some CT members felt that there were merits to showing cohesion with the agencies on how we estimate panther numbers and having both documents as products of the PRIT would reaffirm that. Other CT members felt that the White Paper should remain an FWC document and that the Outreach Document could be a PRIT document and the means by which the PRIT endorsed the White Paper. Robin stated that the CT and the IM Sub-Team would be provided both documents for review and that the Outreach Document would be provided to public relations staff at both FWC and USFWS for further review and input subsequent to CT’s and IM Sub-Team’s review. Consensus was reached that the White Paper would remain an FWC document and that the Outreach Document would be a product of PRIT.

ACTION ITEM: Robin will send the draft revised White Paper and Outreach Document to the CT for review. The CT will provide comments and edits to Robin by October 29th.

RECOVERY CRITERIA SUB-TEAM UPDATE:

Kipp Frohlich provided an update on the newly selected Recovery Criteria (RC) Sub-Team. The members and their affiliations are as follows:

Kipp Frohlich – PRIT Team Liaison – FWC

David Shindle – Florida Panther Coordinator – USFWS

Randy Kautz – Retired - FWC; Breedlove, Dennis and Associates, Inc.

Dr. Madan Oli – Professor – Department of Wildlife Ecology, University of Florida

Dr. Dave Onorato – FWC, Associate Research Scientist, Florida Panther Project

Dr. Michael Runge – Research Ecologist – USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Seth Willey – Acting Endangered Species Chief and Recovery Coordinator, Mountain-Prairie Region - USFWS

**These appointments will not be official until approved by the Service's Regional Director and David Shindle indicated that the appointment letters have been drafted and forwarded to Service staff for review.

The RC Sub-Team had their first “get acquainted” conference call on October 1st, 2015. On this call, the RC Sub-Team members were given tentative offline assignments and the RC Sub-Team will try to plan a face-to-face meeting sometime after the New Year. There are some constraints for in-person meetings given that 2 Sub-Team members live out-of-state (Seth Willey and Michael Runge). One of the topics discussed on the RC Sub-Team conference call was the need to have clear direction and guidance on how surgical the review and potential revision of the existing recovery criteria could be and what constraints the RC Sub-Team would have in its assessment or revision of other components of the Recovery Plan tied to the recovery criteria (e.g. actions, costs, and timeline of recovery). David Shindle stated that he has and will consult with the USFWS Recovery Coordinator for the State of Florida (Vivian Negron-Ortiz) and the Regional Recovery Coordinator (Kelly Bibb). Nancy Payton raised an issue that was brought up at an earlier Transportation Sub-Team meeting about whether Transportation Sub-Team members will be notified and be able to attend future RC Sub-Team meetings. Larry Williams clarified that public participation was up to the discretion of individual Sub-Teams, but that Sub-Team meetings should be open to other Sub-Team members. Caution was given to

exercise appropriate sensitivity to certain issues and that there was an expectation for Sub-Team members to use sound professional judgment when attending or requesting to attend other meetings.

UPDATES ON PREVIOUS ACTION ITEMS AND OTHER REQUESTED UPDATES:

Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan: As a follow-up to a PRIT Action Item from the February 25, 2015 meeting, David Shindle and Kevin Godsea provided update on a meeting held on September 25th, 2015 in Naples, FL that was attended by law enforcement and biological staff from the USFWS, FWC, and NPS. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed incorporation of a detailed Panther-Human Attack Response Protocol in the existing Interagency Florida Panther Response Plan. This protocol was drafted as a follow-up to the Wildlife Human Response Training attended by representatives from FWC and USFWS. The meeting also discussed minor revisions to the Response Plan relating to panther mortality investigations that may involve illegal take.

Livestock Indemnity Program Update: As a follow-up to a PRIT Action Item from the August 19, 2015 meeting, David Shindle provided an update on a meeting held on October 9, 2015 at the FSA Office in Bartow, FL. Meeting attendees included David Shindle, Erin Myers (USFWS), Lindsey Wiggins, Rick Dantzler (Executive Director of the Florida State office of the Farm Service Agency), Debbie Hendricks (LIP specialist for the Florida FSA), Mike Nordlund (FSA County Executive Director for the Lee-Charlotte-Collier Office), and Scott Eubanks (Assistant Director in the Agricultural Policy and National Affairs Division of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss options for streamlining the existing LIP application and verification process for producers and more importantly to discuss the possibility of compensating for calf losses in areas with known panther depredation events in absence of verified depredations provided that a Farm Record was established documenting a loss over the established 3% loss rate. Rick Dantzler was receptive to this concept, but he wanted to make certain that the percentage of loss compensated is bullet-proof in terms of being based on peer-reviewed science. The timing of this request was good given that results of the UF calf depredation study conducted by Caitlin Jacobs and Marty Main were published in PLOS ONE week prior.

**The following updates on agenda were re-scheduled for afternoon portion of meeting.

New Calf Loss Study Update:** Lindsey Wiggins provided an update on a proposed new calf loss study. The collaborators for this study will include University of Florida, Florida Cattlemen's Association, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and a private veterinary practice. There will be four ranches participating in the study and all will be south of Interstate 4. Three of the participating ranches will be north of the Caloosahatchee River (Longino Ranch in Manatee County, Buck Island Ranch in Highlands County, and the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation in Glades County) and 1 ranch south of the river (Big Cypress Seminole Reservation in Hendry County). The Principle Investigator for the study will be Dr. Raoul Boughton (University of Florida). This will be a 3-year study focused on calf loss and the projected funding will be \$500,000. Tom Jones mentioned that Barron Collier Companies was currently conducting an internal evaluation on calf loss and depredation on their properties. Preliminary results from this internal evaluation indicated a range of calf-loss from 8-25% and that there is a correlation between calf loss and land cover. Larry requested that Tom please share the data with PRIT, especially the correlation with land cover and that this was a good opportunity to gather more information on calf loss (assumed loss vs actual loss to panthers). Larry offered to send a letter of support for the UF calf loss study and recommended to look for opportunities to incorporate a panther component to the study (concurrently monitored radiocollared panthers).

ACTION ITEM: Larry Williams send letter of support on behalf of the USFWS for the proposed UF calf loss study.

South Florida Deer Study Update:** David Shindle briefly discussed the 3rd Quarterly Update from the FWC-UGA South Florida Deer Study (see <http://myfwc.com/media/3344679/QuarterlyUpdateJul-Sep2015.pdf>) .

Blackfoot Challenge Update:** This is a follow-up from the tabled discussion at the May 19th 2015 PRIT Meeting in Homosassa Springs. Laurie Macdonald made note that the Partners for Conservation (<http://partnersforconservation.org/>) will hold their next annual meeting in Sebring, FL in the fall of 2016. Laurie made the recommendation that PRIT put together plans for outreach opportunities to inform folks about meeting. Larry

suggested that there may be an opportunity to include a session on carnivore management at the meeting and suggested that PRIT should make a recommendation for this type of session.

ACTION ITEM: PRIT should make a recommendation to meeting organizers to include a session on carnivore management on the agenda.

LUNCH

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF ADULT FLORIDA PANTHER HABITAT

Dr. Robert Frakes presented an overview of the manuscript "Landscape Analysis of Adult Florida Panther Habitat" that he authored in collaboration with Chris Belden, Barry Wood, and Frederick James and that was published in PLOS ONE in 2015 (see uploaded manuscript and presentation at <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). The potential applications of the model include: 1) evaluating impacts to proposed developments; 2) prioritizing areas for panther conservation; 3) identifying areas for possible panther reintroductions; and 4) evaluating the impacts of sea level rise and changing hydrology. The concluding recommendations presented by Dr. Frakes included: 1) redrawing the existing "panther zones" (Primary and Secondary Zones as defined by Kautz et al. 2006) based on habitat value as a large portion of the Primary Zone is not good adult panther habitat (gave examples of the Water Conservation Areas, Shark River Slough, and the "witch's finger"), much of the Secondary Zone is poor adult panther habitat, and there is good adult panther habitat outside of both zones; 2) the Service should revise or replace the current Panther Habitat Methodology ("panther tool") as there is much less habitat remaining than assumed by the existing tool and that the "goal" should be protecting breeding habitat; and 3) that additional panther populations should be established north of the Caloosahatchee River as there is insufficient habitat south of the river to support a single viable panther population and that a Species Distribution Model should be used to identify the best areas for reintroductions. Kipp Frohlich called attention to the fact that there was a telemetry bias associated with the model given that the available telemetry data were influenced by where panthers were initially collared, capture season priorities, and private lands access. Dr. Frakes discussed ongoing modeling work with Marilyn Knight (USFWS) on a statewide habitat model based on the Species Distribution Model developed for south Florida. The statewide model was tweaked as to not provide bias towards wetland forest cover. The use of upland forest was much more important for the statewide assessment given that the upland forest type was not important for south Florida.

TEAM ROUND-TABLE AND PARKING LOT

David Shindle presented the results from the CT ranking exercise for recovery action items, a requested action item from the August 19, 2015 PRIT meeting. The focus of the first PRIT meeting in August 2013 was to summarize and discuss the current status of the 8 priority recovery action items as identified in the 2008 Florida Panther Recovery Plan. The 2015 rankings based on totals of individual ranking scores from CT members were as follows (1 = Highest Priority):

Recovery Action	2015 Rank	2013 Rank
Private Lands	1	1
Recovery Criteria	2	3(tie)
Range Expansion	3(tie)	3(tie)
Habitat Management	3(tie)	4(tie)
Inventory and Monitoring	4	2
Vehicle Mortality	5	5(tie)
Taxonomy	6	4(tie)
Genetic Plan	7	5(tie)

- Develop programs that recognize the importance of private landowners to Florida panther recovery
- Review the existing recovery criteria and recommend revisions to these criteria based on the best available science
- Develop range expansion plans and evaluate the potential for reintroductions outside south Florida
- Develop guidance for panther habitat restoration and management

- Refine or develop inventory and monitoring techniques that produce reliable population estimates
- Identify and prioritize high vehicular mortality areas and recommend risk-reduction measures
- Review the Florida panther taxonomic status as a separate subspecies
- Develop a genetic management plan

The CT proceeded to discuss whether PRIT should be doing anything differently based on these rankings and how they should inform future actions. CT members discussed the tradeoff of taking on additional sub-teams versus workload of existing teams and associated PRIT oversight and also the time commitments of sub-team members serving on multiple teams. The CT also discussed the need to more clearly define which sub-teams should have a defined product versus those sub-teams (or future sub-teams) that would not have so much as defined products as opposed to desired future conditions (e.g. private lands). Sub CT members stressed the importance of sub-teams and that these were the mechanisms by which the PRIT builds more action. Consensus was reached that the PRIT needs to spend more time developing a work plan with more defined products and timelines for the next 1-2 years.

ACTION ITEM: Work planning should be a primary agenda item for the next PRIT meeting.

WRAP-UP AND ACTION ITEMS/NEXT STEPS

Payment for Ecosystem Services

Tom Jones discussed meeting with Abby Tinsley (Legislative Assistant at the Office of U.S. Senator Bill Nelson) in Washington D.C. in which he provided Ms. Tinsley an update on the status of the PES project RCPP grant application and the final submittal date. Tom Jones also discussed with Ms. Tinsley the need for a permanent funding source. Tom Jones requested to be notified when the full proposal has been submitted. It was mentioned that NRCS had requested that the USFWS include the Seminole Indian Reservation in the final proposal and Erin Myers has incorporated these changes. Larry Williams asked Lindsey Wiggins on the status of the letter of support from the Florida Cattlemen's Association and Lindsey confirmed that Erin Myers had provided a draft letter for them. There was discussion among CT members about what agency and personnel will implement the funding actions if the project is selected for funding. It was mentioned that Jen Korn (FWC) and Erin Myers (USFWS) would be the leads. The NRCS funding would go to FWC, but Jen Korn's position funding is uncertain. Larry Williams mentioned options for seeking additional funding for Jen Korn's position, including at the USFWS Regional Office level. Larry Williams expressed to Lindsey Wiggins the importance of having someone from the ranching community help implement the program. Robin Boughton suggested that Dr. Elizabeth Pienaar's (UF) recommendations should be reviewed on how this issue is addressed. Lindsey Wiggins mentioned that the estimated value of FCA outreach and promotion is approximately \$25,000 during the 5-year project period. Kipp Frohlich stated that staffing support could come out of FWC's Conservation and Planning Services (Scott Sanders).

Other Issues

Lindsey Wiggins asked about the status of the Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA). Larry Williams mentioned that a draft SHA was drafted for the Lykes Ranch but that it was not well received by the landowners. A similar response was given from other people; therefore the SHA option was set aside. Larry Williams reiterated that USFWS is doing more research on the Safe Harbor/10(j) non-essential experimental population options and seeking input from the Regional Director on which program to move forward with. Larry Williams stated the USFWS was cautious of bringing draft plans to the PRIT and public that were not well-researched and complete, especially without a sufficient review of the applicable laws and policies.

ACTION: Next Meeting to provide update on RD briefing and tying range expansion discussion/work plan. 10j/Safe Harbor may be more applicable to those further away.

Next PRIT meeting will be held in mid-late January at FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute in St. Petersburg, FL. David Shindle will send Doodle Poll to CT members with potential dates.

MEETING ADJORNED