

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation SubTeam

Meeting Minutes

April 13, 2017

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

Attendees:

Amber Crooks
Katasha Cornwell
Elizabeth Fleming, Core Team Liaison
Terry Gilbert
Darrell Land
Nancy Payton, Chair
Gwen Pipkin
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
John Wrublik

Guests:

Kristin Caruso, Scaler
Mark Easley, KCA
Jen Korn, Johnson Engineering
Rose Luzader, FDOT intern
Nicole Monies, FDOT
Tom Pride, RK&K
Christine Sciarrino, Scheda

Communications

- Elizabeth provided an update on the 04/11 meeting of the PRIT core team in Vero.
 - February announcement that panther population increased to 120-230 (from 100-180 adults and subadults in south Florida).
 - Recovery Criteria SubTeam has had difficulty scheduling meetings.
 - Focus of this PRIT meeting was panther management north of the Caloosahatchee River (one female with kittens, another female documented at Platt Branch, and likely a mating pair at Avon Park), including incentive programs.
 - There was also a discussion regarding delisting of eastern puma due to extinction, which is anticipated soon.
 - The Service will begin a Florida panther species status assessment as part of its 5 year review.
 - Service also considering a different regulatory framework to take into account panthers north of the river
- Elizabeth provided an update on the Transportation SubTeam at the core team meeting.

- Larry asked the SubTeam to respond to a request from Department of Interior Secretary Zinke for 5 priority crossing projects that the DOI could include in the federal infrastructure bill.
 - John had originally been contacted about this request and coordinated three recommendations with Dan and Darrell (SR29 north of Oil Well Rd. (Owl Hammock), CR846 East of Immokalee, and Keri Road).
 - Elizabeth suggested Turner River and SR29 south of Oil Well Rd.
 - Amber noted that these five correspond to the SubTeam’s top projects, minus Alligator Alley I-75 where fencing is being installed. She noted that I-75 still need to be looked at for crossing structure on the west end.
 - Katasha noted that some of the projects (e.g. SR29) are going through PD&E by FDOT. FDOT is concerned that if projects are identified for funding that will cause timing difficulties for FDOT. She suggested the group focus on more “shovel ready” projects to provide as recommendations.
 - Amber inquired about this concern, in that by the time PD&E is completed, typically crossing and funding are typically identified.
 - Brent asked for clarification and it was understood that all projects receiving federal funds must follow the NEPA process including having a PD&E.
 - There was discussion about how the federal funding could be dispersed to local roads, if there are cooperative partners. Don noted that the local road would also need to be identified on the federal aid eligible network.
 - Dan suggested that RADS funding is needed.
 - Darrell suggested asking for more specifics on money, timing. Amber asked about timing of the funds, if the bill is passed. That is an unknown.
 - Nancy mentioned 11 “shovel ready” replacement county bridges in eastern Collier County, but no funds are available.
 - Gwen said Keri Road could be most feasible of the top priorities since it is a local road.
 - There was not consensus amongst the group to provide recommendations. Hot Spots document can be a resource for FWS in providing these recommendations.
 - Brent, Katasha and Gwen reiterated FDOT’s position not to include any State Roads on the recommendation list since most have PD&Es underway. Brent indicated he would schedule an internal FDOT meeting to see if there were any non-PD&E opportunities where federal funding would be appropriate which could be included on the recommendation list.
- The next PRIT meeting is August 8, 2017. The Transportation SubTeam’s goal is to complete the Hot Spots document before that next meeting. Costs may take some time to complete.

Southwest Florida Hot Spots

- The group reviewed and edited the Hot Spots document.
 - The group discussed how often the document should be updated and how to notate if some efforts/structures had been made on the segments but may not

adequately solve the mortality issue (e.g. due to limited fencing). Brent added an asterisk to two Hot Spots noting that efforts had been made, but locations may need additional measures.

- Brent suggested adding in contact information for adjacent cooperating land owners to document their willingness to donate conservation lands adjacent to proposed crossings. Several people objected to this because it is a public document. Nancy agreed to provide contact information and specifics regarding cooperating landowners to FDOT in a separate document/email.
- “FDOT Guideline Considerations” will be deleted and constraints will be added.
- There was a consensus that the current metadata in the kmz file was adequate.
- FDOT will provide some of the missing information in the document project sheets.

Current and Upcoming Transportation Projects

- Mark Easley provided the SubTeam information on SR70 improvements. No design, ROW or construction is currently funded. Pending the outcome of the PD&E the road may get widened but no current timeline. A workshop was hosted, but comment window continues to be open. Mark noted plans to include proposed wildlife crossings into the SR70 widening project. Mark noted the substantial utility and cost reasons for selecting the preferred northern alignment which impacts conservation lands.
- Amber provided a presentation about local projects in Collier and Lee counties that included the Randall/Oil Well Road Corridor study, Vanderbilt Beach Road Extension Corridor study, CR951 Area Study (Wilson Benfield), and Corkscrew Road traffic impact study.

Cost Surface Mapping

- Dan presented changes to the cost surface modeling. The cost of fencing has been doubled. The crossings have the same value as the adjacent habitat.
- In some cases the cost pathway did not use the crossing (e.g. SR80 bridge due to presence of high quality corridor to the west).
- Dan would like to model more pathways north of the River/Babcock Ranch because of recent movement of females north of the Caloosahatchee.

Funding Opportunities

- Has Don got any updated information from local impact fee coordinator?
- Amber to set up next meeting and can include speed zone enforcement funding.
- Brent updated the group that an FDOT consultant is still working on modeling effort of trips and panther impact fee.

Public Comment

- Kristen Caruso asked about the Twin Eagles crossing design.

Next meeting will be June 21, 2017 at the FDOT offices in Bartow.