

**Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)**  
**Transportation SubTeam**  
**Meeting Minutes - Webinar**  
August 2, 2019

Attendees:

Amber Crooks, Chair  
Katasha Cornwell  
Elizabeth Fleming, Core Team Liaison  
Terry Gilbert  
Don Scott  
Brent Setchell  
Dan Smith  
John Wrublik  
David Shindle, FWS Liaison

Guests/Members of the Public:

Meredith Barnard  
Jonathan Bennett  
Mark Cantrell  
Katie Castrol  
Gladys Delgadillo  
Kenneth McDonald  
Nicole Monies  
Tom Pride  
Julianne Thomas  
Zakia Williams

Welcome and Set Agenda

Communications

- David Shindle, FWS staff liaison update
  - CORE team on pause right now. FWS working on Species Status Assessment (SSA). Waiting for clear path before moving on CORE team matters.
  - Elizabeth asked about timeframe for SSA. David doesn't know. He was hoping for end of 2019, but currently unsure of timeframe. FWS has a pretty good initial first draft. If there is a status change recommended, would result in rulemaking and public comment.
- Elizabeth Fleming, core team liaison update
  - CORE team meeting that was planned last fall. It got canceled.

- Subteam Sharing of Information
  - Hurricane fencing repair update
    - Brent sent email about hurricane repair to get latest news. Doesn't have any new news at this time, but is seeking an update for the Subteam. Original estimate was to complete work around end of summer. Work included I-75 beyond Alligator Alley as well. Subsequent to the meeting, FDOT has defaulted the fencing repair contractor due to performance issues as of 08/14/19. The bond company will be hiring a new contractor to finish the work. In the meantime, our asset maintenance contractor is in the process of propping up the downed fence as best they can. No new time frame for completion known yet.
  - Eastern Collier Multiple Species HCP update
    - Decision documents appear to be postponed due to ongoing discussions between the applicants and USFWS. The ballpark timeframe for news on this is late 2019. One of the issues that is a subject of discussion is traffic/transportation/vehicle mortalities. Dan was asked to make a prioritized list of projects for the HCP consideration.
  - SR 29 gaps
    - In spring 2019, a panther was trapped in the roadway and was guided back to safety. Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge (FPNWR) staff found two holes in the fence that was repaired. One of these holes was likely the entry point for the panther that had entered the roadway, as panther tracks were spotted on the inside of the fencing. Additional gaps/holes on the east side BCNP also improved for the short-term, but sent request for longer-term fix to FDOT SR 29 maintenance contractor.
    - The fence is FDOT's, and they are responsible to maintain it, but rely on reporting of needs by agencies and public.
  - SR 29 widening
    - Segment from Oil Well Road to SR 82:
      - Design consultants awarded, plans starting later this fall. PD&E close to being finalized/approved. Amanda Haygood, FDOT, manages design for the segment from Oil Well Road to Sunniland Road. Other sections are managed by other FDOT project managers.
      - Replacing bridge with more vertical clearance and bridge over canal and wildlife fencing at Owl Hammock.
      - Looking at crossing in more northern section of Owl Hammock. FDOT made a comment during the Eastern Collier HCP public comment period about the need for more conservation land. David has made comments to Bruce Johnson for improved conservation

designation in the HCP related to providing conserved lands on both sides of the road to facilitate crossings.

- Segment from Oil Well Road to I-75:
  - Progressing through PD&E early on. Dan Smith helping with that effort.
- Collier County bridges updates
  - Recent public meeting to replace 11 bridges in Collier County. Recommending that ledges are included when these bridges get installed. Amber can send map provided by Meredith onto the Subteam.
  - There was some discussion about how to synergize bridge project, road projects, and Eastern Collier HCP/development project decision-making openings.
    - The Subteam mentioned the need for remediation on CR 846 near Corkscrew Swamp and Immokalee Road west of Twin Eagles wildlife crossing.
    - Amber suggested to prioritization crossing funds for areas where there is no project reasonably foreseeable, i.e. using funds where not already likely to be covered by existing or forthcoming project.
  - Subteam expressed interest in reviewing information, such as locations and design consideration, with Collier County.
    - To ensure design would allow use in wet season conditions.
    - County did get copy of the Subteam's Hot Spots report when we last sent it out last. Follow up in person or at future Subteam meeting is desired.
    - Meredith will get consultants contact and report back.
    - Amber could make specific bridge agenda item and invite Collier County staff.
    - Ken McDonald said he would like to make connection with Collier County since Mike Bosi is leaving and he was their main staff contact for HCP-RLSA matters.
  - Tom Pride stated that the consultant for the project is HNTB consultant (Michelle Rutishauser).
  - David Shindle reminded the team to focus on providing guidance to County on design and ensure that they don't get the impression that the Subteam is the FWS officially consulting on the project. John Wrublik is the FWS staff member who is coordinating the consultation on this project.
- Updating Hotspots

- Discussed results showing full data set versus data set that FDOT used during the last model run (removed historic data and using only 21-year period).
  - Main difference appears to be the splitting up of SR 29 and 846 E into smaller and less severe segments, as well as making Keri Road go from orange to green. Elizabeth was concerned that Keri Road got 'cooler' with no improvements made.
- Suggestions:
  - Dan was concerned about how many years of data to remove, why was 20-years selected? Perhaps start at 1990, or only use the most recent 25 years worth of data, as a more reasonable approach. He would also be in favor of changing the category/color scale.
    - Dan suggests comparative analysis re number of years to include or trying to determine the statistical significance. What was the time that the historic tipping point from SR29, 846, and Keri Road?
  - One option would be to run the model and then remove areas where historical mortalities bumped it up to 'warmer' severity, i.e. how we used the footnotes to note where area around I-75 Alligator Alley was excluded.
  - Mark Cantrell suggested breaking up subsets to do our model runs. Could do this and then blend for final product with our site-specific knowledge. FDOT consultants to do it every year, but that way of doing it would mean more work for the GIS person to incorporate specific changes.
  - Ken McDonald suggested annualized how many roadkills per kilometer per year.
- Cost Surface Mapping
  - Dan sent spreadsheet of land cover and Onorato et al 2011 study to Subteam. He used USFWS 2012 land cover for most of the land covers. He used Onorato et al to help categorize land covers that were too broad in the USFWS system, i.e.:
    - mining in Bone Valley
    - utilities powerline corridors
    - riverine corridors
      - Some smaller streams placed in same category as Caloosahatchee River, for example.
      - Dan categorized them the same as non-forested wetland.
    - roadways
      - Dirt forest roads classified with the same value as highways, for example.
  - Discussed Swanson et al 2008 and if we should replicate some of the tables in this study.

- Dan wanted to know if we should include marginal habitat composition in the tables. Subteam said probably not needed.
  - Dan said he would like to include tables that include information such as percent in Florida Greenways Network/Florida wildlife Corridor, public lands, etc.
  - Dan wanted to know if report should include information regarding the number of lanes? The Subteam said it would be good to know the number of lanes (related to cost of structures) and AADT (related to likelihood of success of cats attempting to cross). But this can come in the future, if not included in the report now.
- Dan is considering use of various buffers (150m, 0.5k, 1km) of the least cost pathways to help catch bridges, culverts, or other structures nearby.
- Brent wanted to know what the assigned value for crossings was? Dan said he assigned the dominant land cover adjacent to crossing. He made fencing barriers.
- Report is divided into three portions: south of I-4 to north of I-4, from Caloosahatchee River to I-4, and south.
- Cost paths for I-4 area had not changed since our prior discussions with only slight differences.
- Dan would like to get a full draft for Subteam review next week. He would like help with formatting, helping format GIS maps/tables, etc.
  - Meredith will coordinate.
- I-4 Next Steps
  - Amber reported that Larry Williams informally asked for Subteam's information I-4 permeability sooner than later. He said the Service is eager to secure opportunities for panthers to get to Green Swamp area and beyond. Brent has the beginnings of a PowerPoint presentation that shows the current opportunities along I-4, which we could present to the Core Team, along with draft least cost modeling/report if available.
  - Amber noted that FWF, Defenders of Wildlife, and Conservancy of Southwest Florida provided a letter regarding the Army Corps of Engineers Public Notice (SAJ-2019-00278 for I-4 Improvements beginning at CR 852, which includes Reedy Creek area).
- M-CORES presentation by Will Watts, FDOT
  - Will explained Senate Bill 7068.
  - Corridors haven't been determined yet
  - Segments:
    - Suncoast Connector from Citrus to Jefferson Counties

- Turnpike Connector from norther terminus in Wildwood to Suncoast Parkway
  - Southwest-Central Florida Connector from Collier County to Polk County
- 08/01/19 news release. First task team meeting Tampa Convention Center on August 27, 2019 (combined facility meeting, AM addressing public at-large and PM separating into separate corridors).
- Task Force reports delivered to Governor, Senate, Speaker of house by October 1, 2020
- Will can send his presentation to Brent, and Amber can post on Subteam webpage
- Segments will receive the full PD&E process. Using previous research to help.
- Schedule is very aggressive. Construction aimed for end of 2022 and open by 2030.
- About \$100 million a year for M-CORE PD&E, construction, etc.
- Live with new webpage <http://floridamcores.com>. Interested parties can sign up for mailing list.
- Approx. 7 task force meetings are planned.
- Q&A:
  - Elizabeth asked for clarification on public meetings, alternates, sunshine law.
  - Don asked about “A” and “B” designations. Will says that is place holder for indicating segmentation.
  - Amber asked about how the cost for these projects may impact funding for existing projects. Will says that FDOT still needs to determine feasibility for the projects, and M-CORES is supposed to be on top of existing funds. However, there will be resource competition (equipment, people, staff).
  - Dan says US19 currently underutilized.
- Future agenda items ideas
  - Subteam move forward with I-4 presentation to Core Team first.
  - Brent suggests engaging other counties and local agencies to future meetings north of the Caloosahatchee.
  - Dan suggests including land acquisition groups as well. Orange County Expressway Authority.
  - There was an interest in hearing from Dr. Tom Hctor re Florida Greenways Network.
  - There was an interest in about RADS/Animal detection system and Turner River. Alternatives that can be used in places where corridors cannot work. Florida and panther specific. Dan may have online presenter in mind.

**Next PRIT Subteam meeting is planned for Bartow offices, November 1, 2019 from 10am-3pm.**

