

**NOTES**  
**Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team Meeting**  
**South Florida Ecological Services Field Office**  
**Vero Beach, FL**  
**August 8, 2017**

**WELCOME**

**Attendance:**

PRIT Core Team: Larry Williams (USFWS), David Shindle (USFWS), Kevin Godsea (USFWS), Robin Boughton (FWC), Elizabeth Fleming (Defenders of Wildlife), Todd Hallman (Florida Sportsmen's Conservation Association), Tom Jones (Barron Collier Companies), Kipp Frohlich (FWC), Ron Clark (National Park Service; via phone)

Transportation Sub-Team: Nancy Payton (Florida Wildlife Federation), Amber Crooks (Conservancy of Southwest Florida), Brent Setchell (Florida Department of Transportation), Dan Smith (University of Central Florida), Darrell Land (FWC), Katasha Cornwell (Florida Department of Transportation; via phone)

Recovery Criteria Sub-Team: Dave Onorato (FWC), Seth Willey (USFWS; via phone), Michael Runge (USGS; via phone), and Randy Kautz (via phone)

Invited Guests: Roxanna Hinzman (USFWS) and Erin Myers (USFWS)

**5-YEAR STATUS REVIEW UPDATE**

An update on the 5-Year Review process and proposed timeline was provided and discussed. The Team discussed some of the misconceptions about the 5-Year Review that were prevalent in many media articles published subsequent to the public announcement. The Team agreed that the Q&A by Elizabeth Fleming published in the Orlando Sentinel provided a needed clarification to some these misconceptions. FWC is supportive of the review and will provide info and technical assistance to the Service, as requested.

The Service has determined that a Species Status Assessment (SSA) will need to be completed prior the 5-Year Review given that the Service's Southeast Region now use SSA's to inform all listing decisions. However, the SSA's themselves are not regulatory or decision documents. Questions and concerns were raised by the Team on how the SSA will fit into the 5-Year Review process. The Service is concerned with the additional workload that the SSA will add, but there are indications that additional resources will be provided to support this effort. Some Team members continued to express skepticism that the SSA and 5-Year Review will be completed within the proposed timeline, especially if additional modeling work is necessary for the future scenario analyses in the SSA. The Service is firm that only the best available information (including existing models) will be used and that new research will not be initiated for the sole purpose of being incorporated into the SSA or 5-Year Review.

Addressing the taxonomic uncertainty issue was one of the 8 priorities established by the Core Team. This assessment will now take place as part of the SSA and Five-Year Review. This assessment would be based on existing data and information and not be stalled by the initialization of additional taxonomic research. Ultimately the taxonomy question and what is considered the listed entity is a policy question that will be answered by the Service. The Team agreed that having another presentation on the DPS policy (similar to that was provided at the May 2015 Core Team meeting), or a more in-depth seminar, would be valuable. The Core Team's role is to advise the Service on the component pieces of this process and how to handle the DPS issue.

## **LIP/PES UPDATE**

Erin Myers provided an update on the 2016 and 2017 applicants for the LIP and discussed the issues that have yet to be resolved (e.g., interpretation of 3% baseline mortality rates by FSA) and continue to provide roadblocks for the successful implementation and receptivity of the program to provide compensation for panther depredations on calves. The Team discussed options on how to resolve some of these outstanding issues through outreach efforts to State and Federal offices. Erin provided an update on the RCPP applicants and the issues that may limit the success of this program.

**ACTION ITEM: Schedule 1-hour call with Core Team and Erin Myers to discuss issues with LIP, RCPP, and other Farm Bill Programs in more detail and what the next steps should be and who needs to be briefed.**

**ACTION ITEM: Larry and Kipp will find out if Russell Morgan talked with Nick Wiley and also if Nick talked with Sonny Purdue.**

**ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will arrange for an RCPP and LIP presentation at next PRIT meeting that will include more “real life” examples.**

## **INVENTORY AND MONITORING SUB-TEAM UPDATE**

Robin Boughton provided a summary of the final report from Robert Dorazio and Dave Onorato of the second phase of the project designed to develop a statistical model that could be used to compute a population-wide estimate of Florida panther abundance using camera traps and telemetry. Specifically, this second phase was focused on the effects of habitat types on the movements and home ranges in order to improve the accuracy of abundance estimates in both surveyed and unsurveyed study areas (see report:

<https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). Although good density estimates for both study sites were generated, the hopes of extrapolating those densities based on habitat covariates to come up with range-wide estimates are now somewhat diminished. There are still future avenues to pursue. For example, the South Florida Deer Study will be correlating the movement of deer relative to habitat covariates and the analytical techniques tested as part of that study may be applicable to panther camera and movement data.

Dave Onorato provided an update on the ongoing camera study on Immokalee Ranch. Fifty cameras were deployed in May and capture efforts in January 2017 were dedicated to radiocollaring a sufficient number of panthers on Immokalee Ranch.

Although the concept of extrapolating a sample, site-specific density to the population as a whole may still be possible; the recent analyses and interpretations by Dr. Dorazio highlight the challenges and limitations of using this approach now. Although previous updates provided to agency leadership have been optimistic that this technique was the most promising approach for achieving scientifically defensible estimates for range-wide population abundance, research staff has always cautioned from the beginning that this survey and analytical approach may not be feasible for achieving this objective.

**ACTION ITEM: Schedule a more in-depth discussion on population monitoring at next Core Team meeting, specifically on the results of the Dorazio report. FWC will provide David Shindle a copy of the report for posting on PRIT web page.**

## **TRANSPORTATION SUB-TEAM UPDATE**

## **Southwest Florida Hot Spots Chart, Project Sheets and Other Materials**

Brent Setchell presented the final Panther Hot Spots report (see report: <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). Report and work were well-received by Core Team. A question was raised about the crossing on CR846 and whether there were any analyses to examine the number of panther deaths pre- and post-crossing construction. It was noted that panthers have been documented using crossing, but also panthers have been documented getting caught on the highway inside the fencing. The concept of incorporating “jump outs” in highway crossing planning and the recent improvements by Collier County to improve the drainage on the aforementioned highway segment were also discussed. Collier County was also given credit for incorporating a drive way (and adding gate) in response to the drainage issue being brought to their attention.

Brent also showed the new ArcGIS online website developed by FDOT to provide a database of wildlife crossing structures and remote camera photos collected at respective crossing. This page is open to the public and will be updated as new crossing structures are completed and as new photos are uploaded by various individuals, agencies and organizations that manage cameras for individual crossings. The link is available on the Transportation Sub-Team website:

[https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherTransportation/20170621\\_FDOTWildlifeCrossingArcGISlink.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherTransportation/20170621_FDOTWildlifeCrossingArcGISlink.pdf)

**ACTION ITEM: Transportation Sub-Team will incorporate revisions to the hot spot section pertaining to CR846 east of Immokalee and include a breakdown of panther deaths pre- and post-crossing construction. Comments will be addressed prior to the next sub-team meeting on August 29th.**

**ACTION ITEM: Next step would be for PRIT Core Team to provide final comments on hot spots report to sub-team. Larry would then transmit report to all recommended recipients under an FWS cover letter. Nancy and Elizabeth will work on draft language of letter.**

## **Cost-Surface Modeling I-75 to I-4**

Dan Smith gave presentation on “Least Cost Path Exercise and Assessing Future Road Crossing Needs in the Future”. (Use presentation as summary). Dan also provided a Google Earth examples of predicted pathway models. The future management implications of this work will be to assist FDOT in identifying future crossing locations between Caloosahatchee River and I-4. The work presented today still needs to be fine-tuned and validated against existing telemetry data before it’s ready for public consumption.

Team discussed the need for an in-depth look at panthers and other wildlife relative to the I-4 corridor. FDOT has hired a consultant for Polk County to develop least cost pathways model to identify where crossings are needed along the I-4 corridor and reports generated from this work are ready to be shared. Brent feels comfortable that FDOT is set, with some exceptions, for I-4 and Polk County. Given the aforementioned need to focus efforts along I-4 corridor, there was a suggestion to include the involvement of an FDOT District 7 representative at future Transportation Sub-Team meetings.

## **LUNCH**

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

Kipp Frohlich gave an update and presentation on the draft proposed revisions to the Florida panther recovery criteria and provided a copy of the draft report (see presentation and report: <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/FloridaPantherRIT.html>). Sub-Team members stressed that this is still a draft report, some criteria are just place holders for now until concepts can be further fleshed out, and specific metrics for criteria still need to be determined.

Team discussed how these revised criteria could eventually be used assuming recommended revisions would be accepted by the Core Team and submitted to the Regional Office. The concepts in the draft report and eventual final report may be used in the SSA and 5-Year Review in some format, even though they are not officially draft criteria. Formally incorporating any recovery criteria revisions into a recovery plan would necessitate a formal revision of the plan.

**ACTION ITEM: Core Team will provide written comments/suggestions on draft report to Kipp Frohlich and Dave Onorato by 15 September 2017.**

### **PANTHER MANAGEMENT/REGULATORY FRAMEWORK REVISION UPDATE**

Roxanna Hinzmann provided a brief update on some potential concepts the Service is exploring as part of a revised regulatory framework for panthers. With panthers moving and reproducing north of the Caloosahatchee, we have a need and opportunity to revise our current regulatory strategy. Moreover, this is an opportunity to think about a multi-species landscape approach to connectivity. One potential strategy would be to develop a voluntary, multi-pronged approach using a General Conservation Permit/Plan (GCP), coupled with landowner agreements (e.g., Safe Harbor Agreements [SHA], easements) and mitigation. Applicants would ALWAYS have the option to come in and use a traditional section 7 or 10 process (BO or HCP).

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

**ACTION ITEM: Suggested agenda items for next Core Team meeting are as follows:**

- **Presentation on SSA and Five-Year Review and how the revised recovery criteria would play into those processes.**
- **Presentation by Elizabeth Pienaar on human dimensions research.**
- **Presentation by Kevin Godsea on the Florida Panther NWR Landscape Conservation Design.**
- **Todd Hallman will develop agenda item for discussion on demonstrating the compatibility of panther recovery and recreational hunting/ORV access.**
- **Ron Clark will develop agenda item on the key language from previous Biological Opinions and Management Plans that exemplify where panther was used to restrict or limit hunting/recreational access.**
- **David Shindle will arrange a more in-depth discussion on population monitoring, specifically on the results of the Dorazio report.**
- **Presentation on RCPP and LIP that includes more “real life” examples.**

**ACTION ITEM: David Shindle will send Doodle Poll to schedule next Core Team Meeting in St. Petersburg in early December 2017.**

**ADJOURN**