

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation SubTeam

Meeting Minutes

June 21, 2017

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

Attendees:

Katasha Cornwell
Amber Crooks (phone)
Elizabeth Fleming
Terry Gilbert (phone)
Nancy Payton
Gwen Pipkin
Dan Smith (phone)
Don Scott
Brent Setchell
John Wrublik (phone)
David Shindle (phone)

Guests:

Kristin Caruso
Niki Cribbs
Matt Crimm, Stantec
Chris Dailey
Matthew Marino, FDOT
Nicole Monies, FDOT
Tom Pride
Jason Watts, FDOT

Communications

- Update by FWS Staff Liaison, David Shindle.
 - Anticipates a 5-year review notice to come out soon in the Federal Register. Outcomes are reclassification from Endangered to Threatened, delisting, or maintaining current classification. Will consider demographics, genetics, range, habitat conditions, conservation measures, threats, and new information. Would like to complete it within a year, but may take 18-24 months to complete. The intent is that this assessment will go through peer review and will include looking at habitat north of the river.
 - Regulatory methodology (e.g. Panther Habitat Units “PHU”) is also undergoing a separate review. There is a January 2019 target for having that process completed. Brent mentioned there is a FDOT analysis recommending how PHUs should be revised.
 - Next Core Team meeting is August 8, 2017. There is an open invitation to SubTeam members to attend. Details at the end of these minutes.

- Amber asked about a habitat “working group.” Kevin Godsea is expected to give a Landscape Conservation Design (LCD) update to the PRIT core team. This item will likely be a part of the August meeting.
- Update by Elizabeth, PRIT Core Team Liaison.
 - SubTeam discussed request by Larry Williams to provide DOI with five priority wildlife crossing projects for the federal infrastructure bill. At the April Transportation SubTeam meeting, the group discussed potential priorities to suggest to FWS. FDOT provided priorities directly to Larry Williams, but did not send that information to the SubTeam.
 - Katasha stated that FDOT reviewed bridges that could be a stand-alone project to add a shelf or be widened in Districts where panthers are likely to occur. The information was provided to Larry Williams. Xavier and Katasha also called Larry to discuss the rationale. FDOT expressed that any federal funds/projects for state highways be coordinated with the FDOT.
 - There was a discussion about NEPA requirements associated with accepting federal funds for road projects. Projects have to go through the NEPA process before they can be eligible for federal funding and be “shovel ready.”
 - Nancy mentioned that after approval by PRIT core team, FWS will have available to them the SubTeam’s Hot Spots chart and other materials that help prioritize road segments where panthers have been killed and where safety measures could reduce mortality.
 - SubTeam on the whole was not able to respond to the request as described in the last SubTeam meeting minutes.
 - Individual entities (e.g. NGOs) can submit their suggestions separately to FWS/Larry Williams.
- Transportation SubTeam member comments
 - Brent demonstrated the new public ArcGIS online program. It has photos and data available that includes hotspots, cameras, panther mortalities, and wildlife photos from the underpasses. It is for the District 1 region and includes data from about 20 sites.
 - Nancy asked about including photos and data for crossings on county/local roads. Brent will add if he has the necessary information including the pictures and bridge details. [Link to Wildlife Crossing ArcGIS online](#)
 - Nancy shared a Wall Street Journal article about crossings. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/wildlife-crossings-get-a-whole-new-look-1497967411>
- Current and Upcoming Transportation Projects
 - SR29 from SR82 to CR82A (Cowboy Way): PD&E has been signed and NEPA document is now available. FDOT has a meeting tomorrow concerning the segment of SR82 from Collier/Hendry line to Keri Road regarding the crossing near the Twelve Mile Slough area. Three crossings are contemplated in this stretch. SR29 in LaBelle is expected to be completed late this year.
 - Additional SR29 segments: Gwen stated that SR29 segment (I-75 to Oil Well Road) is ongoing with a feasibility study. SR29 north of CR858 to Immokalee has an ongoing PD&E (hope to be done end of 2018).

- SR80 is under construction from Dalton Lane to CR833. There are shelves to be constructed at both the C-2 and C-3 canals.
- Elizabeth asked about funding for Turner River RADS improvement. Katasha is trying to get meetings to get an update.
- Jen Korn of Johnson Engineering has a contract with FDOT for work on trail cameras at FDOT roadway crossings.

Southwest Florida Hot Spots Chart, Project Sheets, and Other Materials

- The group reviewed and edited the Hot Spots document. Nancy will work with FDOT SubTeam members to fill in the remaining gaps. The goal is to complete the document by the August 8th PRIT core team meeting.
- Elizabeth asked about adding in daytime speed zones to the chart. Brent added the daytime speeds during the meeting.
- Brent is working on cost estimates to fill in that portion of the chart.
- Amber noted that there are additional mortalities in 2017 (after the Hotspots cut off) on SR82 in the area that is already green. When it gets updated in 2018 that segment might be elevated.
- There was a discussion about input from the PRIT Core Team about type and level of detail.
- Changes were made during the meeting to fill in the gaps and discuss specific projects.
 - During update on Hotspot for I-75 Alligator Alley there was a discussion about connectivity and the existing fencing that had been constructed. Brent mentioned that FDOT was waiting on a determination from USFWS. He also mentioned that FWC did not recommend a crossing in the 7-mile stretch because it would allow access into North Belle Meade/Golden Gate Estates where there are residences and concerns with human-panther conflicts.
 - Amber mentioned that USFWS had previously mentioned concern that if there is no/limited connectivity on the western side that the panthers may instead travel west into more populated areas and heavier traffic roads (e.g. CR951 and East Naples). She also mentioned that the Conservancy had provided a comment letter on this issue there were over 1,500 acres of private mitigation lands in permanent conservation easement status in the North Belle Meade, many contiguous and some adjacent to I-75.
 - Nancy mentioned that there are opportunities underway at the local level that could assist in this situation.
 - Brent noted that if a clear conservation lands “corridor” was formed within Golden Gate Estates to connect to existing conservation lands in either the north or the east, it would make FDOT’s decision easier to proceed with the proposed crossing(s).
- Gwen will update the Project Status Sheets with PD&E information by July 7th. Brent will then add the estimated construction costs and intends to send back to the SubTeam chair by July 14th.
- The group updated the recipient list including new Collier County staff and current SFWMD Governing Board members.
- The final document will be sent around to the SubTeam prior to providing it as final draft to the PRIT Core Team in advance of its August 8th meeting.

Funding Opportunities

- Impact fee and federal methodology improvement ideas
 - Brent looked at cost of crossings and shared his research with the group.
 - Box culvert (12' x 7' for 2 lane road = \$750,000).
 - Bridge (46' w x 80' l for 2 lane road = \$2,000,000).
 - Bridge shelf (4 lane = \$650,000).
 - Doesn't include design, ROW, or maintenance costs.
 - Brent explained the assumptions that went into the study prepared by Stantec regarding Impact Fee Calculations, including the 11 crossings locations that went into the study
- Don Scott spoke with Lee County impact fee office. Impact fees are up in the air in some counties. A question that may come from local impact fee personnel is – will this fee replace some or all current required mitigation.
- Don brought up points that he will be looking into - for example, the rationale nexus test (in the cost feasible plan?), as how appropriate it is to assess future v. existing needs. He also mentioned that rural areas such as Immokalee are trying to reduce or phase impact fees.
- Don mentioned that the costs shown by Brent deal with construction only. They don't include design which is typically included.
- Matt Crimm of Stantec gave an overview of the draft impact fee/compensation study.
 - Scenarios for impact fee amount could be 1) existing scenario 2) future traffic volumes in total for new development only and 3) future traffic volumes in total for new development in Collier County only.
 - Of \$11,700,000 needed for the subject crossings, fees will generate about \$4,800,000 of the cost under Scenario 3.
 - Amber clarified with Matt some questions on how the study impact fees were calculated. Matt mentioned that District E had less growth predicted for TAZs and that District D had the cost divided over more units in that area.
 - The location of the crossings does affect the outcome of the study since it is related to trips passing by those areas.
 - Cost is per dwelling units, hotel rooms, or commercial square footage.
 - There was an interest to see how the model looked in Lee and Hendry counties as well, meaning additional crossing locations would need to be identified.
 - There was a discussion about how this fee/mitigation would fit with existing requirements of PHUs. Would some of the currently required PHUs be reduced with the addition of this fee?
 - Amber stated that this should be additive. The USFWS has a regulatory methodology for assessing habitat loss, but not a consistent method to seek compensation for indirect impacts to panthers from increased traffic volumes. Thus, the additional funding would go to help remedy an existing gap in a more meaningful way.

- Brent inquired about the PHU methodology including some consideration from roads. The Panther Habitat Assessment Methodology includes an additional 0.02 to the base ratio related to the issue of crossings.
- Brent will send the impact fee report to all. John may provide some feedback.
- Dan asked about the inclusion of two crossing structures on SR82 that are already-identified projects. The crossings are identified in that project as well as projected funding for the structures. The 11 crossings that were included in the impact fee/compensation study are not reflective of actual projects and only serve as a basis to run the analysis. Brent asked for input from the SubTeam regarding alternative locations for the crossings.

Cost Surface Mapping

- Dan updated the cost surface modeling. He has completed a rerun of cost paths with two different options - standard values and inverse values. He added new source and destination points because of new female presence in Babcock to add to model.
- Dan is looking at optional scenarios (traffic volumes for example), but he is not yet comfortable to include in the model. He is looking for night v. day traffic volumes.
- Dan will send report for review by the SubTeam and then can begin to prepare for present to PRIT Core Team. He said he should have the base model available before the August PRIT core team meeting.

Public Comment

- Chris Dailey shared concerns about the draft impact fee study related to the Koontz v. St. Johns River Water Management District ruling. He stated that the assessment should be proportional to impact. He said that the fact that the analysis includes trips passing by the crossing locations is logical and better than basing the fee/mitigation on trips generated alone.

Transportation SubTeam members are invited to attend the next PRIT core team meeting August 8th. The SubTeam will present the final Southwest Florida Hotspots map and materials. Dan Smith will provide an overview of the cost-surface mapping from I-75 to I-4 and get feedback from the Core Team.

Next Transportation SubTeam meeting is August 29, 2017, at the FDOT offices in Bartow.