

## **Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)**

### **Transportation SubTeam**

#### **Meeting Minutes**

November 15, 2017

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

#### Attendees from the SubTeam:

Elizabeth Fleming, Liaison to Core Team

Nancy Payton, Chair

Amber Crooks

Terry Gilbert

Darrell Land

Don Scott

Brent Setchell

Dan Smith

John Wrublik

#### Other attendees:

Kristin Caruso

Niki Cribbs, public

Chris Dailey, public

Cynthia Grizzle, public

Laura Herrero, Johnson Engineering

Bruce Johnson, Stantec

Catherine "Cady" Kaiman, Earthjustice

Jennifer Korn, Johnson Engineering

Ken McDonald, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Nicole Monies, FDOT

Gordon Mullen, public

Tom Pride, public

#### **Communications**

- Elizabeth provided the update for the PRIT and FWS
- PRIT Core Team met on August 8, 2017
- Main topic of discussion was the Florida panther Five-Year Status Review and Species Status Assessment. This process will take 1-2 years. This will help inform decision making on panther issues
- Transportation SubTeam also gave an update which included final Hot Spots Report presentation, preliminary presentation on cost surface modeling north of the Caloosahatchee River to I-4 to try to predict where panthers will cross roads, and provided a link to the FDOT ArcGIS website that shows use of wildlife in numerous crossing structures. There was also a discussion regarding increasing permeability across I-4

- Larry Williams provided the Hot Spots Report to dozens of interested parties, agencies, and other decision-makers so they can begin to use it to help with prioritizing funding
- The report's data goes through 2016. As 2018 approaches, the SubTeam will look to update with 2017 data
- Nancy mentioned that the report needs to clarify "collisions" instead of deaths or mortalities since the data is mortality and injuries
- Eric Staats of the Naples Daily News did a story about the hotspots  
<http://www.naplesnews.com/story/news/environment/2017/10/22/florida-panther-hot-spot-report-aims-focus-wildlife-crossings-where-needed-most/784645001/>
- Next Core Team meeting is St. Petersburg on December 12-13

### **SR 82 Update**

- FDOT consultant Tom Pride gave a presentation about the SR 82 widening project from Hendry/Collier County Line to Gator Slough Lane
- Proposed crossing bridge shelves at Under Canal and Gator Slough-Panther Creek
- These locations can connect with the Natural Resource District areas of the SW Hendry Sector Plan
- Bridge structures are proposed to be 8 foot wide shelves at Under Canal and 10 foot wide structures at Gator Slough-Panther Creek, both with 10 foot high associated fencing
- Estimated timeline
  - Design ongoing
  - Right of way summer 2018-2020
  - Construction summer 2023
- Darrell asked about the Eastern Collier Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and the proposed wildlife structures. Bruce Johnson stated that there was a change in the location from prior draft of the HCP to the Gator Slough area, in coordination with FDOT's efforts on the SR 82 project.
- Dan asked about width of Southwest Hendry Sector Plan Natural Resource District areas (King Ranch).
- Dan asked about improvements on Corkscrew Road near SR 82. There may be roadway improvements at the intersection planned, but no improvements near CREW

### **SR 29 – from Oil Well Road to SR 82 through town of Immokalee**

- FDOT public meeting on November 9, 2017
- PD&E ongoing
- Design funded fiscal year 2019
- Construction will begin in 5 years at the earliest

### **Least Cost Pathways**

- Dan gave a presentation about the least cost pathway modeling
  - Methods included two separate algorithms to service the cost surface, the standard value (x, blue lines) and the inverse value (1/x, red lines) (where "x" represents the adjusted scores for panther habitat type selection/avoidance equivalent to PHU values from USFWS (2012))

- The inverse value places greater emphasis on the shortest distance between two points, while the standard value places greater emphasis on habitat quality
  - The resulting cost paths for the Inverse algorithm are shorter smoother lines, while those produced by the Standard algorithm are generally longer and more convoluted because of reliance on stricter use of higher quality habitat
  - Individual preferences among cats, demonstrated by telemetry, suggests the SubTeam needs to consider both methods (standard and inverse)
- Seven sources south of the Caloosahatchee River: North Belle Meade, Big Cypress east and west (north of I-75), Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (Audubon), CREW, OK Slough, and Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge
  - Zoomed in on different paths going north from CREW. The LCP was slightly east of Gator Slough planned crossing structure
- OK Slough to Fisheating Creek, Babcock Preserve, Myakka State Park
  - At SR 80, the standard model did not utilize the existing crossing, rather it chose a path around the wildlife fencing through selection of alternative natural habitat blocks, whereas the Inverse selected a pathway through the existing crossing
- The LCP model pathways between Babcock Ranch Preserve and Myakka SP crossed SR 31 through adjacent private lands to the north rather than through Babcock-Webb
- Darrell said models may not capture local movements, telemetry can help us understand that better
- If the location of specific source/destination points are changed slightly, the overall pathways will generally stay the same over the landscape, while some small changes will occur near the source/destination (the “on” and “off” ramps change slightly, but the overall lines stay the same)
- Brent mentioned that the C-43 reservoir will change the landscape value when it is constructed, so FDOT has directed Townsend canal bridge to have wildlife crossing shelves. Fort Denaud collision proves further information as to panther movements in this area
- Darrell asked about how the SubTeam wants to deliver the LCP work, periodically updating based on new data. Can be a layer/map as another tool in the toolbox. Darrell asked if wanted to show segment of roads that are of interest or if the product includes the entire line over the landscape
- Dan said that the SubTeam should focus on solidifying our selection of sources/destinations prior to finalizing the product for public/formal use
- Brent and Dan will work to send Amber the list of source/destinations for input by the SubTeam. Feedback to Dan should be provided by December 15
- The SubTeam discussed looking at bear movement, use of habitat, roadkill and verified sightings in addition to least cost pathways for panthers, collisions, telemetry (connect the dots with GIS), Thatcher and Clark study north of the Caloosahatchee River, etc. to help predict/identify hotspots north of the river
- Brent will provide this layer for EDTM and planning purposes. Amber asked about packaging the materials, could have a layer that has a point or segment where the lines crossed a road to highlight roads that are of interest, although that will be an effort
- The report will describe the methodology, provide results and maps, and focus on details through the use of examples of the LCPs, e.g. US27 in Highlands County

## **Funding Opportunities**

- Brent emailed the SubTeam asking for formal feedback on the Example Impact Fee Calculations for Panther Crossings, dated June 2017. Brent would like feedback by November 17, 2017
- Don provided feedback on the draft from county staff and consultants. The feedback included:
  - Current impact fees already include crossing/mitigation. Should include credit for facilities that are already built. Had questions regarding countywide fee per residential unit that changes for different parts of the county. Perhaps different terminology than “impact fee” (part of the permitting)
  - Also, impact fees don’t tend to cover projects in the LRTP fully
  - Difficult to make changes politically, will need support from Board of County Commissioners and County manager
  - Collier County is considering a local sales tax for infrastructure needs
- Public-private partnership
  - Possible federal gas tax increase (7 cent increase)
    - State is doing a study on autonomous vehicle and electric vehicles and how that might impact taxes
- Elizabeth asked about tolls
  - Brent said that toll revenue under certain circumstances may be used to fund roadway projects in the same county where the toll facility is located
  - SubTeam intends to invite the appropriate FDOT staff member to discuss tolls with us at a future meeting
  - Alligator Alley is currently utilizing a large amount of toll revenue for median guard rail and inside shoulder project

## **Hurricane Damage**

- Wildlife fencing down due to Hurricane Irma at Alligator Alley MM84 and other locations. It is still down. Brent explained that the repair is being coordinated with reimbursement from the federal government and that will take some time
- Corkscrew Road wildlife fencing is also down. Don Scott will coordinate with the appropriate staff to repair

## **Panther Outreach Team Joint Meeting**

- Presentation – include RADS photo
- Change mortality/deaths to collision
- Ken Warren working on news press release
- Bruce Johnson incorporating the SubTeam Hot Spots Report into the Eastern Collier Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

Next meeting is scheduled for 02/21/18 at FDOT Bartow office, 10:00am to 3:00pm. The agenda may include update on FDOT District 7 projects from Nicole Selly and information about use of tolls from I-75 Alligator Alley.