

**Panther Recovery Criteria Sub Team**  
**10:30 -12:00 Thursday October 1, 2015**  
**Conference Call**

Team Members in attendance: Kipp Frohlich (KF), David Shindle (DS), Randy Kautz (RK) Madan Oli (MO) Dave Onorato (DO) Michael Runge (MR), Seth Willey (SW)

Notes.

The team was welcomed by KF and each member gave a brief introduction regarding their background and experience as it relates to the team.

DS introduced the draft terms of reference and indicated that sub teams, such as this are official appointed by the Regional Director of the FWS and the provisions of the Terms of reference apply to sub-teams as well. There are other sub teams including the Transportation sub-team and the Inventory and Monitoring sub-team. He also pointed out that the work of this team (Recovery Criteria sub-team) will be considered a major revision and therefore will undergo a full public review. DS provided the team copies of the Interim Endangered and Threatened Species Recovery Planning Guidance from NMFS/USFWS that should be used as reference for the team's review and potential revision of the recovery criteria.

The team members discussed the purpose of the team. These included:

- Review of the recovery criteria from the 2008 Recovery Plan to determine if they need to be revised.
- Explore if there could be criteria that are easier to measure (because currently determining the population number is problematic).
- Review panther criteria in comparison to other recovery plan criteria
- Compare the recovery criteria in light of the Federal guidance document.
- Need to make sure that we are using the most recent and best available panther data related to models

Team discussed that the current plan has a goal, objectives, and recovery criteria. DS indicated that he would confer with FWS to clarify the side boards of this team, whether we are only considering the criteria or also the goal or objectives. It was pointed out that most species share the same general goal – that is to remove the species from the list. Usually long term viability of the species is a corner stone of recovery. The panther plan indicates that long terms vitality is 95% probability of survival in 100 years. This is similar to some other plans. It was pointed out that setting this level is not really a science question, but rather willingness to tolerate risk, in this case a 5% risk of extinction in 100 years. A team could make another choice that is equally valid, such as a 20% risk of extinction in 100 years. These are policy decisions not science.

The team discussed that federal recovery plans vary widely in terms of recovery criteria. It was agreed that we need to look at a number of other plans to assess the multiple approaches to assess recovery.

Before the team begins to address recovery criteria, the team should have a foundational understanding of the ESA, and the terms threatened and endangered. In addition to the statutory language, there are also more recent policy documents that help clarify these terms. SW offered to lead this future topic via webinar.

Some recent recovery plans provide options for recovery criteria. An example is the Whooping Crane plan. Another way to look at it as paths to recovery. There may be a number of pathways to achieve recovery. This approach may be use because if circumstance dictate that one pathway is not feasible, there may be other ways to reach recovery. However, in some cases none of the recovery criteria may be achievable but that does not mean that the bar should be lowered simplify to make them achievable. Future discussion on this is warranted.

In regards to how narrow the team is focused, it is important to recognize that we should not be so specific in our changes that we do not address those things that are required by law to be part of plan. For example, a criteria change could modify the recovery actions needed; therefore, time and cost estimates would also likely change. It is incumbent on the team to address all the requirements of the ESA.

Time frame for the team was discussed. There has been no time frame of proposed deadline for a team product. KF indicated that he thought they could complete most of their work within six months. But that would depend on no new data modeling or PVA programs being run. If new analyses are needed regarding results of models, that could increase the time needed to complete the team product. KF indicated that FWC would be providing the FWC commissioner's panther update in one year and that it would be important to be able to report significant progress at that time.

Future meetings were discussed. It was agreed that the work could best be accomplished in a team meeting that was face-to-face as opposed to teleconferenced but that there could be some individual webinars or teleconferences as well.

Based on people's schedules, it may be difficult to have the face to face meeting before January. This meeting will be held in a place that allows for easy and direct flights from Colorado and Maryland.

Things that need to be address either at the first meeting or in individual webinars prior to that meeting include:

- 1) Understanding of the terms endangered and threatened and the legal issue associated with the ESA
- 2) Thorough understanding of the current criteria, the science they are based on and the relevant history of the decisions that lead to their adoption.
- 3) A review examination of the polar bear recovery plan and criteria
- 4) Review of an assortment of different recovery plans, not just carnivores.

Members were asked to share important documents with each other via email, so that we begin to have a shared foundation and understanding of background literature.

Next steps:

- SW will work with KF and/or DS to set up a future webinar to focus on ESA and threatened endangered terminology
- RK will work with KF and/or DO to begin to plan for what will be needed to provide the team with a greater understanding of the basis and background that lead to the current recovery criteria.
- DS will confer with FWS and provide addition insight regard that scope and sideboards of this sub-team.