

Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team

DRAFT Meeting Summary

December 10, 2014
Vero Beach, FL

The meeting began with an introduction of Lindsey Wiggins, our newest Recovery Implementation Team member who will be representing the ranching community via Florida Cattlemen's Association.

Team members then provided opinions about the outcome of the public Panther Population Estimation Workshop that was held October 28th. The following were suggestions that could have improved this workshop, and might be useful for future public meetings: hire a facilitator; address the panther prey issue; work on our messaging so the public is clear about the intent of each meeting; ask for questions and allow time at an open microphone for attendees to make comments.

Work Group Updates

Transportation WG – Laurie Macdonald (FPRIT liaison) provided a brief update about their Dec 2nd meeting. There were presentations by Xavier Pagan on EDTM and by Dan Smith on a variety of wildlife crossing designs. They discussed dangerous intersections and roads for panthers, reviewed FDOT guidelines on crossings and provided suggestions for the revision. The scope of this WG is still being discussed, but products will include maps and a ranking of the most important road areas for protection of panthers. The meeting agendas and notes are posted on the Recovery Implementation Team website.

Inventory & Monitoring WG – Appointment letters are being finalized and will be sent to the Regional Office for signature, and then mailed to nominees. Robin Boughton provided an update on the logistics concerning the upcoming deer research study in Big Cypress and the FL Panther NWR. The grid design to estimate deer density is not adequate to determine panther density in those areas without modification.

Range Expansion WG – The Team decided to postpone discussion about this WG until the next meeting. We need to decide what the focus of this WG will be - - habitat needs?, outreach? It seems that this WG might not be as urgent as other WGs at this time.

Other WGs - The Team decided that a Recovery Criteria WG (to review the FL Panther recovery criteria from the recovery plan) was more critical, so members were asked to provide names as potential nominations for discussion at the next meeting. Some suggested nominees included Julien Martin (USGS), Madan Oli (UF), Jennifer Hecker (Conservancy of Southwest FL), someone from FWS with recovery planning expertise, and someone from the FWC panther team. Kipp Frohlich would be the Team's liaison to this WG.

It was also decided that the panther Safe Harbor Agreement discussions and products would not be part of the Range Expansion WG, but rather be included under the Programs for Private Landowners priority action item along with the Payment for Ecosystem Services concept. If a Private Lands WG was appointed, they could help facilitate discussions and solicit input about the Safe Harbor and Payment for Ecosystem Services concept. Some suggestions for nominations included Erin Myers (FWS), Julie Morris (Wildlands Conservation), Jennifer Korn (FWC) and Lefty Durando (private landowner).

The Team also discussed a possible Habitat Management WG to assess the current panther prey situation. Larry mentioned the need to involve citizens in panther management. He wants ranchers, sportsmen and others involved in decisions about hazing and/or removing animals.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Concept

Next steps and action items: Start sharing the document! The monitoring component of the PES could also include access to capture and collar panthers. Get feedback from landowners about the monitoring component and flesh it out in the document. Monitoring will be done according to the individual landowner's willingness to participate.

Laurie received some feedback on the PES document from several NGOs. Some of the commenters expressed that performance measures should be included and that we should know the effect of this program on the panther prey base and hunting leases and operations. Kevin will incorporate those comments into the document. Larry asked that the word "draft" be removed from the document. He also mentioned that the Service is still actively seeking sources of funding for the PES; we should hear more about that at the next meeting.

Umbrella Safe Harbor Agreement

Team members can begin having meetings with stakeholders about the concept and particular incentives of this panther SHA. The document is still very draft and needs a complete review from Team members before we can share it directly with the public.

Panther Response Plan and News Release

Kipp gave a brief update on the revisions that will be incorporated into the 2008 FL Panther Response Plan. The revised plan will be available very soon. Larry talked about the upcoming news release intended to acknowledge that the increase in panther numbers from a recovery perspective has also resulted in an increase in livestock depredations and other panther/human encounters. The news release will provide information about how to help avoid hobby livestock depredations, explain the legal policies concerning panther/human encounters and provide agency contact information for anyone who experiences a depredation or encounter.

Additional Proposed Public Workshops

Larry mentioned that Roy McBride proposed doing a public workshop to inform ranchers (in particular) about how to determine if a calf depredation was caused by a panther vs. another predator. There

could also be a discussion about panther movements and how to engage citizens with helping to manage panthers. Laurie told the Team that Defenders held workshops in the past to help citizens with identification of panther sign. She will share that workshop model with the Team to help with planning this workshop. Some Team members felt that ranchers would not want to attend this type of workshop, and that it possibly should just be limited to FSA (Farm Service Agency) staff.

Another idea for a workshop would involve a discussion about the public perception of a decline in panther prey and other game. Team members need to discuss how to follow up about that idea with sportsmen; they would be asked to share their data on deer declines and habitat management, and the agencies would also need to share their data.

Next Meeting: Feb 25, 2015 in Gainesville.