

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation Sub-team

Meeting Notes

March 31, 2016

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

Attendees:

Katasha Cornwell
Amber Crooks
Elizabeth Fleming
Terry Gilbert
Darrell Land
Nancy Payton
Gwen Pipkin
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
Dan Smith
John Wrublik
David Shindle, FWS

Members of the Public and other Guests:

Mark Easley, Kisinger Campo
Chris Dailey, RS&H
Kenneth McDonald, FWS
Nicole Monies, FDOT
Tia Norman, AECOM
Tom Pride, AECOM
Tim Tetzlaff, Naples Zoo (phone)
Jason Totoiu, Everglades Law Center

Welcome and Approval of the Agenda

Approval of the Minutes

- Minutes were adopted with changes.

Slowing Down Drivers in Panther Zones by Tim Tetzlaff of the Naples Zoo

- Strategies discussed:
 - "Your Speed Is" radar feedback signs.
 - Additional painting (medallions) considered on the roadway to indicate being in a speed zone.

- Off-duty officers.
- Community-based social marketing. Participants sign commitments and show commitment via decal on vehicle.
- Billboards in key hotspots.
- Website.
- There was a discussion about including information about speed zones and RADS to visitor's centers. Tim is planning to meet with BCNP about partnership and using their volunteers to sign people up.

Communications

- Transportation Member Comments.
 - SR29 (SR82 to CR80A Cowboy Way) Biological Opinion is complete.
 - Final Roadside Animal Detection System (RADS) report to be posted on Subteam website.
 - FDOT is working on finalizing the Crossing Guidelines. Once complete, will be sent to the Subteam.
- David Shindle provided FWS Staff Liaison Update.
 - Gene Lawless has been appointed as rancher representative on PRIT core team.
 - Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) grant awarded, but Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will be providing only \$360,000 over 5 years, a reduction from their original announcement.
 - PRIT meeting will be held in Gainesville next week, where the focus will be panther population and habitat loss.

Southwest Florida Hotspots, Continued Discussion

- SR29 Bypass and Widening from I-75 to Immokalee
 - Most eastern alternative eliminated, now remains 4 alternatives for the bypass. Feasibility, purpose, and need to be reviewed for segments proposed for widening.
- The Subteam reviewed a hotspots map prepared by Darrell.
 - There was a consensus to only remove older roadkill mortalities if the problem area had been remedied by a crossing or exclusionary fencing now being in place.
 - Darrell utilized known mortalities, buffering the pinpoint with 200 meters area, and including a 1km radius.
- Public comment
 - Question from Tom as to whether there are any newer hotspots. Darrell said I-75 west of panther fencing appears to be a newer hotspot.
 - Jason asked about predicting needs for corridors and crossings outside of south Florida. Suggested National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) programs funding opportunity.

Local Road Projects and LRTP presentation by Don.

- 2040 Long Range Transportation Plans have been adopted. FAST Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act was adopted.
- Population is increasing with Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) estimates for Collier in 2040 was 492,534 people and Lee was 1,044,323 people.

- Lee projects included Corkscrew Road traffic study. Wilson Benfield project in Collier County will be discussed at a future meeting.

Eastern Collier Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) informal discussion over lunch.

- FWS staff member Kenneth McDonald and AECOM third party consultant were there to provide information and answer questions.
- Applicant's request for incidental take permit does not include transportation projects.
- Amber stated that the HCP would necessitate widening of existing roads and new roads and referenced the Florida Panther Protection Program Technical Review Team (PRT) report.

Cost Surface Mapping

- The group reviewed Dan's modeling by both reverse and inverse scoring methodologies. Stantec had performed a similar analysis also using land cover base rankings specified by the 2012 Panther Habitat Assessment Methodology, but by applying an inverse algorithm. Dan's modeling used a reverse ranking. Dan found that the inverse algorithm had the effect of smoothing out the least cost pathways (because the formula places a greater emphasis on reduced distance from point A to point B). The use of reverse rankings created more complex pathways (as greater emphasis was placed on habitat type).
- There was a consensus that use of both methodologies added value and it was up to the modeler to understand each methodologies limitations.
- Dan will incorporate existing panther crossings into the model.

Funding Opportunities

- Federal
 - NWRs funding. Jason suggested that Refuge planning "responding to outside threats" function could help provide funds.
 - Federal review of projects, e.g. Section 7 in-lieu fee type program.
 - There was consensus that we would like to pursue an improved mechanism with USFWS review of traffic-generating projects.
 - Amber stated that it should be used for improvements to public roads (not internal road to developments which should be considered and a condition if permit at time of construction, if needed).
 - Amber and Nancy will research this idea and bring back to Subteam for continued discussion.
 - These funds would be focused on improving hotspots where road construction or improvement projects are not planned. Brent clarified that he believed FDOT would be exempt from paying the new fee based on AADT since new roads don't generate traffic, only new development generates traffic. John and Brent agreed that FDOT would still be required to add a crossing if it was a condition of a Biological Opinion.
- State
 - Jason suggested Florida Communities Trust (through FDEP). Elizabeth brought up Amendment 1 funding.
- Local
 - Lee County is conducting a traffic study.

- Discussion of local impact fees. The group reviewed impact fees for Collier County and other counties.
 - Could also make a recommendation to increase impact fees specifically for wildlife.
- Private
 - Development projects through Section 7 or Section 10 could provide (e.g. City gate, proposed Eastern Collier HCP).

Next meeting is planned for June 7, 10am-3pm in Bartow.