

Transportation SubTeam Update to Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Core Team



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Transportation SubTeam

- Core Team Liaison: Laurie Macdonald, Defenders of Wildlife
- SubTeam Chair: Nancy Payton, Florida Wildlife Federation
- Amber Crooks, Conservancy of Southwest Florida
- Elizabeth Fleming, Defenders of Wildlife
- Terry Gilbert, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Darrell Land, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Xavier Pagan, Florida Department of Transportation
- Gwen Pipkin, Florida Department of Transportation
- Don Scott, Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Brent Setchell, Florida Department of Transportation
- Dan Smith, University of Central Florida
- John Wrublik, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- <http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRITTransportation.html>

Mission

To identify and prioritize high vehicular mortality areas and recommend risk-reduction measures.

- Southwest Florida
- Central Florida
- Statewide

Active Projects

- Identifying Southwest Florida Hotspots
 - Collier, Lee and Hendry State and Local Roads
- Cost Surface Mapping, South of I-4
- Developing Format for Recommendations
- Developing a Compendium of Existing Panther/Wildlife Crossings
- Reviewing MPO's Vehicle/Animal Crash Databases

Pending Projects

- Field Trips
 - Keri Road, Hendry County
- Transportation Impacts Outside the Panther Focus Area (Primary, Secondary, Dispersal zones)
- Hotspots in Central Florida
- Roads in Planning South of I-4 - MPO Long Range Transportation Plans, FDOT Work Plans
- RADS (Roadside Animal Detection Systems)
- Locations of Slow Speed Zones

Completed Projects

- Review of FDOT Crossings Guidelines



FDOT Wildlife Crossing Guidelines

- Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) developed in consultation with wildlife agencies around 2008.
- Purpose is to provide FDOT guidance on when wildlife crossings and other related structures/exclusionary devices (fencing, walls, etc.) are appropriate.
- Guidelines apply to new roadways, projects that involve addition of travel lanes, or retrofit projects.
- Identification of wildlife movement issues and impact minimization measures best identified early in the project planning.

Florida Department of Transportation Wildlife Crossing Guidelines

These guidelines have been developed for use by the Florida Department of Transportation Districts to determine the appropriateness of including wildlife crossings (upland or wetland) and/or exclusionary devices (fencing, walls, temporary barriers, etc.) on proposed District projects or on existing roadways as retrofits. These guidelines also establish criteria that should be considered during design of wildlife crossings and/or exclusionary devices. These guidelines should be utilized as early as possible in the project planning process and prior to project design.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have regulatory authority and are the recognized wildlife experts for listed and non-listed wildlife species within the State of Florida and nationally. These guidelines have been developed in consultation with the FWC.

The Districts should only determine if a wildlife crossing and/or exclusionary device is appropriate based on the coordination and recommendation of the FWC or USFWS.

- For a proposed project: Wildlife crossings and/or exclusionary devices should only be considered when the project is a capacity improvement that involves the addition of travel lanes.
- For a requested retrofit project: Districts should require entities requesting a wildlife crossing and/or exclusionary devices to provide documentation or studies to substantiate their requests. Districts should also pursue funding partnerships with requesting entities.

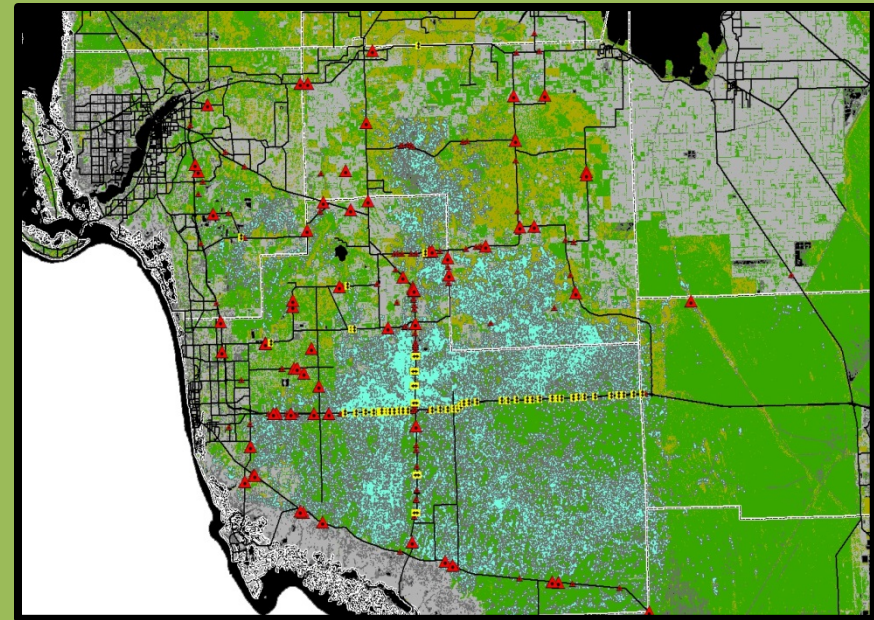
In cases where data does not exist to adequately address the guidelines, it may be necessary to perform studies or additional research to obtain the data. The FWC and/or USFWS should have an active role in the review and development of any studies; and in the review and evaluation of the results.

The following guidelines should be utilized in determining if a wildlife crossing and/or exclusionary device is appropriate.

- The FWC and/or USFWS have expressed a science-based need for a wildlife crossing for a target species
- There are listed species documented within the project area and the project area has been shown to be utilized by these species.
- There are documented recent road kills of listed species within the project area.

FDOT Wildlife Crossing Guidelines

- Review and revision of FDOT Wildlife Crossing Guidelines identified as a subteam project at first meeting October 2014.
- Over two meetings in early 2015, subteam members provided edits and through discussion came to a final consensus on suggested changes.



Revisions

The Districts should ~~only~~ determine if a wildlife crossing, other structures such as bridges with shelves, and/or exclusionary device is appropriate based on the coordination and recommendation of the FWC and/or USFWS/NMFS. The Districts will also consider recommendations from other interested stakeholders, e.g. conservation organizations, biologists, land management agencies, or academics. NOTE: The FDOT PD&E phase is the best opportunity for stakeholders to get involved in the project planning process.

- For a proposed project: Wildlife crossings, other structures such as bridges with shelves, and/or exclusionary devices should ~~only~~ be considered when the project is a planned new roadway or capacity improvement that involves the addition of travel lanes, new roadways, improvement of current lands, complete road rebuild, and/or bridge replacement.
- For a requested retrofit project: Districts should require entities requesting a wildlife crossing, other structures such as bridges with shelves, and/or exclusionary devices to provide documentation or studies to substantiate their requests. Districts should also pursue funding partnerships with requesting entities.
- Wildlife crossings, other structures such as bridges with shelves, and/or exclusionary devices will also be considered when the project involves locations of critical conservation need where non-District funding can be obtained.

Revisions

The following guidelines should be utilized in determining if a wildlife crossing, other structure such as bridges, and/or exclusionary device is appropriate. The list below is not conclusive and not every guideline below needs to be met to deem a wildlife crossing is appropriate.

- The District has been presented with FWC and/or USFWS have expressed a science-based need for a wildlife crossing for a target species.
- There are listed species documented within the project area and the project area has been shown to be utilized by these species.
- There are documented ~~recent~~ road kills of ~~listed species wildlife~~ within the project area.
- The project is within the documented range of the Florida panther and/or Florida black bear primary or secondary range of a listed species (e.g., panther, black bear).
- The project crosses a documented landscape level habitat linkage, ecological greenway, or Florida Forever project area, for the target species.
- The project is within a known area of wildlife/vehicle strikes that create a potential (motorist hazard safety).
- Public conservation lands or lands under perpetual conservation or agricultural easement are present (or are planned to be will be present at the time of design), in sufficient amounts, on both sides of the road (adjoining and contiguous), where the crossing will be located in order to ensure that future land use is compatible with ~~the wildlife target species~~ needs or ecosystem viability.

Revisions

Data collected or provided to address the above guidelines should serve as the basis of decision for determining whether or not a wildlife crossing, other structures such as bridges with shelves, and/or exclusionary devices are appropriate.

In addition, this data should also serve as a basis in the ~~determination of the target species and in the~~ selection of a crossing design. Alternative measures and technology should be considered where appropriate.

The specific design (type, size, and location) of the crossing, other structure such as bridge with shelves, and/or exclusionary device, should be determined by the District through coordination with the FWC and/or USFWS/NMFS. The Districts will also consider recommendations from other interested stakeholders.

~~Criteria which should be utilized in the D~~determination of a crossing design should include, but ~~are not~~ be limited to:

- The crossing cannot compromise any state or federal safety criteria.
- The crossing and fencing cannot restrict legal access to adjacent property owners.
- The crossing cannot negatively impact adjacent properties (e.g., provide access for people and/or wildlife to private properties where none presently exist).
- The crossing cannot ~~have the potential to~~ negatively impact existing drainage patterns or flood off-site properties.
- The crossing utilizes the most cost-~~feasible~~ efficient and effective design that meets the needs identified by FWC and/or USFWS/NMFS for the target species.
- Significant additional Upland and wetland habitat (e.g., upland and/or wetland) impacts should be avoided and minimized to the extent practicable by proper design and during construction. cannot result from the construction of the crossing.
- ~~The addition of the crossing cannot result in significant modifications to the proposed project (e.g., excessive increases in roadway grade, etc.).~~

Major Themes of Changes

- Expanding types of roadway projects where guidelines can be considered.
- Expanding types of structures to include bridges with shelves, etc..
 - Not all guideline criteria may need to be met for these types of structures.
- Including consideration of input from non-wildlife agency sources (academia, conservation groups, land management agencies, etc.).
- Clarifying FDOT consideration of crossings/structures when outside funding is available.



Major Themes of Changes

- Clarification that crossings/structures can be considered when conservation lands are planned to be present in the foreseeable future, as long as they are obtained prior to design phase.
- Considering general wildlife needs and ecological corridors, in addition to listed species or certain target species.
 - However, focus will continue to be on large mammals and endangered species.
- Highlighting need for cost-efficient and biologically effective designs.



Next Steps

- Subteam's other work products will help inform and demonstrate “science-based need” for crossings/structures.
- FDOT has begun to review the draft guidelines.
- Transportation Subteam asks for PRIT comments and approval of final work product, if needed.

Future Projects

- Crossing Guidelines for FWS
- Cost Surface Mapping – North of I-4/Statewide
- Roads in Planning North of I-4/Statewide
- Identifying Hotspots North of I-4/Statewide
- Florida's Habitat and Highway Connections with Neighboring States

Questions and Comments

