

Florida Invasive Animal Task Team – Meeting #5
South Florida Water Management District
2535 Davie Road
Davie, Florida
April 20, 2005

Attendance:

Bob Doren, SFERTF
Chance DuBois, CORPS
Jim Duquesnel, FDEP
Pam Fuller, USGS
John Galvez, USFWS
Jason Hanley, USFWS
Scott Hardin, FWC

Bob Hill, SFWMD
Tom Jackson, NOAA
Rafaela Monchek, SFERTF
Art Roybal, USFWS (Co-Chair)
Don Schmitz, FDEP (Co-Chair)
Bill Thomas, USFWS
Sonya Thompson, Miami-Dade County

Approval of meeting summary:

Agency affiliations were added to the attendance list, and corrections were made to Bill Thomas' roundtable comments. Motion: Don Schmitz; Second: Sonya Thompson The meeting summary was approved unanimously.

Working Group Report:

Art Roybal will provide a final copy of the Standard Operating Procedures to Bob Doren for presentation at the next Working Group meeting. FIATT will begin working on a goal for invasive animals for the Task Force's Strategic Plan.

SFWMD Report:

The SFWMD has hired Amy Ferriter to develop this years two volume report on exotics, including a technical volume of all the major ecosystems of Florida, and a volume summarizing previous years. Amy would like to work with FIATT and NEWTT to develop the information on a regional basis. RECOVER, a multi-agency group coordinating the CERP restoration verification has organized the South Florida environment into modules. Amy will be starting with their modules, and add in the gaps not covered by CERP. The report is due in August. She is trying to put the best available information together based on species of highest concern. Scott Hardin offered to provide her with information, and Tom offered information on aquatic species. Don Schmitz stressed the importance of having criteria on what makes an exotic species invasive.

FIATT Website:

Rafaela provided a presentation from the Task Force webmaster, Jim Barnes. The Task Force website has been undergoing revisions, and the presentation provided a mock-up of the future FIATT page. The website subteam will meet again to discuss and review the content for the main page, and which documents and links to include on the site. The team was asked to provide links instead of files for the website to reduce storage space on the server. For future meetings, agendas and presentations will be posted on the site. The team also requested Working Group sub-teams be listed under the Working Group heading on the main page of the site.

Summary Assessment Report:

The team reviewed and agreed with the draft Table of Contents provided by Bill Thomas.

The team discussed the importance of recognizing the individual agency mandates on land management, move forward with that reflected. There isn't a lot of information on what diseases are going from one species

to another, and very little basis on calling a particular species invasive. A list of species needing more information, impact studies, etc. should be generated to move the process along. Guidance should be provided to University scientists and graduate students on what research is needed. Species on the perimeter with the potential to invade should also be considered, in addition to pathways. Identifying a “poster child” to take to the State Legislature would be helpful in acquiring funding. Presently, Everglades National Park doesn’t have a line item on exotic animals to draw from.

The team reviewed the list of Ranking Criteria, and altered a few of the questions to be able to be answered with yes or no. The survey will allow for someone to respond with an “unknown”. “Important to other species of concern?” and “Will the restoration process beneficially or negatively enhance the species?” was added to the list to identify how the invasive species is effecting attaining restoration goals. A survey will be prepared for the team to take back to their agency and answer. The list of species to be ranked is from the Goodyear report, additional species to be ranked should be submitted on the survey. The boundary of the South Florida Water Management District is the focus area. If needed, an independent scientific review can be done when the process is through. Don will try to get the survey to the team by next Monday, and the information will be due back by June 30th. In addition to team participant, this survey will go to people from other agencies in the field.

Giant Gambian Pouched Rat, Britta Muiznicks:

Britta Muiznicks from the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge provided a briefing on the Giant Gambian Pouched Rats. These rats are 9 – 17 inches long with a tail length of 14 – 18 inches. They can be identified by their naked tails, with white or creamy colored tail endings and their bloated cheek pouches used for carrying food and bedding. They are nocturnal African natives and proficient climbers that typically reproduce 5 – 6 times. They have been linked to the 2003 Monkey pox virus.

This species was introduced to the Grassy Key by a pet breeder that claimed a raccoon opened cages in her backyard containing them. This incident occurred five years ago, and sightings have been reported for about 3 years. There have been unconfirmed sighting reports from Key Largo, otherwise the reports have been confined to Grassy Key. Their expense in the pet trade causes concern that people will trap them for sale, despite an FDA ban on their movement/trade.

Several trapping sessions have occurred with most of the rats being caught in the same areas. 3 were caught in the first trapping session, 14 in the second, and 15 in a third trapping session run by wildlife services. During trapping sessions, there was a noticeable aversion by the rats to traps that had caught a raccoon the night before. Cameras and tracking plates have also been used to survey Grassy Key.

The Pouched Rat would pose a serious threat to agriculture if they make it to the mainland. They will eat almost anything. They also pose a threat in the Keys to the native Key Largo Woodrat, Silver Rice Rat, and Lower Keys Rabbit. Although yard waste being taken to the mainland provides a method of transportation, it is believed their dispersal is limited to Grassy Key, and eradication is still believed possible. Eradication could occur in 1 – 2 years, including follow-up. Eradication is expected to cost \$100,000, which FWC will be providing the funding for. They are working on traps that are more exclusionary to the pouch rat, and on purchasing infrared and motion sensor cameras. The hope is that they continue to stay near the houses on Grassy Key instead of in the Hammock.

Membership:

Team participants must have their agency's Working Group representative send an email to Rafaela Monchek at rmonchek@sfrestore.org.

Discussion of a FIATT Euthanasia Position:

Euthanasia is a regulatory policy that individuals should be referring to their respective agency's policy for guidance. FWC has not developed a policy but they will be looking at it. Many agencies refer the AVMA policy for guidance. The NPS has a licensed veterinarian that provides the most sensitive way based on the type of animal and other factors and conditions.

The team discussed needing to answer the general public's questions on how to handle the exotic animal they find or have as a pet. The public should know that releasing them into this environment isn't humane either.

Sonya expressed a concern that the park needs a way to deal with the removal of their exotics. The county hasn't adopted the state or federal policies on euthanasia and can't dispose of the animals.

Roundtable:

Don Schmitz, FDEP, said ISWG is making strides on the Action Items in the Plan, and is compiling the amount of money being spent on invasive species. FDACS is spending \$42 million on citrus canker, of the total \$98 million a year spent by the state. Only \$800,000/year is being spent on research on invasive species.

Scott Hardin, FWC, said they are trying to close off the pathway of the pythons getting into the park. They have met with reptile dealers to engage in an education campaign and a certification program. A captive wildlife committee to advise on policies will be instituted as well. A grant has been received to do a pilot pet amnesty day allowing people to bring back unwanted pets. The reptile dealers seem to be willing to take back the animals. Many people will ask what will happen to them, but will be told that they will try to place them but will not make guarantees. Tom added that at the last reptile show he saw fewer of the problem reptiles than in years past.

Pam Fuller, USGS, announced a Risk Assessment training program will be held by the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species in August.

Skip Snow, NPS (ENP), distributed a flyer on exotics, a write-up by the Park on recently introduced fish, and an article on a new exotic spider. The first weekend in May Skip will be talking about Pythons at the Miami Science Museum and will make the presentation available to anyone who would like to see it or distribute. He added he would like to see "habitat" go past fish.

John Galvez, USFWS, announced a meeting between ENP, FWC, SFWMD and USFWS to do work on C-111 canal looking for Asian swamp eels.

Bill Thomas, USFWS, introduced a new assistant, Jason Hanley, who may be filling in for him at meetings if needed.

Tom Jackson announced a meeting of the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species on May 11th and 12th.

Next Meeting:

Bob stressed the importance of this group attending the Invasive Species summit at Everglades National Park. A joint FIATT/NEWTT meeting was planned for July 14th, the morning following the summit.