

**Florida Panther Interagency Working Group Meeting  
Naples, FL  
17 April 2001**

**Below is a synopsis of the 17 April Panther Working Group meeting. Upon request, a full transcript of this meeting is available from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Jacksonville, FL Field Office.**

A regular meeting of the Florida Panther Interagency Working Group (Group or Working Group) was held at the Comfort Inn, Naples, Florida on April 17, 2001 and called to order at 9:00 A.M. by John Kasbohm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with the following members (acting) in attendance:

Dana Bryan, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)  
John Donahue, National Park Service, Big Cypress National Preserve (BCNP)  
Peter David, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD)  
John Kasbohm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)  
Brian Millsap, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC)

Art Rorhbacher, U.S. Forest Service was not in attendance,

Other attendees were:

Sonny Bass, National Park Service, Everglades National Park  
Jane Comiskey, University of Tennessee  
Melanie Culver, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Virginia Tech  
Mark Cunningham, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Deborah Jansen, National Park Service, Big Cypress National Preserve  
Tom Jones, Barron Collier Partnership  
Jim Krakowski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge  
Darrell Land, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Mark Lotz, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Sidney Maddock, Biodiversity Legal Foundation  
Roy McBride, Livestock Protection Company  
Stephen O'Brien, National Cancer Institute  
David Shindle, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Kris Thoemke, National Wildlife Federation

## **Introduction**

After calling the meeting to order the Agenda was introduced (Attachment 1).

## **Working Group MOA**

John Kasbohm gave an update on the status of the MOA. The Group agreed that all necessary corrections and revisions had been incorporated into the draft MOA and that the MOA was ready for signature. ***John Kasbohm agreed to finalize the draft MOA and route for signatures starting with the FWS Regional Director.*** As part of the signature process, each agency needs to officially designate its representative to the Group.

Dana Bryan informed the Group that Benji Brumberg (DEP Ombudsman) had contacted him regarding citizen involvement in panther management. Mr. Brumberg wanted the Group to consider adding citizens as members to the Working Group. Mr. Brumberg's concerns regarding lack of public participation appeared to stem from the inactivity of the Governor's appointed Florida Panther Technical Advisory Council (FPTAC). The FPTAC last met in Fall 1999. Currently, most appointments to the FPTAC are expired. The Group's preference was to take no action and wait to see if the Governor's Office reappoints members to the FPTAC. ***Dana Bryan agreed to contact Mr. Brumberg to let him know that the group does not intend to take action regarding citizen involvement and remind him that all Working Group meetings are open to the public.***

## **Genetic Restoration and Capture Season Overview**

Darrell Land gave an update on the number of panthers/Texas cougars captured and handled in the 2000-2001 capture season. Currently, 37 panthers and 3 Texas cougars have functioning radio collars. Six mortalities were documented. Two panthers suffered broke legs during capture; both capture events appeared routine with no obvious risk factors present. These panthers are being rehabilitated at White Oak Conservation Center and Lowry Park Zoo. Both will be released when they have recovered. Darrell handed out brief summaries of capture data to the Group. This information included data regarding the frequency of genetic characteristics in panther x Texas progeny including kink tails, cowlicks and cryptorchidism. Preliminary indications are that these traits are not showing up in descendants of Texas cats; but, sample sizes are still too low to make any firm conclusions. A final report is being prepared that will fully summarize the project and all available data.

## **Status of Remaining Texas Cougars**

Three Texas cougars remain in south Florida. TX106 on Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge

recently gave birth to 2 kittens. TX105 and TX108 are in Everglades National Park. TX106 could meet the genetic restoration goal of 2 offspring recruited into the population with this litter. TX105 and TX108 are unlikely to meet the goal given the lack of an adult male in ENP; both need to produce 1 more kitten that is recruited. TX107 died from pneumonia prior to her planned capture and removal.

John Donahue asked if there has been any indication that descendants of Texas cougars behave differently than Florida panthers. Darrell Land responded that Texas descendants seemed more energetic at capture, but did not appear to be any different in terms of movements, home range dynamics, or other natural history related behaviors.

### **Molecular Genetics Analysis Summary**

Dr. Stephen O'Brien gave an update on the molecular genetics analysis portion of monitoring the genetic restoration project. About 200 samples from Florida panthers, Texas cougars, Piper stock, Everglades cats, and captive Seminole cougars have been analyzed. Final conclusions and data were not yet available but, highlights of preliminary results included:

- ☞ Cats can be placed into the 5 groups above based on analysis of microsatellite loci.
- ☞ Heterozygosity (number of alleles per locus) has increased since the beginning of the project.
- ☞ O'Brien's lab will be able to validate the pedigree built with capture and monitoring data.
- ☞ Molecular genetic analyses will be a reliable method to monitor the genetic restoration project in terms of the geographic extent and the proportions/representation of the various Texas cougar/Florida panther groupings in the population.

***Dr. O'Brien and Darrell Land agreed to meet to finalize the molecular genetics analysis in the summer.***

### **FWC Study Proposals for FY2002**

Brian Millsap handed out draft proposals for FWC projects to be conducted in fiscal year 2002. Project proposals were:

1. Feasibility of Using GPS Radiocollars on Florida panthers.
2. Effect of Genetic Introgression on Prevalence and Intensity of Gastrointestinal Helminth Infections in Florida Panthers.
3. Feasibility of Extracting Florida Panther DNA from Scats.

4. Panther - Peripheral Areas Survey
5. Feasibility of Using Remote Cameras to Survey Florida Panthers

***Brian requested the Group review the proposals and provide any comments they may have.***

Brian explained that a project proposal for the next phase of the genetic restoration project had not been completed yet. Although the first phase of the study ends June 30, 2000, pedigree analyses and molecular genetics analyses results from Dr. O'Brien's lab are needed before a meaningful proposal can be developed. FWC may host a workshop in Fall 2001 to review existing data and make decisions on the field work, panther monitoring, and capture priorities associated with genetic restoration.

### **Big Cypress Study Plan - Second Capture Team**

John Donahue and Deborah Jansen described the work of the BCNP capture team instituted to address BCNP panther management goals described in the study plan given to the Group in January 2000. Beginning in February, BCNP's team hunted for 33 days and captured 2 panthers. Sign from 3 other cats were detected: an uncollared cat in the Deep Lake unit, a female with kittens in the northwest Turner River unit, and a male south of highway 41. Goals of the work were not met and BCNP wants to field a capture team in the 2001-2002 season. The existing permit to BCNP from FWC has expired.

In order to renew the permit for future capture work, the Group agreed that ***BCNP should submit to the Group and FWC for review, a revised study plan including an evaluation of existing panther data as to why additional capture work is needed. Other members of the Group agreed to assist BCNP in examining existing data.***

With respect to capture priorities, the Group agreed that there is a need to thoroughly summarize all existing panther data and develop overall field work and research priorities. An appropriate forum to carry out this data summary is in the FWS's newly appointed Recovery Team and Recovery Plan revision process. The Group also was in consensus that all the agencies involved with panther management have research/management questions that may require capturing and radio collaring panthers to answer. Much of this field work may be beyond the capabilities of the existing FWC capture team and is a valid reason for a second capture team.

### **Procedures for Study Proposal Review**

The Group discussed the need for a format and time frame required for review of project proposals. All agreed that project proposals submitted to the Group for review do not need to follow a specific format, nor adhere to a rigid time frame for review. However, the Group should be given as much time as possible to review proposals. Also, as a general guideline, all proposals should include a clear statement of the purpose of the project, identify specific questions to be addressed, or hypotheses to be

tested, and an evaluation of existing data that justifies why additional work, especially the capturing, handling and radio collaring of panthers, is necessary.

Brian Millsap noted that unbudgeted and unexpected costs exceeding \$27,000 were incurred this year to care for the 2 injured panthers currently held at White oak and Lowry Park Zoo. He suggested that project proposals that involve techniques that could injure panthers need to consider how injuries will be handled and dedicate resources to pay for rehabilitation. A possible solution maybe to set up a fund through an independent foundation (e.g., Fish and Wildlife Foundation) that could be used to pay these type of costs. Donations could be directed to the fund by private citizens, environmental groups, or others. Agencies could set aside funding as part of new projects. The fund also could be available to pay for rehabilitation of panthers injured by other sources including those injured by vehicles. FWC may make a request to the legislature for \$30,000 to establish such a fund.

### **Authorship Guidelines for Publications**

John Donahue brought to the attention of the Group the need to set interagency guidelines for the collaboration and authorship of publications related to panthers. John indicated that BCNP staff had not been adequately included as authors or acknowledged by researchers in previous publications. The Group agreed that some guidelines might be appropriate. *This topic was identified as an issue that should be an agenda item at the next Working Group meeting. Brian Millsap agreed to distribute the FWC's authorship guidelines to the Group. Dr. O'Brien agreed to provide his lab's guidelines as well.*

### **Panther Management Plan**

Sonny Bass described the need for a panther management plan that would address panther population management issues and help guide agency decision making. The goal would be a document that would address potential management issues before they occur and allow the Group to be proactive and act on a population level instead of reacting to issues after problems develop. The first step would be to bring together all available panther information. This "action plan" likely could take the form of, or an attachment to, a revised recovery plan. *Dr. O'Brien will forward a copy of the panda action plan to the group as an example. The recovery team should discuss this issue when it meets in July.*

### **Proposed Translocation of Male Panther to Everglades National Park (ENP)**

Sonny Bass restated the existing problem of the lack of an adult male in ENP and the NPS request to translocate an adult male panther to ENP to resolve the situation. The Group generally agreed that

management of the ENP subpopulation is an important issue. Consensus was to develop a strategy to deal with the ENP problem. ***John Kasbohm will solicit the Group for a list of questions and concerns that need to be considered and answered in order to develop options available for the management of the ENP subpopulation.*** Following that, the Group will revise and implement a strategy regarding the request to move a male to ENP in the 2001-2002 capture season.

### **MERIT Panther Subteam Progress Report**

John Kasbohm informed the Group that Dawn Jennings, FWS, Vero Beach, FL, was unable to attend the meeting and therefore this item should be held as an agenda item at the next meeting.

### **Recovery Team & Plan Revision**

John Kasbohm gave an update on FWS plans to convene a new Recovery Team to revise the existing Recovery Plan. FWS has invited 34 stakeholders to sit on the Recovery Team. The team will be divided into 2 subteams: a south Florida subteam and a reintroduction subteam. The first meeting of the team will be held July 25-26 in Orlando, FL.

### **Captive Management/Breeding**

John Kasbohm informed the Group that the FWS, FWC, Jacksonville Zoo, Lowry Park Zoo, and White Oak Conservation Center met on 8 March 2001 to discuss the implementation of the *Plan for Management of Captive Held Florida Panthers*. The zoos and White Oak have attempted various pairings of the 6 captive panthers with no success in producing a litter. Jacksonville Zoo and White Oak have recently exchanged male panthers and will try new pairings. If kittens are produced, they will be hand-reared to maximize the potential for maintaining the genetic lines of these captive animals.

# Attachment 1

## AGENDA

Florida Panther Interagency Working Group

Comfort Inn, Naples, Florida

9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

17 April 2001

Finalize Memorandum of Agreement	John Kasbohm, USFWS
Genetic Restoration Project	
2000-2001 Capture Season Overview	Darrell Land, FWC
Update on Radio Collar Failures	Darrell Land, FWC
Pedigree/Morphological Analysis Update	Darrell Land, FWC
Molecular Genetics Analysis Summary	Stephen O'Brien, NCI
Status of Remaining Texas Cougars	Darrell Land, FWC
FWC Work Plan Status	Brian Millsap, FWC
Big Cypress Study Plan - review, comments, next steps	John Donahue, NPS
Procedures for Study Proposal Review - format and time frame	John Kasbohm, USFWS
Update on Panther Management Plan	Sonny Bass, NPS
Proposed Translocation of Male Panther to ENP	Sonny Bass, NPS
MERIT Panther Subteam Progress Report	Dawn Jennings, USFWS
Recovery Team & Plan Revision	John Kasbohm, USFWS
Captive Management/Breeding Update	John Kasbohm, USFWS