

Meeting Summary
Panther Recovery Team Meeting
Lowry Park Zoo, Tampa, FL
January 27-28, 2004

Panther recovery team members present:

Dana Bryan, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Joe Clark, U.S. Geological Survey
Pete David, South Florida Water Management District
Thomas Eason, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Skip Griep, U.S. Forest Service
Deborah Jansen for Superintendent, Big Cypress National Preserve
Tom Jones, Barron Collier Partnership
John Kasbohm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Gary Lester, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Laurie Macdonald, Defenders of Wildlife
Dave Maehr, University of Kentucky
Roy McBride, Livestock Protection Company
Jeff Norment, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Cynthia Ovdenk for Skip Bergmann, US Army Corps of Engineers
Mel Sunquist, University of Florida
Steve Williams, Florida Panther Society
Ed Woods, Seminole Tribe of Florida
Wes Woolf, National Wildlife Federation
Jora Young, The Nature Conservancy

Fish and Wildlife Service participants:

Paula Halupa, South Florida Ecological Services Office, Vero Beach
Layne Hamilton, Florida Panther NWR
Dawn Jennings, North Florida Ecological Services Office, Jacksonville

Other participants:

Sonny Bass, Everglades National Park
Paula Beier, Northern Arizona University
Chris Belden, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Lincoln Bormann, The Nature Conservancy
Mike Conroy, U.S. Geological Survey
Karen Hill, Florida Panther Society
Darrell Land, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Frank van Manen, U.S. Geological Survey

Panther recovery team members not present:

Buddy Baker, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Jimmy Bullock, International Paper Company
Donald Cuzzo, National Home Builders Association
Dennis Hardin, Florida Division of Forestry
F.K. Jones, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida
Robert Lacy, Chicago Zoological Society
Dwight LeBlanc, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
Frank Mazzotti, University of Florida
Brian Murphy, Quality Deer Management Association
Stephen O'Brien, National Cancer Institute
Jim Ozier, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division
Richard Rummel, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
Mark Sasser, Alabama Division of Game and Fish
David Thompson, White Oak Conservation Center

Others invited but not attending:

American Farm Bureau Federation
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
Florida Farm Bureau Federation

The goals of this meeting were:

1. Summarize progress and results of current projects including the Scientific Review Team (SRT) final report and the potential reintroduction area habitat assessment.
2. Develop recovery objectives and measurable criteria addressing threats under each listing factor.
3. Refine outline of recovery actions based on preliminary draft and previous threats analyses.
4. Initiate development of an implementation schedule for recovery actions.

The meeting began at 8:30 a.m. and the following items were discussed:

Reminders of Recovery Team Roles and Responsibilities:

John Kasbohm reiterated the following items as discussed and the first team meeting:

1. Recovery teams assist the Service in revising the recovery plan.

2. Recovery team members should not represent themselves as speaking for the Service or other agencies.
3. Recovery team members should not distribute draft plans or team working documents.
4. Recovery team members should not act through the news media or other parties to influence agency decisions.
5. The recovery team should not interject itself in issues or actions.

Project Updates:

Paula Halupa gave an update on the draft landscape conservation strategy for the panther in south Florida that was developed by the panther subteam of the Service's Multi-species/Ecosystem Recovery Implementation Team (MERIT). The following is a summary of Paula's comments.

The Landscape Conservation Strategy for the Florida Panther in South Florida was prepared by the Florida Panther Subteam of MERIT in December 2002. The South Florida Ecological Services Office is using it and distributing it to people who ask for it. The goal of this effort was to identify a strategically located set of lands containing sufficient area and appropriate land cover types to ensure long-term survival of the panther. The Subteam focused south of the Caloosahatchee River where the only reproducing panther population currently exists. The Subteam created a potential habitat model, including forest patches > 2 ha (5 ac) in size and non-urban areas < 200 m from forest and excluding lands < 300 m from urban areas. Potential habitat was reviewed in relation to telemetry, satellite imagery, and home range polygons. A map showing Primary, Secondary, and Dispersal Zones was produced. The Primary Zone is considered the most important area needed to support a self-sustaining panther population. The Secondary Zone can support panthers, but habitat restoration may be needed. The Dispersal Zone, created through least cost path models, shows the optimum path for panthers dispersing out of south Florida. The Subteam also looked at PVAs and found that a population of: < 50 individuals would likely become extinct; 60-70 would likely decline by 25% and have inbreeding problems; 80-100 would be demographically stable, but have genetic problems; and > 240 would be demographically stable, but be large enough to retain 90% of its genetic heterozygosity. (CDs with the Strategy were provided to the team.)

The "Florida Panther Habitat Conservation Assessment Tool for South Florida" is being prepared by the South Florida Ecological Services Office. This Tool provides information on compensation needed to conserve the panther when habitat alteration (loss, degradation, fragmentation) will occur. It is to be used after avoidance and minimization measures are incorporated into projects to the maximum extent practicable. It will help in the section 7 and section 10 process when loss and degradation from a project cannot be avoided. The Tool is meant to complement other protection and restoration efforts by private landowners,

State, federal, and other partners. The Tool defines what panther habitat is - basically all areas required for the panther to live out its full life cycle, including areas providing food and shelter and supporting characteristic movement for hunting, breeding, dispersal, and territorial behavior. It is largely based upon the Strategy and maps, showing Primary, Secondary, and Dispersal Zones, but includes other biological data. It goes beyond south Florida and considers areas north of the Caloosahatchee in south/central Florida. The Tool gives relative values of various cover types, largely taken from the Strategy. Basically anything not urban has value - row crops, citrus, pasture, freshwater wetlands, forest, etc. all have value. The Tool is based upon the amount of land conserved and at-risk. It has less reliance on telemetry. It will allow us to provide a more systematic and consistent approach for project review for better decisions. We believe that the Tool is fair and flexible to the landowner.

We plan to notice both the Strategy and the Tool in the Federal Register at the same time and invite public comments on both.

Darrell Land gave a brief update on the Genetic Restoration project. Molecular genetic analyses continue. Findings are expected this spring.

John Kasbohm discussed that the Service would soon publish a Federal Register notice soliciting public input into the recovery plan revision process. The North Florida Field Office has developed a new web page for panthers (<http://northflorida.fws.gov/Panther/florida-panther.htm>). Portions of the draft plan will be posted on this site as they are completed by the team. The public will then have the opportunity to provide comments through the web site. This opportunity for public input through the internet is in addition to, and does not replace, the required publication of a draft plan and the associated request for comments.

Presentations:

Paul Beier and Mike Conroy gave a summary of the findings of the Florida Panther Scientific Review Team Final Report, *An Analysis of Scientific Literature Related to the Florida Panther* (power point presentation attached).

Frank van Manen and Joe Clark gave a summary of the findings of their final report, *Habitat Assessment to Identify Potential Sites for Florida Panther Reintroduction in the Southeast*. The final report and a copy of their power point presentation will be available as soon as appropriate briefings are completed both within the Service and with the southeastern states.

Recovery Objectives, Criteria and Actions by Factors A-E:

The team reviewed the preliminary draft outline of recovery actions and discussed recovery objectives and criteria. Changes made at the meeting are reflected in the attached outline; additions are indicated in red underline, deletions in blue strikeout, and comments in brackets in

green. The recovery team agreed to provide additional comments on the attached draft.

Considerations for recovery criteria by factors discussed are summarized below.

Factor A:

- ▶ Parameters used in the potential reintroduction area assessment (Thatcher et al 2003) may be useful for developing measurable habitat criteria.
- ▶ Need “sufficient” habitat to support population criteria under Factor E. The exact amounts could be determined later based on the characteristics of the applicable areas in the Southeast.
- ▶ Need reasonable assurances that habitat base will persist. The amount of public lands, other levels of protection, and stable/predictable rates of land use change should be considered.
- ▶ Conservation strategies and appropriate MOUs and/or management agreements should be in place, implemented, and be effective at protecting habitat. These should include a process for prioritizing habitat to prevent future degradation.
- ▶ Fragmentation should be prevented and connectivity established in important areas.
- ▶ State plans should be consistent with the recovery plan to insure habitat is not lost.
- ▶ Need a process to prevent barriers from road projects in priority habitat and to require underpasses where needed.
- ▶ Ensure appropriate corridors are in place to allow dispersal and gene flow.

Factor B:

At this time, there are no data indicating that overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes is a limiting factor. Consequently, no criteria are necessary for Factor B. Continued monitoring is needed for potential future actions.

Factor C:

- ▶ Thresholds for levels of pseudorabies in hogs maybe appropriate.
- ▶ May need to determine proportion of mortality from diseases versus other sources.
- ▶ See language in the black-footed ferret and desert tortoise recovery plans.

Factor D:

- ▶ MOUs and management agreements need to be in place, implemented, and effective.

Factor E:

- ▶ Three populations would be needed for delisting and 2 for reclassification to threatened. The plan needs to include a justification/discussion of the need for 3 populations.
- ▶ For delisting, each population should be viable, self-sustaining, and not require

management intervention. Management intervention would be acceptable for reclassification (e.g., translocation of panthers to meet dispersal/gene flow needs). Viable would be based on having a 95% probability of persistence for 100 years. Currently, 240 total panthers appears to meet this definition of viability. Understanding of total population size needed for viability may change in the future as population viability analyses are refined.

- ▶ May want to specify that a certain percentage remains as the Florida panther genotype (e.g., 20% introgression target from genetic restoration). Heterozygosity and morphometric measures also could be appropriate. Consider a sliding scale across the range as panthers would have historically intergraded with other subspecies. A genetic workshop based on the results to date of the genetic restoration project is needed to develop recommendations.
- ▶ Measures of mortality, age structure, and other specific demographic variables may not be needed as long as definition of viability is met. However, sensitive variables in population viability models could be used as criteria if needed.
- ▶ Environmental contaminants do not appear to be limiting. No criteria needed for contaminants.
- ▶ May not need criteria addressing levels of prey diseases. Need to investigate the threat posed by chronic wasting disease.

Other Comments on Draft Outline:

The recovery plan should include a discussion of the other threatened and endangered species that would potentially benefit from management actions for the panther. Management conflicts with other species should be identified when possible.

Monitoring actions in the draft plan should be copied and placed into a separate monitoring section.

Implementation Schedule:

A subteam was assigned the responsibility to develop a draft implementation schedule based on the draft outline. John Kasbohm will provide guidance regarding Service requirements. Paula Halupa, Darrell Land, Deborah Jansen, Laurie Macdonald, and Wes Woolf agreed to be on the Implementation Schedule Subteam.