

Panther Recovery Implementation Team (PRIT)

Transportation SubTeam

Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2018

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

Attendees:

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

Meredith Barnard, FWF
Patrick Bateman, FDOT
Erica Christiansen, FDOT
Jen Korn, Johnson Engineering
Nicole Monies, FDOT
Tom Pride, RK&K

Communications

- USFWS Staff Liaison update
 - David reported that USFWS is working on the Species Status Assessment. This will help inform the 5 year review. This process includes Darrell and Dave Onorato, who also have PRIT roles. Public comments they received are now posted on the USFWS Vero webpage. <https://www.fws.gov/verobeach/>
- CORE team liaison update
 - Elizabeth reported to the core team at their April meeting what the Transportation Subteam has been working on. The PRIT core team praised our work and gave us three directives from the core team:
 - Provide updated hotspots model report to the USFWS for distribution (FDOT can update annual based on FWC panther vehicle collision data).
 - Complete and report back on the least cost modeling north of the Caloosahatchee River to predict important areas.

- Prioritize investigation of opportunities to maintain and increase permeability through I-4.
 - Elizabeth mentioned that there was a FDOT briefing for environmental partners on Monday May 7, 2018 regarding statewide planning for future corridors.
 - Dan mentioned Central Florida Expressway Authority has many initiatives, may have a nexus to our exploration of I-4 permeability. And maybe also Turnpike.
 - Next PRIT meeting is planned for October 3-4 2018 in Palm Beach County.
 - Timeline goals for the Transportation Subteam:
 - By October, Dan should be complete and Elizabeth will suggest the Subteam and Dan provide update at the next PRIT core team meeting.
 - Amber reached out to FDOT District 7 to have representative to discuss projects in that area that may have a nexus to the Subteam, most specifically I-4. Could also have someone from District 5 to discuss projects at I-4.
 - Appointments are based on person, not based on organization. It is difficult to get appointment letter from USFWS, as it comes from Region 4.
 - Amber asked about habitat Subteam. Elizabeth stated that one of the PRIT priorities is habitat restoration and management and that item hasn't really been taken up yet.
 - PRIT is celebrating its 5 year anniversary.
 - Genetic management report forthcoming soon.
- Sharing of Information
 - SR29/I-75 interchange lighting project
 - FDOT report has been finalized and was provided to Transportation Subteam. Scheduled to begin construction in August 2018.
 - Project must meet the safety requirement, all interchanges have to be lit.
 - Tom Pride said there are three variables that go into lighting - type of and intensity of lighting, height of the pole, and number of poles.
 - First design - 22 poles that were 120 feet tall was prior design.
 - Most conservative - 212 that were 40 feet tall with dimmer bulb.
 - Current design - 40 foot poles with brighter bulb (but still International Dark Sky Association compliant bulbs).
 - The illumination will be contained within FDOT ROW.
 - The Subteam reviewed the crash and incident records for the intersection. Dan said lighting might help drivers see animals.
 - SR31 Charlotte County update by Patrick Bateman, FDOT
 - Segments: SR31 in Lee County (including draw bridge), SR31 from SR78 North River Road to entrance of Babcock, and SR31 from entrance of Babcock to CR74.
 - Project is widening to 6 lanes due to 50,000 people moving to Babcock Ranch. 2040 LRTP shows 4 lanes north of the entrance; widening focused south of entrance.

- SR31 from SR78 North River Road to Babcock entrance is privately funded by Babcock. Privately funded road project goes through the same process and subject to same rules (i.e. eminent domain still applies since it is a state road). The State Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) is already complete for an eastern alignment. Due to unforeseen circumstances with FGT Babcock is exploring a western alignment which would require updating the SEIR. If a western alignment is chosen it will take FDOT/Babcock 4-5 years to complete design and right of way acquisition.
 - No current PD&E yet for the sections north of the Babcock entrance.
 - There is a FGT pipeline that complicates location of widening. May need to reinstate consultation if design for road project changes and goes to the west side of the street due to pipeline.
 - No underpasses are planned in these segments. State permits and Biological Opinions have been issued for Babcock. Wildlife crossing section, which is between the Babcock entrance and CR74 would not be done until that portion of the road widened.
 - The Subteam discussed the conservation importance of the lands at corner of CR74 and SR31.
 - Corkscrew Road
 - Don updated the Subteam regarding the solicitation of Hurricane Irma fencing repair.
 - Dan is placing cameras along Corkscrew Road (on stretch from current crossing to SR82, and including near The Place and Lee County conservation lands).
 - Lee County is having meetings to discuss the need for flow and wildlife connectivity
 - Amber showed maps of Corkscrew Road study area and possible crossing locations. Some of the permitted and proposed developments in the area have preserves that may be used as connection
 - CR846 Immokalee Road
 - Shelves are planned on bridge structures to the west and east of the Citygate crossing. There are 3 bridge replacements with shelves on CR846 and some additional bridge replacements in that area that will not shelves.
 - There was a discussion about whether or not to place fencing now at the bridge shelves or wait to place fencing when there is a full wildlife structure.
 - SR29 near Jerome
 - Discussed the location where a nursing female got hit in February.
 - Panthers have been known to use the walkways over the canals on the side of SR29.

- Dan ran inverse and standard model runs.
- Mining can impact land cover information - doesn't reflect marsh restoration, berms, or other restoration covers. Mining is a value of 3.
- Sources and Destinations: Alafia River corridor, Hilochee, Disney Wilderness Preserve, Seminole Ranch/St. John's, Hillsborough River State Park, Green Swamp, Lake Louisa State Park, Lake George State Forest, Tiger Bay State Forest.
 - All the nodes are 20,000 acres or greater, some are more likely to be stopover spots, while Ocala and Green Swamp big enough for breeding panthers.
 - Connecting Wekiva to Tosohatchee/Seminole due to bear sightings on east side of I-4.
- There are three FDOT identified potential crossings at I-4 that Brent showed:
 - Area near I-4 and 33/570 and Tenoroc identified as potential crossing, but there were some concerns that there are not currently any target species present.
 - Western Green Swamp underpass at I-4 (in close proximity to existing cattle crossing).
 - Would need to not only identify opportunities at I-4 but also on adjacent roads like US27
 - Reedy Creek crossing at I-4 - there is currently riprap but proposal to add shelves (currently in PD&E).
 - Darrell said that that part of I-4 near Disney would be difficult
 - Terry asked about Cross Water Barge - Dan has had a camera there.
 - What is the final product for this report? Identify segments? Buffer the lines? Just have the raw data?
 - Darrell cautioned that there is no/little telemetry to verify as opposed south of the river. We are directing the model to a specified source/destination, however this can be explained in the methodology section of the report.
 - Dan will also want to compare telemetry, sightings, and known roadkill with cost pathways; could also utilize bear roadkill data as surrogate.
 - Dan still needs to do clean up re fences/crossings (tentatively by end of June).
 - Subteam assistance needed on writing – particularly the introduction and discussion sections. Dan will write the methodology section.
 - Dan is anticipating to be largely done by October; could prepare mostly finalized product and then feedback from PRIT core team in October
 - Erica Christiansen of FDOT Central Office discussed I-4 segment between CR583 and CR570.
 - This project has received concurrence from FWC and FWS. Still in PD&E and not yet in design. No crossings planned. Nancy expressed concern that FWC and USFWS did not require crossings here.
 - Erica said that most appropriate time to weigh in on wildlife crossing at ETDM and initial comments/vetting.

Southwest Florida Hotspots

- Will be updated with 2017 vehicle collisions.
- Need to update the maps and recipient list.

- Add FNAI and State Lands.
- Discussion regarding break points - may not need to be addressed currently; another option is to focus on newer telemetry to use in the model.

Funding Working Group

- Update from discussions about use of toll monies.
- 2024 project ID

Miscellaneous

- FDOT updated wildlife crossing guidelines. Was posted on Subteam webpage.

Next meeting is Wednesday, August 15th from 10am-3pm.