

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation Sub-team

Meeting Minutes Summary

January 28, 2016

Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District 1 Office, Bartow, FL

Attendees:

Amber Crooks
Elizabeth Fleming (phone)
Terry Gilbert (phone)
Darrell Land (phone)
Nancy Payton
Gwen Pipkin
Brent Setchell
David Shindle (phone)
Dan Smith (phone)
John Wrublik

Members of the public:

Kristin Caruso, Scheda Ecological Associates
Tori Kuba, Scheda Ecological Associates
Mark Easley, Kisinger Campo
Chris Dailey, RS&H
Bruce Johnson, Stantec (phone)
Nicole Monies, FDOT
Rob Myers, Metric Engineering

- Approval of the Minutes
- Transportation Subteam Member Communications
 - SR29 (I-75 to Oil Well) update. FDOT will do feasibility study to determine if Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study will be pursued.
- FWS Staff Liaison Communications
 - David provided an update from the last PRIT core team meeting.
 - PRIT set a work plan and prioritized tasks. The top priorities were taxonomic/genetic study, private lands incentives, and review of recovery criteria.
 - Next PRIT Subteam meeting will likely be in April at USGS offices in Gainesville.
- PRIT Liaison Communications

- Elizabeth stated that the Inventory and Monitoring Subteam is working on a white paper and public handout regarding the different methods of estimating the panther population. The Recovery Criteria Subteam is reviewing the criteria to determine if they need to be revised.
- Crossing Compendium Format
 - Dan identified 23 roads with 128 existing structures (bridges, concrete box/concrete pipe, steel pipe, and unidentified culverts) for wildlife use that fall within panther-bear habitat. Some would need to be retrofitted for use by large mammals.
 - Darrell identified 60 structures have been constructed to accommodate use by Florida panthers.
 - Brent suggested that compendium focus on panthers and their prey.
 - Idea for the compendium to be searchable by dimensions. Would like to have an Excel spreadsheet available with the final Word document. Photos of the structures could be linked through a website on the Excel spreadsheet
 - Nancy volunteered to fill in the gaps on the Excel spreadsheet by providing a paragraph for each crossing in a Word document which could be easily cut and pasted into Excel.
 - John offered to make trip to take photos of the crossings in his area, including the SR60. Nancy will be taking trips to capture photos, where there aren't any available already. Some may already have photos of the structure itself and use by wildlife.
- FDOT Analysis of Panther Deaths State v. Local Roads
 - Brent reviewed known panther mortalities from 2009 to 2015. He compiled information on deaths caused by vehicles, how many on FDOT and local roads.
 - His analysis essentially showed an even split between state (51%) and local (49%) roads.
 - Elizabeth asked about traffic and width of lanes. Kristin Caruso said that length of roads would also be a factor.
 - Several Subteam members would like to ensure the group is applying equal focus on local roads and may need additional participation by local transportation planning experts.
- Southwest Florida Hotspots
 - The Subteam reviewed maps that the Conservancy prepared.
 - Amber explained that the draft hotspot maps did not reflect some of the known problem areas that have had crossings constructed (e.g. SR29, CR846, CR850) or where they were planned (SR82, SR80).
 - There was a suggestion to include SR82 as a hotspot. Additional stretch of road that does not have crossing continue to be indicated.
 - There was a comment that date of panther death should be included.
 - Dan said that Least Cost Pathways (LCP) can be utilized in hot spots identification. Darrell said that the LCP is at a larger landscape than decisions panthers make in their individual home ranges.

- Nancy would like to add CR951 south of Fiddler's Creek.
 - Darrell would like to add buffer as part of the hot spot.
 - There was a group consensus to not prioritize road segments. Subteam may use priorities internally to set order for review (to then look at specific biological data for that area, identify potential structures that could be retrofitted for improvements, etc.)
- Cost Surface Mapping
 - Stantec was contracted by FDOT for similar least cost pathway modeling project focused on Polk County due to FDOT's time constraints with their projects.
 - Brent and Bruce Johnson described the methods of that study. Range of values was from 1.1 to 3.3 and they assigned higher values to roads (20), low intensity urban (10).
 - Sources and destinations were from Fisheating Creek, Avon Park, Bright Hour Watershed/Peace River, Myakka, Alafia River, Cabbage Island, Lake Okechobee, Lake Hancoc, Hillsborough River, Green Swamp, and Lake Louisa.
 - The subteam discussed a one-mile stretch of I-4 where the Stantec pathway crosses and a cattle crossing exists that has been used by wildlife.
 - Stantec used 10x10 meter. There was some discussion about what resolution was best for determining pathways.
- FDOT Crossing Guidelines
 - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) are reviewing the Guidelines on an official capacity. Individuals of the Subteam can bring forward any ideas or concerns about the Guidelines, but the Subteam will not review further.
- FWS Guidelines
 - Amber and Nancy talked about the need for internal guidelines that FWS would utilize when determining if a crossing or other improvements were needed due to projects, which could include transportation projects as well as traffic-generating projects.
 - Brent had an idea to create an escrow account (or similar) which developments could pay into to support the construction of wildlife crossings.
 - Amber said that FWS often considers impacts within a 25-mile action area and perhaps funds could be used within the action area.
- Funding
 - Brent would like to see the issue of funding ideas for crossings and other improvements to be discussed at the next meeting.
- SR29 82 to 80A
 - Amber asked for an update on the SR29 project from SR82 to CR80A in Labelle, a project that was discussed in prior Subteam meetings. John stated that FWS has drafted a Biological Opinion.
- Speed Zones

- FWF submitted a comment letter to FDOT regarding passing zones in panther speed zones.
- Next meeting date set for 03/31/16.