

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation SubTeam

Meeting Minutes

February 28, 2019

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 1 Office, Bartow, FL

Attendees:

Amber Crooks
Katasha Cornwell
Elizabeth Fleming
Terry Gilbert
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
Dan Smith
John Wrublik

David Shindle
Meredith Budd
Kristin Caruso
Niki Cribbs
Nicole Monies

- Agenda Approved
- Communications
 - David Shindle, FWS Staff Liaison
 - Florida panther Species Status Assessment (SSA) update: Process is behind schedule because of the furlough. First draft has had internal review. End of 2018 is the target for recommendations. Still plan to get it peer reviewed. SSA is acting as the 5 Year Review. If changes are recommended, public commenting would come through Federal Register notice.
 - Core Team has been on pause, waiting for completion of the SSA. Recovery Criteria Subteam and Inventory and Monitoring Subteam also on pause (FWC's mark-recapture work is still underway).
 - Transportation Subteam was recognized as a Subteam that should keep going.
 - Elizabeth Fleming, Core Team Liaison
 - Core team meeting that was scheduled for October 2018 was cancelled due to Hurricane Michael. Will be rescheduled for webinar just on Transportation Subteam business.
 - Sharing of Information, Subteam Members

- Hurricane repair of panther fencing: Contractor moving slow. Target is to be done by September. Amber mentioned that area near MM 80 where fencing is down is problematic.
 - Elizabeth mentioned that flashing sign near Collier Seminole light isn't working. Brent is aware and contacted the right person to fix.
- SR29
 - I-75 to Oil Well Road segment just went to PD&E. Subteam members inquired if the feasibility analysis for this segment was complete?
- US17 bridge shelves at Charlie Creek was completed in October 2018.
- Elizabeth had shared a FWC speed zone enforcement report from November 2018.
- Eastern Collier Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan comment period ended December 3, 2018. There was an interest in having USFWS speak to the Subteam about transportation aspects of the HCP at a future meeting (could be in the long-term, if staff processing this application aren't able to provide update in the short-term).
 - John Wrublik and Kenneth McDonald looking for fencing shapefile for HCP. Dave Onorato, Mark Danaher, and Dan Smith working on fencing shapefile that might be ready and could be used by USFWS.
- Collier-to-Polk highway: Don Scott says this is a return of the Heartland Parkway. News articles were shared. Subteam members stated that the timelines for these roadways are not realistic. The Suncoast Parkway Extension to Georgia is not in the SIS. And not in any of the MPO plans. MPOs would have to prioritize it in order for FDOT to begin PD&E. Conceptual only at this point.
- FWC bear study: Dan provided peer review for FWC bear study. This study was completed a few months ago ("High Density Vehicle-Bear Collision Locations and Potential Mitigation Measures: Identifying Existing Bridges as Potential Wildlife Underpasses"). FDOT OEM shared with Districts 3 and 5. Handful of crossing in District 5 that were prioritized via that study. Amber can disseminate to the Subteam.
- Sen. Passidomo Alligator Alley fire station bill (SB72): Current Alligator Alley monies can be used within the same county (in the past, these monies were used for projects within Collier and Broward Counties. Alligator Alley resurfacing is planned and would consume funding for the next 5 years.
- SR80:
 - C-2 and C-3 shelves being built within a 6 mile long project that is currently under construction. Dan asked about the clearance height for the bridge shelves. Brent says the clearance for C-2 is 4 ft (8 foot wide). Has some fencing.
 - There was a recent panther mortality just west of C-3 (adjacent property owner is SFWMD and will be doing water quality experimental testing on that site. Meredith can get an update on

- what buffer was being provided for on that property). C-3 has no fencing (2-foot-wide bridge shelf).
 - No cooperation from adjacent landowners for fencing between C-1 and C-2. Only 4 months left to provide fencing at the C-1.
 - Property owner is House
 - Amber noted wetland restoration plans for Lone Ranger property and limited remaining corridor for panthers.
- Florida Wildlife Federation Wildlife Crossing
 - Meredith updated the Subteam about the idea of a Wildlife Crossing Manual and provided a handout of the concept. Dan Smith would work with FWF on this project.
 - The purpose of the study would focus on how to design a crossing that is most effective for the target species.
 - 2-year study timeline. Have about half of the funding for this project as of yet. No start date yet.
 - Amber asked about study of 'experimental' crossing on Immokalee Road at Camp Keais Strand. Dan reported that data collection is being wrapped up, but analysis has not been completed. This information would then be rolled into the final design manual.
 - Bridge replacement program has added wildlife structures, but they aren't included in the inventory. This would be another element of this project. Brent asked about retrofitting bridges to accommodate wildlife. Will this be included in the project? Dan says yes.
- Updating Hotspots
 - The Subteam viewed the new map depicting hotspots with 2018 collision data and the changes summary provided by Brent:
 - Niki Cribbs got updated (through 2018) collision data from FWC. Only looked at mortality from past 20 years (1998-2018) per direction from Darrell Land and Brent's, Darrell's, and Nancy's recollections of past discussion with Subteam members. The Subteam minutes from March 2016 and May 2018 reflect some discussion of this issue, in terms of breakpoints and how to address use of older data in the model, but there was no consensus on how to move forward.
 - Dan suggested that removing the old mortalities in the one-off (i.e. blue) areas might be ok, but not in the 'hotter' areas. Amber asked if removing some of the data would impact the segments/severity for close by areas since the modeling utilizes buffers?
 - There was a discussion about whether or not to keep blue hotposts and urban areas. Elizabeth and Amber spoke in support of keeping the data on the map and addressing the limited remedy options in the text (also include a note about the removal of Alligator Alley segment where fencing was just constructed, and also more text about limited options in urban areas).
 - Subteam will want to update the chart to discuss the blue hotspot on I-75 Alligator Alley where fencing exists.

- Amber asked where were the "rural road segments" that were excluded? Niki will send more data about what was excluded. Subteams will want to include this information in the chart text.
 - There was a discussion about the appropriate cut-off date for data to use. Is 20 years the most appropriate cut-off date? There was not a consensus on whether or not the Subteam should do this. Several members were concerned about changing methodology, and several members raised questions about what year to use for the cut-off and if it was appropriate to remove historic data for all areas; there were additional concerns that manual manipulation of the data would increase the subjectivity of the modeling.
 - There was a discussion about disseminating the 2017 hotspots since there was not consensus about the methods for the 2018 update. The consensus of the Subteam members at this meeting is to keep the historical data until the Subteam can decide on these issues in the future. The Subteam should discuss changes to the color cut-offs and data set in the future, and apply to 2019 update.
 - Elizabeth can give USFWS the go-ahead to disseminate the 2017 Hotspots. Elizabeth and Amber can review the recipients list to ensure no changes since last update.
 - In the future, the team could disseminate to the Hot Spots report to the recipient list every other year. Mapping could be updated every year.
 - Amber will ask CSWFL GIS staff if they can redo the hotspots with all historical data through 2018, if provided the shapefile and is provided more detail about what hotspot areas are excluded (most of Alligator Alley and some of the other extremely rural [i.e. ag roads] one-offs). Subteam can then compare.
 - Dan spoke about another way to do a similar modeling exercise through collision density by mile. Dan suggested doing a GIS exercise that calculated the number of roadkills per mile per year. He will run this to show the Subteam. Brent will send Dan the complete collision mortality data set through 2018.
- Least Cost Path Study
 - Dan provided a presentation of least cost path study. Dan showed the projected pathways against actual GPS telemetry data, some panthers followed the LCP (i.e. FP130) and some did not (i.e. FP232).
 - Cost was changed where there was a crossing structure in place. Was made the same value as the adjacent land cover.
 - Report would include intersections of conflict between the LCP and roadway. Would use 0.5 and 2-mile proximity measures. Are there any bridges or structures within the proximity buffers?
 - Dan will give draft to Subteam members in two weeks.
 - Additional investigation would include 1) exploring more locations, 2) verify results against telemetry, mortality, and sighting data, and 3) evaluating other methods/modeling platforms (circuitscape, corridor designer, gflow, resistant kernel density). Future investigation could also include looking at habitat composition and protected areas along the paths.
 - Dan might need help with making maps. He wants to include Ecological Greenways.

- There was a discussion about who would update this and how often. Dan suggested that it may not be needed updated more than every 3 years.
 - Dan did some E-W source-destinations while Brent's prior study with Stantec focused more on N-S.
 - Was not able to fix Bone Valley mining land cover categorization. Therefore, the LCPs may avoid this area.
 - Presentation to core team would be from south to north, and adding extra focus on the I-4 area
 - Dan should explain how the hotspot map is reflective of available data and how the LCP is predictive. We can get feedback from Core Team about how often to update.
 - Would like to include USFWS including transportation personnel, Core team, transportation Subteam, David Shindle, etc. Brent, with support from Katasha if needed, can get an update. FDOT does not prefer to extend an invitation to the other Districts at this time for this particular meeting. Invite additional USFWS District staff.
 - Date TBD based on availability of Dan's report. Two hour webinar.
 - Would like to have live data for the presentation in order to turn layers on and off.
 - Brent could make maps or pull up information showing I-4 intersection and LCPs.
 - Katasha said that the presentation should include that partnership is needed in order to purchase or secure lands needed to make these connections.
- I-4 Permeability Next Steps
 - ACOE issued Public Notice for segment of I-4 in Osceola County, which includes Reedy Creek. Casey Lyon would be the best point of contact; ledges would be included and potentially fencing.
 - Public Notice for I-4 and 557 from ACOE coming soon
 - Design Charrette
 - FDOT was looking at updating bridges in SWFL and installing shelves. Brent is still seeking a cost effective design. 4 shelves on 2 bridges on I-75 cost half a million dollars. The main issue was placement of grout. Brent spoke with contractors to brainstorm alternatives.
 - No public commenters

Next meeting is scheduled for June 27, 2019.