

**NOTES**  
**Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team Meeting**  
**Buck Island Ranch**  
**January 12-13, 2017**

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 12<sup>th</sup>**

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

**Attendance:**

**PRIT Core Team:** Larry Williams (USFWS), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Robin Boughton (FWC), Gene Lollis (MacArthur Agro-ecology Research Center), Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife), Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association), Tom Jones (Barron Collier Companies), and Kevin Godsea (USFWS, via phone)

**Invited Guests:** Hillary Swain (Archbold Biological Station), Elizabeth Boughton (MacArthur Agro-ecology Research Center), and Raoul Boughton (University of Florida)

**TRANSPORTATION SUB-TEAM UPDATE**

Elizabeth summarized the Transportation Sub-Team's January 2017 report to the Core Team (see report under meeting handouts at <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). Members of Core Team requested a refresher from Sub-Team on the top tier priorities identified in the Hot Spots Report. Team discussed the 4-laning of SR70 and the need for bear and panther crossings.

**ACTION ITEM: Transportation Sub-Team will provide a refresher on the top tier priorities at the next Core Team meeting. Larry also requested additional information on FDOT's feasibility report referenced in the sub-team's update (*Wildlife Crossing Evaluation for Alligator Alley between the Naples Toll Booth and Miller Canal*).**

ACTION ITEM: Elizabeth will reach out to Hillary Swain and FDOT to make sure Archbold is fully involved in the planning process for SR70 capacity improvements.

**INVENTORY AND MONITORING SUB-TEAM UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS**

Robin provided update on the recent activity of the Inventory and Monitoring Sub-Team, specifically related to the continued efforts on revising/updating the panther population paper. Nick Wiley had previously requested that the "white paper" and "outreach document" be combined into a single document. FWC and USFWS staff held a recent call to discuss the most recent draft of the document and proposed revisions. The updated paper will be based on the 2015 Annual Panther Count conducted by Rancher's Supply, Inc. Adult and subadult densities based on the minimum count numbers for 4 of the annual count survey units (BCNP north of I-75, BCNP north of US41 and south of I-75, Fakahatchee and Picayune, and FPNWR and Golden Gate Estates) were extrapolated to Primary Zone as delineated in Kautz et al. (2006). The updated population range will have a lower bound of 120 and an upper bound of 230 adult and subadult panthers. Larry asked that the population paper be provided to the Core Team for one final review and only for "fatal flaw" comments/edits. Nick and Larry will need to sign-off on final draft prior to disseminating to the public.

Robin discussed future task of sub-team that will focus on how the agencies should undertake population estimates in the future. David Shindle will assist the sub-team with this task. Robin discussed ongoing camera surveys focused on spatially explicit mark resight methodologies to derive rigorous estimates of population densities and the parameters that influence these densities. Camera studies based on this technique have been completed on the Florida Panther NWR/Picayune Strand/Fakahatchee and the Addition Lands of Big Cypress National Preserve. Panther radiocollaring efforts are currently underway on Immokalee Ranch in preparation for a camera grid deployment on those private lands. A manuscript authored by Robert Dorazio

and others is expected to be submitted for publication within the next few months and will be based on the aforementioned public lands camera surveys. Larry stressed the need to evolve away from McBride's Annual Minimum Count surveys.

**ACTION ITEM: Robin will provide Core Team the latest draft of population paper and team will have one week to review provide "fatal flaw" comments.**

## **ARCHBOLD STAFF WELCOME AND CALF LOSS STUDY UPDATE**

Hillary Swain and Betsy Boughton provided an overview of the history and the ongoing conservation, research, and management activities on Buck Island Ranch/Archbold Biological Station (<http://www.archbold-station.org/index.html>).

### Calf-Loss Study Presentation by Raoul Boughton

Two main losses in cow-calf industry: getting cows pregnant and calves surviving. Florida calf survivorship is lower than calf survivorship in rest of U.S. An increase in 1% survival of the Florida state calf herd is equivalent to 6,900 calves. Market value for calves varies (e.g., \$600 this year, \$1,000 - \$1,200 last year). Objectives of 2017-2019 Calf Loss Study: 1) Undertake the most thorough peri- and post-partum calf loss study ever conducted; 2) Quantify cause of calf loss from late gestation to weaning; 3) Establish the most common causes of calf loss; and 4) . This will be a 3-year study and is supported by the Florida Cattlemen's Association and the Beef Cattlemen's Enhancement Board.

## **AFTERNOON MEETING ADJOURNED**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 13<sup>th</sup>**

### Attendance:

*PRIT Core Team:* Larry Williams (USFWS), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Robin Boughton (FWC), Gene Lollis (MacArthur Agro-ecology Research Center), Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife), Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association), Tom Jones (Barron Collier Companies), Kevin Godsea (USFWS), and Ron Clark (National Park Service, Big Cypress National Preserve).

*Florida Panther Coordinator and PRIT Liaison:* David Shindle (USFWS)

## **PANTHER RECOVERY AND MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

### LIP AND RCPP UPDATE

David Shindle provided an update on the current status of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) program that will provide financial assistance through NRCS's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to eligible landowners who conserve good panther habitat. The application deadline is February 3<sup>rd</sup> and so far no one has submitted an application. Erin Myers (USFWS) will be reaching out to the interested landowners/lessees that she knows and will encourage them to sign up ASAP. Erin will also ask Lindsey Wiggins (UF-IFAS) to send out a reminder. Erin has the application ranking questions outlined and will send those to the Hendry County District Conservationist, as well as the list of enhancements that we will be targeting for funding. USFWS and FSA hosted a public meeting on December 15, 2016 at the UF IFAS Extension Collier County Office in Immokalee to discuss both the RCPP and LIP programs with producers in attendance from primarily Collier and Hendry Counties.

David provided update on the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and informed Team that the first application submitted to FSA for calf losses based on the 5% loss rate to panthers has been approved. This application was submitted by Liesa Priddy (JB Ranch). Commissioner Priddy gave a presentation at the December 15<sup>th</sup> public meeting that provided those in attendance an overview of the application process and the types of information that she used to establish inventory record and notification of loss. David and Erin are currently working with other producers that are interested in enrolling in LIP. Larry informed team that the USFWS wants to establish a compensation fund that would provide a mechanism to bridge the gap between the 75% of the market value paid by LIP for calf losses and the 90% maximum compensation allowed by LIP. Basically, USFWS would provide funds that cover the 15% gap (90%-75%) in order to make the program stronger and more attractive to producers. Team members agreed that bridging the LIP payment gap was a good idea. Gene Lollis offered to facilitate assistance from the Florida Cattlemen's Association, if needed. Kipp Frohlich discussed the concept of allowing a non-agency entity to verify calf losses. Kipp used the Seminole Tribe as an example and asked whether FWC should accept verification from the Tribe for individual calf losses to be included on FWC's depredation table that is posted on FWC's PantherNet. Gene offered to invite Alex Johns to next PRIT meeting.

**ACTION ITEM: Follow up on the concept of having the Seminole Tribe (or some other non-governmental entity) act as a third party verifier for livestock depredations.**

#### EASTERN COUGAR DELISTING AND TAXONOMIC REVIEW UPDATE

David provided update on the proposed Eastern Cougar Delisting Rule. USFWS Region 4 is coordinating with Region 5 as the rule becomes finalized. No word on when final rule is expected to be published. The USFWS is still deliberating internally on the best path forward for initiating the taxonomic review. Two options are currently on the table: 1) An Indefinite Deliverable, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) Contract through the USFWS, and 2) A National Academy of Sciences Study. The National Academy of Sciences option has been discussed given the importance of the proposed review and its potential to inform ESA policy at the National level. Kipp inquired about a timeline for the taxonomic review. Larry said to expect that the review would be started this year.

Todd announced that a GoFundMe fundraiser has been started to raise money to support the legal/administrative fees for filing a petition to delist the Florida panther (<https://www.gofundme.com/delistthepanther>). This fund is being administered by Mike Elfenbein. Kipp asked if any other groups were onboard with this campaign. Todd mentioned that approximately 30 people met with a representative from the Pacific Legal Foundation at the September 2-3, 2015 FWC Commission Meeting in Fort Lauderdale. Kipp mentioned the fact that if panthers were delisted Federally, the Florida panther population would still be listed and protected on the State Threatened list. Although currently listed as Endangered, the Florida panther would likely qualify as Threatened under the current state Imperiled Species Listing Rule and Management System and current protections would apply.

#### **RECOVERY CRITERIA SUB-TEAM UPDATE**

Kipp Frohlich provided update on Recovery Criteria Sub-Team's progress to date (see presentation at <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>).

Team discussed examples of Service delisting species based on 5-factor analysis (5 listing factors, as outlined in Section 4 of ESA) and not necessarily the existing recovery criteria. A point was raised that there should be cross-collaboration between sub-teams (e.g., Recovery Criteria and Inventory and Monitoring), specifically for the example of establishing measurable recovery criteria. Team discussed potential timeline for Recovery Criteria Sub-Team to provide at least draft revised criteria to Core Team. Larry reminded team that the Service may have to respond to changing events (e.g., delisting petition), that would take time away from this

effort. Team discussed optional recovery criteria pathway for delisting based on a single population. The sub-team would need additional guidance from the Service given that multiple populations are referenced in the Recovery Strategy and Recovery Objectives in 2008 Recovery Plan.

**ACTION ITEM: Request that Recovery Criteria Sub-Team provides the Core Team their recommended revisions by August 2017, even if still in draft form or partially completed.**

#### **NEXT STEPS FOR NORTH OF THE RIVER**

Larry informed team that the Service was working on a new regulatory/conservation framework to be in place in approximately 2 years. This framework would incorporate a revised/updated panther regulatory tool based on the habitat modeling work done by Bob Frakes, Chris Belden, and others. Although the Service is anticipating the potential for the natural establishment of a breeding population north of the Caloosahatchee River to occur, all viable options to achieve recovery should at least be reviewed. Larry would like PRIT to continue brainstorming on the available options over the next year and advise the Service during the development of the new framework. One option would be the development of a work product that included maps of available habitat that would incorporate threats assessment of habitat loss (e.g., 2070 report) and determine how many panthers could be supported in existing protected lands and what would be needed to achieve downlisting/delisting. Initial brainstorming exercise by Core Team could be accomplished through a conference call prior to next in-person meeting. The idea would be for the team to provide “big picture” input to the Service on this path forward.

#### **STRATEGY TO MAKE HUNTING AND PANTHER RECOVERY COMPATIBLE**

Team discussed draft outline for Strategy to Make Hunting and Panther Recovery Compatible (see handout at <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). This outline reflects discussions between Todd and Larry. This is a work in progress and Todd and Larry will continue to refine document and bring to Core Team for future discussion/action.

#### **WRAP-UP AND ACTION ITEMS/NEXT STEPS**

**ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will send out Doodle Poll for next PRIT meeting in April 2017.**

**ADJOURN**