

**Panther Recovery Plan Implementation Team
Transportation Work Group
Meeting Summary**

October 23, 2014
FDOT Operations Center, Cape Coral, FL

Attendees:

Amber Crooks, Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Elizabeth Fleming, Defenders of Wildlife
Terry Gilbert, FWC
Dawn Jennings, USFWS (via phone) – Panther Recovery Coordinator
Darrell Land, FWC
Laurie MacDonald, Defenders of Wildlife – PRIT Liaison
Nancy Payton, Florida Wildlife Federation – Work Group Chair
Gwen Pipkin, FDOT
Brent Setchell, FDOT
Donald Scott, Lee MPO
Daniel Smith, UCF
John Wrublik, USFWS

- Brief introduction of attendees

- Governance
 - Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) overview
 - Recovery teams are FACA exempt, as long as officially appointed to recovery team.
 - FACA becomes a consideration if opening meetings to public; formal decisions and sharing of pre-decisional documents may then trigger FACA.
 - The group is not restricted to discuss matters amongst themselves.
 - There was consensus that the meetings would be open to the public and noticed on the FWS website. Observers from the public could attend, the subteam can engage the public if wanted (including one or two minute comment period at the end of the meeting), otherwise public can provide input via comment card. Nature of the meetings may change depending on the agenda (whether or not decisions are made, etc.). The meetings may incorporate more time for public comment or the meetings may be closed to the public if needed.
 - Mission refresher
 - Election of a Chair
 - Nancy Payton was elected as chair for the group.
 - Relationship with Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)
 - A review of the FWS Terms of Reference was provided.
 - Laurie MacDonald, as liaison, will be reporting on the subteam to the PRIT.

- There was a discussion about changing the name of the primary PRIT group to the ‘steering committee’ and changing the name of the subteam to ‘work group.’
- Timing for group
 - It was recommended that the group’s recommendations be provided in a timeframe to allow for inclusion in the December 2015 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).
- Communications and sharing documents
 - Press inquiries would be best handled by chair to represent the work group.
 - Individuals may represent themselves to the public and to the media on issues discussed in the work group.
 - Several options for sharing documents amongst the work group were discussed.
- A presentation was provided about Metropolitan Planning Organizations.
- There was discussion about the work group mission in regards to identifying proposed projects that pose a danger to panthers and providing solutions, as agency participants may not be able to weigh in on certain aspects.
- A presentation was provided about Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) initiatives and planning.
 - It was mentioned that if addressing wildlife issues/crossings doesn't take place in the Planning/Efficient Transportation Decision Making (ETDM) process, the best opportunity to identify wildlife crossing locations is in the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) process.
 - There was discussion regarding opportunities for improving wildlife movements in a capacity project versus a retrofit project.
 - The FDOT wildlife crossing guidelines were discussed.
 - The work group can address the required ‘science-based support’ requirement by assembling available scientific data and can also help reassess the guidelines.
 - The group identified the need for reliable and complete GIS data on conservation lands (including eased lands). FDOT is working on a project to update this; Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) is also working on a project, to be completed by September 2015.
 - There was a discussion about single-family homes and panther habitat unit (PHU) requirements, as well as the idea of an ‘impact fee’ or other associated trigger for projects to provide wildlife movement mitigation/infrastructure.
- Criteria and Parameters
 - The geographical scope for the work group was discussed. The importance of both the area south of the Caloosahatchee River and areas north were discussed. Bear data is a good surrogate for panther data in areas where panther data is limited.
 - The group agreed that assembling data and performing GIS analysis regarding land surface costs to panther movement would be a good way to

begin identifying areas of conflict or needs. The group can compare this information with existing LRTP roadways and then prioritize based on current status of the projects.

- The group should examine existing crossings (even if not specifically for panthers) to determine their relative value to panthers and other wildlife.
- At the next meeting, the group may categorize land cover to determine surface/cost/value for the GIS exercise.
- There was a suggestion that the group create guidelines for all wildlife structures, if information is available.

- Action or follow up items
 - Group members will look into available alternatives for sharing information and studies amongst the work group.
 - Reassess FDOT wildlife crossing guidelines.
 - Do a mapping exercise to build upon Least Cost Pathway (LCP)/least-cost surfaces and identification of needs or potential conflicts with existing/planned roads.

- Next meeting
 - Tentative agenda to include:
 - update on Roadside Animal Detection System (RADS)
 - presentation of maps and discussion by group
 - presentation on ETDM
 - presentation on crossing types and locations
 - To be held 12/02/14, Bartow, FL, 10am-3pm.