

Panther Recovery Implementation Team
February 25, 2015
Gainesville, Florida
Draft Meeting Notes

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Attendance: Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Alliance and Florida Sportsmen Trust Group), Laurie MacDonald (DOW), Marty Main (UF), Caitlin Jacobs (UF), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Elizabeth Pienaar (UF), Larry Williams (FWS), Erin Myers (FWS), Tracy Melbhiess (FWS), Dawn Jennings, Melissa Kreye (UF), Robin Boughton (FWC), Lindsey Wiggins (Florida Cattlemen's Association), Mark Cunningham (FWC)

UPDATES

Response Plan

Human Threat/Attack: Law enforcement staff with FWS and FWC is developing a detailed protocol to respond to Threat and Attack incidents. The Response Plan currently provides broad guidance for response, but not detailed steps to guide evidence collection and other considerations. The Team discussed that the issue of public safety needs to be a focus of the Team's work. The Team will be updated as the protocol is drafted.

Multiple Depredations: Situations in which a landowner suffers multiple depredations occur but no human interaction has occurred is not covered in the current Response Plan or NEPA Environmental Assessment. Team discussed whether relocating panthers (versus supporting living with panthers) is an appropriate response. Team discussed that substantive revisions to the Response Plan are likely necessary, including NEPA analysis of changes. There are likely difficulties inherent in the types of changes being considered, such as identifying whether one panther was responsible for multiple depredations, or which panther; we need to be careful to not provide a "tool" that we can't implement because of those difficulties. Logistical issues need to be considered during any revision, such as being able to hold panthers temporarily while determining if it is the offending panther, etc. The Team discussed how to involve the public in revisions to the Response Plan, and whether USDA Wildlife Services should be engaged to assist in responding to depredation events.

ACTION ITEM: PRIT agrees that a substantive revision of the Response Plan is needed. PRIT will identify several issues they would like considered in the revision. FWS staff will draft a statement of need to review with the Team at the next meeting. FWS/FWC/NPS will coordinate with the Response Team to revise the Response Plan. FWS needs to look at 10(a)(1)(A) permit to ensure coordination between the Response Plan and permitted activities. FWS will also be responsible for NEPA analysis of revisions.

Private Lands

Partners for Fish and Wildlife/Programmatic

Larry reviewed that the Service drafted a Partners agreement last year but ran into legal concerns related to incidental take. In response, the Service has decided to develop a range-wide Partners Agreement that the Service will analyze under Section 7 with a Biological Opinion to quantify take.

TO DO: FWS will share a draft with PRIT at the next meeting.

Payment for Ecological Services (PES)

The PES Document is finished and has been transmitted to FWS Regional Office and FWC to seek funding. Several ranchers have expressed concern that ranchers leasing their land that join the program and receive money through the PES could face an increase in their lease fees from the land owner; Team agreed they need to understand the issue better as implementation gets underway.

TO DO: Send final PES and talking points to PRIT; PRIT can share widely and assist with seeking funding. DONE

Safe Harbor Agreement

Issues: Team members are still collecting and condensing comments on the SHA.

TO DO: Team members should submit any additional comments on the SHA within 2 weeks; FWS staff will develop a second draft to share with the Team at the next meeting, and will summarize main messages we got from PRIT review.

Subteam Updates

Transportation Subteam

FWS and FWC will meet with Florida Department of Transportation Secretary in near future and are seeking input from the Transportation Subteam on issues of importance to discuss. Subteam has a report that identifies easements in Florida under permanent protection for panthers. Subteam (Darrell Land, FWC, leading the effort) is analyzing looking at least cost pathways for panthers related to road crossing; this will help identify most dangerous roadways for retrofit (underpasses, etc.) and can be considered during future transportation planning. Subteam is also reviewing FDOT Ecopassage guidelines and providing input to FDOT; recognized that Service doesn't have set guidelines on how to ask for transportation changes and subteam wants to address that hole.

TO DO: Laurie will provide easement report to FWS to distribute with draft meeting notes.

TO DO: Transportation Subteam will develop a product at the March 12 meeting to provide to Larry for his meeting with FDOT Secretary. DONE

Recovery Criteria Subteam - tabled

Inventory and Monitoring - tabled

Panther Social Media Messaging – tabled

REPORTS ON LANDOWNER SURVEYS

Landowner Survey Results (Caitlin Jacobs)

Caitlin discussed results of her survey. (See Power Point Presentation)

Team discussed that in casual conversations with ranchers in south Florida they describe higher losses than what is reported in various statewide averages/studies/surveys. How to reconcile or address this discrepancy? Additional communication is necessary.

(Melissa Kreye)

Described comments received from cattleman community, using sociological perspective on the psychology of the community. Themes on recovery of panther as a threat to their community: how the issue was defined, economic context, historical perspective.

-predators have always been something to compete with, not "save"

-generational turn over that upcoming generations may not want to ranch, will sell to developers

-Federal regulation of private land

-ranchers are good land stewards

-value self reliance, resisting government control, authenticity and truthfulness, conservative, small government

-issues with genetic introgression: government decided unilaterally to pursue, created more aggressive panther (narrative within the community – huge injustice has been done and it fuels their resistance);

-concerns that population is higher than monitoring shows

-concerns for human safety

-conflict centers around goal to recover, prioritizing panthers over humans, process injustice, disproportionate economic impact on small ranches,
-several comments that use of incentives may work but also concerns about overreach of government

(Elizabeth Pienar)

Dr. Pienaar Presented preliminary results on the Incentives for Land Stewardship: Managing the Florida Panther and Wildlife Habitat on Ranchlands Survey. (See: A Summary of Research Findings Presented to the Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team February 25, 2015)

TO DO: Will send PRIT report of additional results as she and Melissa finalize their analyses.

TO DO: Caitlin and Elizabeth pdf their presentations and send to Team? DONE

NEW/ONGOING ISSUES FOR TEAM ACTION

South Florida/Blackfoot Valley Landowner Exchange (Laurie)

Laurie updated the Team on the teleconferences that have been held to discuss the concept of a landowner swap between South Florida ranchers and Blackfoot Valley participants. Team discussed the benefits and goal of this event: Blackfoot Challenge provides an example of how to develop trust between landowners and government and of successful collaboration that conserves working lands and species (how to manage predators, easements and how to secure funding for easements, how to create a forum for communication that is candid and trusting). Team discussed how to determine who would attend; it may be beneficial to limit the pool geographically to ensure “neighbor” connections are made between participants. Team clarified that the panther is only one part of focus, the larger focus to address development pressure at the landscape scale with a grassroots effort. Service offered to fund a small number of invitational travelers.

TO DO: Small group (Lindsey, Kipp, Kevin, Lefty) will continue developing the idea, including which landowners to reach out to and how. Will report back to PRIT.

Workshop Ideas

Depredation Verification: Team discussed concept of certifying landowners to verify their own depredations but considers independent verification to be important.

TO DO: Lindsey will inquire with landowners what type of workshops they might be interested in.

Team discussed genetic introgression as a workshop topic and agreed they would provide this if the public is interested in it.

TEAM ROUND-TABLE AND PARKING LOT

Recovery Criteria Subteam: Kipp discussed progress in putting together a subteam to revise the recovery criteria in the 2008 Florida Panther Recovery Plan. He raised the question of whether the Service needs to revisit taxonomic issues associated with the subspecific focus of the Florida panther. Team decided it would be good to improve their knowledge of the current science related to this issue.

TO DO: Next meeting will include a presentation of panther/puma taxonomy. Team will also discuss the implications of this information for the ESA (species/subspecies/distinct population segment).

Inventory and Monitoring Subteam

Invitation letters at the Regional Office for signature. Should be finalized in a few weeks.

Panther Social Media Messaging

Erin updated team on effort of Region to provide proactive panther messaging on social media. She will share any media products with the Team.

Next Meeting: May 19 or 21, 2015, Doodle full team

Naples or Homosassa, FL